Susan Rodriguez: The

Quickening



Susan

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The

Quickening

*Eric B. Teepell*

Susan’s Requiem series prequel

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*Nor shall this peace sleep with her; the bird of wonder dies, the maiden phoenix. Her ashes new create another heir, as great in admiration as herself. So shall she leave her blessedness to one. Heaven shall call her from this cloud of darkness; from the sacred ashes of her honour*

*shall star-like rise as great in fame as she was, and so stand x’d.*

William Shakespeare, Henry the eighth

Prologue

Not everyone is a Dresden Files fan so not everyone is going to know who Susan is or what she’s been through. This series is going to be an independent endeavour from the Dresden Files proper so once her background is ex-plained here it will be easier to get into the following story. She was very much a main character in the rst three books, then disappeared until death masks skip-ping 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

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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 tendancy 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 is attractive, intelligent, funny and appealing. Her motivations are clear and simple, and she is honest in pur-suing them. She is absolutely relentless. She has used her sexuality in pursuit of information. She is very aggressive and was the one to ask Harry to dinner not him. Susan took Harry out for their rst date and treated him. She has a smile all her own, a patent smirk with her lips quirk-ing up at the corners. Her hair is midnight black. She has dark eyes and a deeply tan complexion.

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

In Storm Front she asked Harry out for dinner. Well, kinda tricked him into dinner in a playful way. She wants what and who she wants and works hard to get it. She and Harry ran into a demon they needed to combat. A toad creature. They did it but barely, Harry called down lightning on it and Susan was vomiting most of the time from potions Harry had her drink. The date turned out to be the worst night of Susan’s life. As well as the best story she had written so far.

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

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

That was the last we seen Susan, she did not have a part in the next novel but in the following one she did

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reappear brie y. She had been ghting the vampires in South America and doing humanitarian aid to the res-idents there. South America was the heart of the Red Court Vampire territory, the world pretty much ignores what happens there and it had gotten really bad down there. They followed a high ranking vampire back to Chicago (where the novels take place). She gathered her belongings from the city to take back home and inter-vened against the plans of the vampires while there. Harry and Susan got to ght again and went to a ball together. They even had a dance together. Then she left to rejoin the ght in Central and South America.

It was seven novels of wondering what happened to Susan and when she was going to nd the cure for her vampirism. In that nal novel “Changes” she ghts with Harry to save the daughter they had together (that he didn’t even know existed). In the end of the novel Susan makes that rst kill and begins to change. Their daughter was saved from being killed in a sacri ce and Susan was killed in her place.

That is where the Dresden les story ends and the Su-san’s Requiem story begins. Her life will never be the same.

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01

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 miss-ing, and now here we are at the altar of Chichén Itzá

surrounded by vampires and their many minions deter-mined to sacri ce my baby girl on the altar. I need to save her.

My emotions are on high, I’ve been far too close to los-ing 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 immor-

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tal 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 inter-mix 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 esh 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 sacri ced a life to the slumbering vampire and brought it forth to consume me. I think my hands came rst 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

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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 sacri ce. 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 con dent 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 sacri ce 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 su fering. 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

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time I felt myself oating up and seen myself, my blood owing 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 bring-ing it to you. I was most certainly pleased that thou wert the rst 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

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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 blas-pheme 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 t. 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 re 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

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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 accom-plished 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 terri ed that my soul was meant to be trapped in Chichén Itzá forever.

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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 fuck-ing traitor.”

Martin’s expression ickered 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 re-ward.”

“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’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

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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 inde nately, 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 o ce 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 grievious 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 in ict him with, ascended and enslaved. Given signi cant power. Or something Martin was to cause, his actions are to cause and ascension of something or someone else. Everything is speculation right now.

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That rst evening, 30 minutes after sunset, came some rather interesting events. Some creatures in hidden in robes came into the temple. I say creatures as I felt the power radiate from them. It was not like anything I have ever felt. Like monks their hands were joined hidden un-der their loose sleeves and their faces completely hidden in their cowl. Dozens came into the temple and pros-trated for a good ten minutes face down at the altar. Five came to remain in the temple. Three remained prostrated while two came through the entrance bearing a gold ark. They rested the ark in front of the other three. They then prostrated behind and took sentry at the entrance. The three then rose and two took the ark by the handles at ei-ther side. The remaining creature between them removed a crook and ail from the ark and rose it high.

I seen his arms for the rst time and they were com-pletely mummi ed. The markings indicated it might be a creature called an arch-lich, which until now I thought was only legend. They were told to be ascended creatures with the full power of godhood but earth-bound. They refused to ascend into the realms of never never as a god with a typical rite of ascendance. They instead chose un-death in order to refuse the responsibilities and visibility of godhood in exchange for the freedom and anonymity to pursue personal power, especially arcane power, to the exclusion of all else.

The two to the side raised the ark and moved it forward to the alter I was in. The passed it over the alter and placed it with great reverence to the rear of the alter. The creature in the middle processed behind them and placed

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the crook and ail gently on the altar, stepped backwards a few paces and prostrated again, then the two came back from the ark and did the same beside him. Then the two at the side levitated up and remained facing the altar ve feet apart. The central one came to levitate behind the altar. All had heads bowed low in the cowl and hands joined inside the sleeves of the ritual robe.

I see on them a coat of arms. It is emblazoned on the entire front and back of the torso on their robes. I don’t understand it but maybe in time I might. A dark woman in a dress appeared to bear the coat of arms on her shoul-ders while crouched, with a sword outstretched to either side. Her mouth was open and fangs prominent. She is the coat of arms compartment. Behind the shield an imposing mountain is portrayed in the background. To the right a panther is represented with one arm hold-ing a ail ready to strike, then on the left is a pheonix bearing a crook on which it appears to lean. The crest is a terrible but majestic crown sitting on a golden open faced helm. On the top of the crest is portrayed a dark and terrible representation of a Seraphim, or perhaps demon-phim if there is such a thing, with it’s wings out-stretched over the whole of the coat of arms. The wreath is a dark but glorious crown. The shield was with ordi-nary in chief. The lowest eld was blood red and the upper was Tyrian purple. The lower contained a mes-senger pigeon with a scroll in it’s beak and the upper was divided with the left containing a triad of oak trees and the right had a prominent cross ory. There was writing but it was not latin or any language I’m aware of yet. I

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observed what appeared as a motto at the bottom. From what I see the order is “SDR FL OL LT .” The motto is in three parts. The engravings ow in a rib-bon below the woman and the order in a draped ribbon.

It reads, “ BIAH OL CHTZVT

OE MTIF SIAION OL LECHAPPES OE MTIF TM TT KRKM OL LCHSHVF L GV OIAD HRM

OL DRILPI LT ” At the very top ap-pears what seems to be a motto on a ribbon which is draped from the neck of the Seraphim. It appears to be

owing like in a light breeze. It reads, ”OL LEHAFIL

OIAD HFLH VVTR OL NANAEEL OL LHCHRZ MTIF LBALTOH NORA CICLES ” Finally etched into the

hilt of the swords I seen when the crook and the sta f were laid on the altar was the phrase SHAKAR ON

CA SVZN RVDRGZ

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 fews clues either. I need clues. I need answers.

The night passed and the creatures remained in reverent contemplation of the alter. 30 minutes before sunrise they took their leave. They performed their ritual in re-verse order taking the crook and ail out in the ark in

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the same manner it entered. I heard the sound of people outside but none of them entered the main temple area. I was able to overhear conversations. Chichén Itzá and the surrounding area, for many miles out, have been quaran-tined with the o cial purpose of maintenance and repair. In actuality various organizations that are clued in to the paranormal are present performing research into what happened. The white council of wizards of here. Scholars of the british monarchy are also here as they became clued in during the wars with the red court. The fae are here and as I understand it Mab herself, the queen of winter, spoke clearly that any who entered upon the temple over the next 5 days and so much as overturned a single pebble will know su fering unheard of since the beginning of time and will not end even to the time the oceans will boil dry. The threat was leveled against any and all who are present even all fae outside her own court. I feel quite con dent of my doom knowing that as I remain in this Godforsaken altar I risk the cold wrath of Mab should she ever nd out.

As I understand it there is complete devastation in a 10 mile radius from Chichén Itzá. Trees and vegetation are non-existent and a ring of intensity exists in the dis-tance where the heat of the power coming from the earth melted the earth itself into glass. I noted they said it came from the earth, not in icted upon it.

None of those who were present in the day stayed any later than an hour before sunset. There wasn’t a single fool that stayed in the darkness of a place that had seen the greatest display of evil power the world had ever known.

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30 minutes after sunset the devils monks, or so I’m call-ing them, returned and performed the same ritual as the other night exactly in every detail. Within the hour came visitors. The stench could be smelt long before they ac-tually arrived. Black court vampires. They looked like walking corpses and smelt no better. The robed monks of hell or whatever they were raised their heads. At the sight the vampires stepped back slowly and the skeletal crea-ture in front began to shake as the monks looked down at him from a levitating position. They turned their head back slowly to the escorting vampires and slowly nodded. They backed away from the entrance to allow them to enter. I have never in my life seen a black court vampire shake with fear like that.

Dear God what in hell are these robed creatures? Could I be right that they are arch-lich? Even Lich are not known to have ever really existed, having been told of in arcane legend but never seen.

The terri ed vampires entered into the temple in abso-lute silence and the skeletal creature stepped forward. The two monks that hovered diagonally to the alter oated forward. They held open hands to the skeletal creature and with shrieks and screams of pain the skeletal creature burst into ame, oated up and burst into nothing but dust which scattered throughout the temple. The monks then folded their hands back into their sleeves and dipped their heads down as they oated back to their designated positions. Everything these monks did were slow and perfectly calculated.

The remaining vampires hit the oor in prostration

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faster than a sack of potatoes, faces at to the oor. The shaking creatures remained there for some time then slowly and reverently left. There were others of the black court entering that night, other sacri ces. I believe the sacri ces may have been the elders, oldest of any given group, and the rst one having the semblance of a skele-ton might have been the foremost elder of the court. This seems like more than just a solemn remembrance of the fallen red court. I’ve never seen sacri ces made in the name of remembering a fallen evil. I think these monks are cooking up some kind of power move, forcing obedi-ence of the vampire courts somehow. I still don’t know for sure what they are, a true lich of legend would be com-pletely unconcerned for the matters of the world being absorbed in their arcane studies.

The same ritual occurred again before sunrise, and the researchers of various groups came and spoke of their ndings. Or lack thereof. No soul dare enter into the temple again today.

That night humans came to the entrance. The monks on sentry stopped them with a gesture. They slowly turned their heads to the human group and slowly bowed their heads again facing them. The humans burst into true form white court vampires. Having witnessed the monks countenance they fell to the ground and took some time to pull themselves back together. The monks oated back to allow entry and didn’t move the breadth of a hair more. The vampires entered into the temple still shaking and the two monks made the sacri ce like be-fore and the remaining vampires fell in terri ed reverence.

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There were other processions of white court vampires just as there were processions of black court the other night continuing to just before dawn and the monks withdrew in the perfect recreation of their ritual.

The third night brought a very large procession of crea-tures. I recognized a few of them as being phage. Anoth-erwards vampiric creatures outside the vampire courts who exist in realms outside of the physical world, mostly di ferent parts of the nevernever if not all from there. They were not good, but certainly composed of both the bad and ugly, sometimes both. There was no pause in the procession and the sacri ces were endless.

The fourth night brought battle. One of the sentry monks exited It sounded like a battle eld outside the temple. After a short time he returned with a warlock walking in front. It didn’t look like he was moving of his own volition. The monk returned to his designated position and the warlock was sacri ced like the other crea-tures. Remaining warlocks, warlocks, and other mortal users of black magic entered and prostrated. In the latter half of the night came all manner of undead and a great host of sacri ces. I seen skeletons, zombies, and others of all manner of breed and class known and not yet known.

At the end of the night the monk who stood behind the altar moved forward and another stood at the entrance. The two monks who oated diagonally to the alter moved forward and sacri ced him. The monk at the entrance moved into the temple and all the monks prostrated un-til the prescribed time in which they ritually exited the temple.

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The fth day a feverish investigation took place to nd out what the sounds of battle were the night before but no one found anything of note. Still unwilling to enter the area after sunset it was decided that being one day away from the deadline Mab had set they will investigate the temple on the sixth day and remain overnight to de-termine what is happening in this area. I think that might be a very good idea except for the fact that it looks like they would get squashed like ies.

That night was very interesting indeed. The greatest powers of the created universe came to present them-selves in solemn meditation. Some stopped in the middle of the temple and held their hands out open palmed like they bore gifts. The monks went to them and held their hands above palms down and either nodded yes or no. Those who received a yes came forward and placed their hands on the alter. I then felt something. It was di ferent every time one of the gods or powers did so. That night I seen entities I did not know but also those of the known pantheons including the norse, caananite, sumerian, na-tive american, and more. I seen the arrival of both Odin and Loki. One man followed shortly after Odin and Loki who came with a cow. The cow was clearly intelligent and bore a gift. The monks approved and the cow licked the alter which bestowed the gift. With all the intensity of the last few days I needed the giggle that ensued.

I don’t know for sure what to make of what happened but it feels like I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. I think the altar represented the genocide of the red court and the past few days were payment for allowing the red

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courts destruction. I’m thinking the monks are somehow intimately connected to the former red court. I won-dered why they weren’t at the nal battle but there are any number of reasons why. If they are lich they would not concern themselves with such worldly matters. If so though why such incredible reverence from them? I guess we know very little of them though, only a scatter-ing of legends that until now weren’t known to refer to a veri able entity but rather a non-existent gment of legend. Time will surely bring better understanding of these events.

It was in the middle of the night when the monks per-formed their exit ritual this night which put me on alert. Something is happening tonight. I realize this is the fth night, one that Mab de ned as being signi cant some-how.

Shortly after they left 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 sts on my shoulders, causing me to re ect on the fact that there was a crook and ail repeatedly placed on this altar over the past 5 days. If they were still on this altar they would be perfectly in my hands right now.



I looked at myself and shuddered.

Oh God, I’m not human. This was the true form of the red court vampire. I really did complete my change. I felt normal though. I seemed to be physically a typical red

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court vampire except for maybe the odd thing, like talons rather than claws that resemble razor sharp scythes. I felt hungry. I felt very hungry. Oh my God sweet Jesus mercy and pass me an artery hungry. I had control for now. I caught the scent of human on the breeze and crouched low in a tiger’s purr. The sound caught me by surprise as the red court never made such cat sounds that I’m aware of. I was a little di ferent somehow. I concentrated a little while and managed to put on a esh mask, a convincing one, but being naked I decide to forego the esh 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 distant countryside, it sounded like popcorn. Anarchy had descended in the land and armed con ict is everywhere. People and paranormals were 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 needed to do then, nd 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 ne now, but not for long. Maybe I could take a couple sips while I’m there, I’m not that bad o f 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

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and I see the glow of human life o f in one direction, at line of sight. With a growl I’m o f. 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 esh from limb with my claws, chewing, sucking, lapping and gulping every last bit of the poor victim. They wouldn’t even be able to identify him with dental records. I was too hungry to have any control. I genuinely hoped someone would just shoot me.

A black court vampire appeared. 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 ourish of his hat. Then lls 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 e fectatiously culled from the local herd. Alas it nearly came to pass that the noble vampire society might have

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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 pend-ing, a weapon I’m sure was rst devised by the fellowship against the red court. Although not really used for any-thing but vampires, they may work on other supernatural entities or powers. They have no e fect 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 guaran-teed 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 con dent 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

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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 tzrvt ollor adin zer-imah”

Instinctively I know it means, “Leviathan come, into my hand forms a gentle ow.” 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 owing 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 utter far too slowly given the force of the wind today.

Then he said, “Flereus niis lishloach mad setani prg lehashlich, pon oyev” and a ball of ame hurtled from his hand directly at me. Fire is not good, I’m particularily vulnerable to it.

It burnt straight through that same tree and the tree fell to the earth. Of course the ball of ame caught me o f guard and I hurled myself just in time, it grazed my left

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bicep burning it o f 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 g-ured 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 rearms. I had an automatic pistol once I really loved. Snap out of it Susan, don’t drop now, ght.

I’m on the ground. I can’t move. He is throwing the jar for the nal attack. I’m at the rear quarter of the truck. My arms are working again. I throw a rebar o f 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 in nitely small it’s in nitely spacious.

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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 re 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 pro cient in magic. I tear o f 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 re burns toward me and I turn what’s left of the quarter panel and de ect 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 st and around me the earth begins to buckle and split. It splits deep and my hands grasp the other side of the ssure 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

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you have displayed.”

I fall into the crevasse, grabbing into the rock face and landing on a small outcropping on the way down. Hold-ing 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 res below. I assure you your destruction will be quick then there shall be no more pain nor su fering of this most noble vampire existance. 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 cli f 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 cli f 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

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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 oor of the tunnel undisturbed by any creature.

I fall on my ass, shaking with adrenaline. OK I just need to gure out how to get back up the ssure. 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 nd something. My heart is in my throat, I’m scrambling around in the pitch darkness with vampiric vision to nd 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 oor 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

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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 nd me. What if he buried me though? Noone would ever nd 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 nd 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 terri ed. I want to die but I don’t. I want to live. Somehow. To nd a cure, to refrain from the feeding somehow. To stop killing. To stop hunting. Should I even attempt to nd a way out of this. It’s futile. Why should I?

To stop the vampires that’s why. To nd a way to defend people against the supernatural forces. I am the only one with the strength of a vampire, the speed, the invulnera-bility against their hunger. They can’t feed on me, we’re made of the same stu f. 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 nd out what hap-pened to me. I have a purpose. I’m like the only vampire

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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 ful l 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 oor 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 scu ng up the oor of the cave and leaving it disturbed some-how. 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 ne dust on the oor I should have left footprints. Something isn’t right in this place. I swipe the oor 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 o f 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

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feel around the walls and nd many discrepancies, and something in particular I was looking for. I nd 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 nd myself in a ritual chamber. Skeletons are scattered on the oor, 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 oor. An alchemy alcove and bookshelves along the walls. The oors and ceiling are perfectly at and polished to a sheen. I check along the walls to see what’s behind books and I nd 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 nd it slopes up. It continues on forever. I come to the end to nd a door which opens up into a basement. Stairs lead to a cabin via a secret door in the oor, 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 alice webbing. An M-16 ri e. A 20mm vulcan sniper ri e tted 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

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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 wiz-ards stayed here. I came from their ritual room. They were hidden down here away from a signi cant contin-gent 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 nd 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, moth-ers, 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 scienti c 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 o f now that they’re gone. I race up the ladder and can’t open the door. I yank and beat

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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 replace, wooden oor and ceiling with mist pouring out between the boards. I try to get into the replace, no go. There’s a window, but a wall of force holds it safe. I swipe at the ceiling and the force sparks o f 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. Some-how. 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.

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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 e forts 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 nd us. If they do though we only need to refrain from cease the mist and all will be ne –” Huh? Oh. As in if they do nd us, double negative? No, refrain from then grammatical disaster. What if I’m looking for “cease the mist”? the all will be ne is declared as a double negative so it seems to a rm the possibility. Of course pseudo-latin. Here goes, I say, “cessare in calig-ine!” 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 show-

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ing 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 nd in the basement area and rest inside a closet to try to conserve heat. After a while I drift o f to sleep. I’m not going to be leaving this little cabin. At least not today.

I remain sleeping on and o f for a couple days, healing less quickly than I normally would but I healed nonethe-less. My clothes are ne since the attack was just using water. I’m rather hungry now though. So here we go again. This is what pisses me o f, if I would consider my-self 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 o f 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 get-ting 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 nd a front door key under the mat. As I left

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the door locked behind me and the key works ne 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 in-formation now there isn’t a need to nd a village except to feed. No matter which direction I go I’ll nd food. Eventually. Maybe I can link up with some former fel-lowship people, people I’ve fought with. I can nd 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 gure out where best to go. The sniper ri e has extremely long range sights. The roof, a tree, I need to nd 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 cli f face, I’ll take a reading o f 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 for-est around. Cant see south I’m partway up a mountain. There is a path down from here so i think thats my next move. The discharge of weapons in the distant country-side 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 lled with bloated corpses. Its Armageddon out here sweet mercy.

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I see near to the road black court are approaching a fellowship re-team about two and a half to three miles from me. It doesn’t look good for the re-team. Looking around me I see I can sight in better to the south east of the cabin. I gotta get o f the roof, recoil could damage it. I leap down to the ground and setup the sniper ri e.

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 modi ed to be broken down into smaller pieces for transport.

I setup the ri e 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 ash ve or six feet in diameter of smoke and ame. I have only a moment to see some faces turn thinking im a panzer that just red a shell. Then the round hit, the target vampire was vapour-ized shrapnel and incendiary sprayed back o f the rock as the impact shattered it. Two more vampires were inca-pacitated. Not knowing a high powered sniper ri e from a small artillery piece the remaining vampires ran one way and the reteam ran the other.

I made a stpump, Yesss! I really like this piece! I raised a smirk, put a hand on my hip and ipped the bird in the direction of the vampires with the other. Nobody messes with Susan. I took a moment to dedicate my ri e by an old fellowship sniper creed. A variant is used in the usa

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military but which motto came rst I may never know. I hold the ri e high in both hands, facing it, as I kneel on both knees.

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

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

Without me, my ri e is useless. Without my ri e, I am useless. I must re my ri e 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 ri e and I have love knowing that what counts in war is not the rounds we re, the noise of our burst, nor the smoke we make. We know that it is the hits that count, and we will re true.

My ri e 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 ri e 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 ri e and myself are the defenders of good. We are the masters of our enemy. We are the saviors of my life.

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

Amen.

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

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

I feel like I’m descending into hell. Gun re is erupting all around me and I just seen the horror of what’s happen-ing with my own eyes. The m16 assault ri e 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 re- ghts 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 re 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 con-sidered 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

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coming this way. Otherwise I’m just a sitting duck. Get the facts, y 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 o f 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 ri e but by the time i do it has skewed two of the hapless people. It didn’t have a chance to nish the meal though my ri e was up and I did something only a supernatural creature could do, re that massive weapon o f my shoul-der like it was a target ri e. The recoil caused my rear leg to plow a row into the road. A massive muzzle are 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 ri e to my back and sprint straight for it. I open up a clip of the assault ri e 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

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have steel which its vulnerable to but only a kabar and what little steel is in the bullets i re. 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 red at this thing. So yes it is vulnerable to steel. I grab my kabar and head in. Lets dance Jiminy.

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Jiminy the Demon

Jiminy the cricket from hell only just turned slightly by the time I threw aside my rearms. I was in the air at full speed. I threw my arms apart and extended my scythe like talons. I kinda felt like the female wolverine Laura Kinney. My talons aren’t adamantine and yet I had a shit

eating smirk thinking about that as I pounced.

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

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I land on it’s thorax talons rst, 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 in-versely on the same branch. I shed my skin and go true form to allow me to ght 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 o f the uniform keeping my weapons close. A get myself closer and grabbing my kabar I release from the branch and land the blow above the thorax but not quite to the brain as I wanted.

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

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

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Jiminy the Demon

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 o f.

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 ying 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 in-deed. 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.

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I gave my life for nothing. I shouldn’t be here. As the ground became closer I could picture it as paradise. A nal 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 o f 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 gure out how to move.

I’m thrashing and swinging my arms.

I’m kicking. I’m feeling numb. I’m feeling funny.

I’m ying. 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 utter in to land at my belongings. Screw the insectoid, I wouldn’t get anything out of that ght anyway. If others

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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 ran-dom 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 rst seen the demon there are two live humans. I dash in and make the kill. Being satis ed enough I shake o f 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.”

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She has a necklace of red court vampire fangs. Eyes full of tears she holds it up and holds her head on it.

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 ght o f 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 at 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, terri ed of everything. She would wash her hands all day long to keep germs o f. Finally there is Laura, she has no hair. She is always in pain, it’s so sad. I hope she nds 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 nd 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 fellow-

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Jiminy the Demon

ship 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 o f 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 glori ed tarp, blocks light and likely will hold up to wind and rain quite well. I gure 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 ght.”

“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 o fended, I used to be a red court thrall. My last master was slaughtered by the fellowship by re, and I harvested his fangs and wore them under my clothes. After the cataclysm when the reds were de-

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stroyed I wore them exposed to remember. I have had two masters, the rst 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 t to do so. I su fered under him but not like the rst 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 be-cause 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 su fering I endured before I was enthralled, everything I’ve endured with the reds pales in comparison to the su fering of my sick-ness. I am indebted to them, and since the cataclysm long for their return that I may nd wellness again. I hope it doesn’t o fend 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

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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 de nitely human. I can feel the warmth of human lifeforce from a distance as well and that lifeforce is de nitely 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 o f 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

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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 rst kill in there. She changed, she became the opposite of what she was, cruel, heartless, powerhungry. She took me as a thrall because I was con-venient 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 di ferent. 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 sacri ced. I lost control and made my rst kill. I started changing, my lover killed me as a sacri ce and since it was a bloodline curse the reds, all of them, died. It worked because I was the youngest full red court vampire yet my change did not complete. The vampire part died so like other younger fellowship members I just got cured. Then I just came back to life.

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Sort of. I guess. I really don’t know, so sue me.” “Sort of?”

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

She seemed to de ate somehow. Not being a true red court vampire she gures 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 nd 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 nd 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 con icted.

I guess I could try. It’s just for me, it’s almost like eu-thanasia. 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 inter-vened I would be dead now. I’m not an island. If there were others with me they could have distracted that thing

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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 en-counters I might not even need to make a kill just sip as I go along. I would not addict anyone. Jill told of her su fering 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

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in the sense that there are things that simply should not be walking these elds 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 ee back to it and meetup.” We passed out of the underbrush and found the cabin some twenty to thirty feet away. Jill went rst and her crew turned around to greet her and I came right behind her.

There was 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 ew within inches of my nose. I felt like I was in the movie matrix, the adrenaline slowed everything down to the point it felt like an hour for me to hit the ground on my back. I rolled over to face Jill’s people, most of whom with their eyes wide as saucers were asking me, “My God are you OK?” I walked toward them carefully, and said, “Jesus Christ!” without meeting Jack’s gaze. I was thinking about wolves and how meeting the alpha male gaze is considered a challenge. I don’t want to challenge Jack, it might hurt.

Another one walked toward me and said, “Fucking ass, Oi, Fuck.” He extended his hand smiling in order to

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shake mine but somehow seemed to be genuinely greet-ing me. As if something was shortcircuited in his greeting mechanism.

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

One girl wouldn’t look at me but rather asked Jill, “Oh my God Jill, did you wash her before you decided to take her home? You don’t know where she came from!” to which I responded back, “I ew 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 di cult but she is a tad paranoid.” I said, “I can tell.”

One girl was bent over wearing welders equipment, modifying a rocket launcher. She said, “Quiet, my plans are nearly complete. With correctly enhanced ordinance we will nally conquer and rule this land!” She would seem to be some sort of evil mastermind. Always helps to have a pet super-villain on duty.

Then nally a tall lanky fellow walks clumsily toward me. He trips, his ri e goes o f, the bullet hits a tree limb above his head which then falls. Then it hits him on the head knocking him at to the ground. The rest of us dive for the ground not realizing at rst 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.”

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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 gure 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 rst 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.

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The next day I was walking with Laura as we were head-ing south. The rst thing she did of course is curse having such a simple-minded companion, and then said at least Jack might prove useful. Between her and George it’s going to be a very a fectionate journey.

“So then. . . , you like the clean look? I mean clean shaved head. It’s cool.” I said.

“Well actually, it wasn’t that long ago, well actually it was quite a long time ago, I fought my way through can-cer. There is quite a bit of pain even now and my hair never grew back. Being, Er, of use to the reds relieved the trouble. No pain, regained my hair. They were evil, that I know, yet I miss them. Part of me wants them back.” said Laura.

She seemed unexpectedly forward, like she is actually trying to connect with me unlike how she treats the oth-ers. I say, “Man that sucks. What’s everyone hoping to nd south of here?”

Laura said, “Well, I can’t speak for everyone but for me I hope either the fellowship encampment south has found a way to replace the need for the red court people have, or I will attempt to nd the answer. That way I can ful ll my manifest destiny to rule. Unless of course I can nd someone who can help me in a more old fashioned way.” “Like a di ferent diet you mean?” I said.

“No I make sure to eat well, I’m clean, no diseases and I take good care of myself. I’m good and healthy and. . . ” Laura said.

It creeped me out a bit when she turned to me with an overly warm smile. I shrank away, and slipped over

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to chat with Craig. He turned his head toward me and smiled as I approached. The side of his head hit a branch as he walked. He arched his torso back like a high jumper and ailed his arms one of which grabbed hold of the trunk of the tree. He wrapped himself around the trunk then spun o f it like a dancer who just executed a dip. Finally having pulled himself back up he straightened his collar and continued on loose legged like he just put on a show for my entertainment. Admittedly I was enter-tained, curling up a little smirk due to the little spectacle. Amazing. Like a real life Kramer in a way.

“Hey Craig wassup?” I said.

“Nuttin’ much. Hows you?” He said.

“So what’s your story? What did you do for a living before stu f happened?” I said.

Craig hung his head in sorrow. “Once, a lifetime ago, I was a doctor. I was a neurosurgeon in fact, sought after by every cancer patient in Los Angeles. Celebrities and tech tycoons from all over the country, hell all over the world were knocking at my door. When I was enthralled my master sought to teach me the evil of too much sugar in his co fee and beat me about the head with the leg of a co fee table. Something was damaged, I have no balance, spasms, falling all over myself. I was better when I was fed from, and I needed it regularily in order to have some semblance of a normal life. I wonder if he knew what he was doing would make me all that much more dependant on him? Probably not. He wouldn’t care either way, I was just a dog for him to beat.”

Craig kicked the dirt, grabbed a large tree branch and

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threw it far into the darkness of the night.

I felt like shit. I tried not to think of the fact that I inherited much of the red court legacy. It would be such a glorious thing to be rid of it all. I timidly put my hand on his shoulder and patted him in an awkward attempt to comfort his anger.

“I really can’t say I can understand, that would be in-sulting. They have hurt me too Craig. I had a wonderful guy and my infection tore us apart. I fought down here for a decade and by the time we met again we were almost strangers. At the last day at Chichén Itzá I was left for dead. I hope to meet him again, nd my little girl and start my life again. That’s my story, so far. God it sucks down here.”

Craig said, “No shit. I thought it was bad before the fall of the reds but we hadn’t seen nothing like the hell that we see now. The worst atrocities in history are happening here and nobody outside of these jungles have any idea.” I sigh, and shake my head, and say, “It’s always been that way. Nobody cares what happens down here. The middle east is having a melt down in terrorism, and the whole world is watching. Is it about the oil? So stupid. Like what has to happen down here before the world is willing to see?” I punched a tree hard and it tore open. A

twenty inch diameter tree.

Craig said, “Damn girl, that’s quite the left hook you got there. Remind me not to piss you o f. What are you carrying with you? They touched you somehow didn’t they? Everybody here thinks so.”

I looked at him wide eyed, “I guess I do, what are the

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others saying about me? I’m getting bad vibes man.” Craig sighed, and said, “Well, we think you might have the venom. That maybe you could heal us. We know the reds fell, the sky was like Armageddon. The sun eclipsed and lled with re and lightning. We seen them all drop, those who didn’t found out by word of mouth and the abandonment of their strongholds. Everyone knows. If you have what we think we will stick to you like glue and protect you to our death. You can be sure of that.”

My heart sank. I hung my head low and said, “I don’t know what all I am Craig, or what I can do. I’m not entirely like them, I have talons. Well I guess maybe, well OK I am carrying their legacy in me to some degree. I just don’t want to hurt you guys. I think it would, if I do have the venom and I don’t know. I hope I don’t really, I could kill you if something isn’t right with me. Maybe I might kill myself with some kind of feedback from the attempt. I don’t know what I am Craig.”

Craig pursed his lips, and said, “You’re right, we are willing to die but there is a remote possibility we could kill you. That isn’t what we want. I’ll leave you alone sure enough Susan if it is as you wish but the others are going to try to tempt you to feed, the only thing they care about is being healthy again. I understand how they feel. I think you might too, deep down.”

I nodded, “Yeah I do. I am con icted over this, honestly. I don’t know what is right here. I know the evils of the venom but I really didn’t consider where it might heal others as well. It just doesn’t make sense to me.”

We continued through the bush heading south, bodies

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in various stages of decomposition were scattered in our path. We raided the corpses for ammo and supplies along the way. Every so often we heard a noise and dove for cover, only to nd out it was some local fauna, and we sighed a breath of relief.

When it was coming to morning we camped. They had a ten man canvas tent, army issue, no light dared to either enter or leave the old monstrosity and yet they took my canvas cloak tent and gathered it around me all the same. I felt like a unicorn discovered by a team of zoologists, overprotected.

Inside a small coleman lantern burned, and Jack was shoring up the tent from the inside. As he was circling around to where I was he accidentally got a sliver from one of the wooden spikes. More than a sliver. He used his ka-bar to slice open his palm to remove it. Blood splashed onto the ground. I had to cover my eyes. I whipped my head around but the arousal of my body and animal like sni ng of the air was apparent. I desperately tried not to but I released a vampiric hiss. A quiet one. Jack clearly heard it though. He said, “How much longer can you hold it lady? We’ll break you, we need what you got.” Damn. This doesn’t sound good.

Renewed whispers rippled through the camp, and Laura snuggled up to me. She said, “We could rule the world you know, you and I. I have the knowledge, and the will-ingness to help you reconquer this land. We could be invincible.” She bit her lip hard. A stream of blood ac-cumulated. I covered my eyes and convulsed, rolled over and bit down on an iron spike. They have a kind of blood

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like taste, being iron and all. It helped only a little bit. It was like hard ta fy to me, which helped a little more being something to chew on. I was sweating profusely for a few minutes, breathing deeply to calm down, hissing gently. I’m not going to be able to stand much more of this, it will twist my mind up. The hunger cannot be perpetually ignored.

I just laid there, no sleep for me. I’m starting to smell them. I can smell their humanity. I can smell their blood. Only mildly now but it will get worse.

Later I checked my watch and it showed 12:00. Oh crap! I got everyone up, we are way late getting going. It’s already halfway through the night and we wasted hours with me just sitting there and them sleeping. All of them groggy, Jill said, “What’s up Susan? We have hours before we need to leave.

I said, “No we don’t it’s midnight already we have to go!”

She said, “What? My clock says high noon? So does Jack’s Susan. Wait! No don’t go out!”

Vinny yelled, “I happen tire! I hat of res ceiling the laments!”

Jack yelled back, “Make sense goddammit man!” Vinnie punched the ground.

Sure enough it was a bright and sunny when I leapt from the tent. I covered myself and rolled into a ball, crouched, and was close to leaping back for the tent. Then I realized I’m not burning now. Ever since my transformation ght-ing the cricket demon I tried to enter into that angelic form again but couldn’t. I don’t know how I did that.

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Yet I believed I might be changing, growing somehow, into something unique. Growing into a beast not before seen. It seems some part of what I predicted is true. The fact that I’m growing and changing. As of this moment I’m una fected by the sun, whether or not it stays that way it’s hard to tell.

Veronica said, “Ew. She’s going to burn up and stink up the tent.” she tried to be quiet but my super hearing still heard her.

Jill replied to her, “My God woman, is that all you think? A noble creature burns, an abominable event, and you’re only afraid that she might stink?”

I relaxed my crouch and stood up. I looked skyward to see my long lost love. I was a sun worshipper in the modern sense when I was human and infected. Just as much when I was fully human. I would lie out in the sun and tan endlessly.

The warmth on my skin was wonderful, it made me feel normal again. The sun eased my hunger slightly too, but only slightly. The other members of the crew leapt out of the tent expecting to see a smoking puddle and seen me standing there staring up at the sun. They all hit the ground on their knees and planted their face in the dirt. Craig smacked it on a rock and rolled on his side groaning. A spontaneous reaction for thralls I expect, only the most elder and powerful of the reds were daywalkers.

I stared at the sky and said, “This is new. I wonder when I became a daywalker? It’s OK guys I’m not old. Seems like millenia but really it’s only been days since the weird shit happened at Chichén Itzá.”

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One by one they looked up, and sat there staring. I said, “I’m gonna hang out here a while guys go back and sleep. I wanna learn more about this if I can.”

Jack said, “Look lady this ain’t safe. If everyone’s OK with it I’m gonna take over sentry, I got the beef to handle shit.”

George said, “I’ll do your hair, and girl you’re going to get some exfoliation your skin needs loving too you know.”

The rest looked at each other and nodded in agreement.

Whether with Jack or George I’m not sure.

Vinnie said, “That led a missed fact, he made an ancient smear. An a fectionate malevolence.”

Jack said, “Right then, here’s the deal lady if there’s a problem I’m putting you back in here by force if I have to. I don’t think anyone here would disagree we would all die trying to help you if you even so much as stubbed a toe on a rock.”

I said, “OK I hear you Jack. No prob.”

So I rolled things up and did some sunbathing. It felt so good, it seems like it’s been a lifetime.

As I lay there I cleared my mind, pushing out all the misery of the last few days and just taking in the warmth of the bright sun. Nothing mattered at this moment, I’m in deep crap but I can’t do any more about it than what I’m doing. Heading south. Heading to the encampment I knew might not even still be there. I just hope it wasn’t relocated with the reds gone, and that it hasn’t fallen to raiders. It’s just hope, that’s all I can live on. We’ll change our travel to the daytime when it is safer, now that I’m a

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daywalker.

Veronica was washing my face with carbolic soap. She was convinced George’s river scum exfoliation was unsan-itary. I swatted hands away after submitting to her OCD for a few minutes.

I said, “Jack, let’s change to travel during the day. I think it would be safer now that I’m daywalking.”

Jack said, “Any sign of trouble we go back to night travel, I’m not putting anyone at risk most especially you kid.” I said, “Loud and clear big guy. Let’s start tomorrow.” He said, “Aye, if the others are good with it so am I.” So it’s settled. I was about to rise to pack up for tonight’s voyage. We better get going, the longer we are camped here I feel the more danger we are in.

Jack was clinking away at the mouth of the tent eld stripping his AK-47 when I heard the brush rustle on all sides. Ghillie suits, ve soldiers in total. Safeties clicked o f as they all moved at once. One taking Jack o f guard knocked him facedown to the ground and moved swiftly back to cover him with his ri e. One came out to my side to cover me. Three pulled up the tent pegs like they were straws and covered my other friends who raised their hands in the air. Shouts erupted that didn’t register to me at all. My mind was literally in the clouds. I was pushed face rst to the dirt. I could likely take them but I would likely kill my friends doing so. We were helpless.

They searched through our belongings and found noth-ing more than our weapons and survival kit. We had nothing else. They shouted at us, saying, “Speak now! Who are you people and what is your purpose! If we

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don’t like what you say we kill you and walk away with more supplies than we came with. We don’t need any more raiders in this area. Ten seconds starting now. . . ”

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So what the hell do they want to hear? I just decide to start with a realistic description of what we are. I said,

“We’re refugees for God’s sake! Mercy, leave us be!” “Well don’t you have brass balls. I would believe it from these quivering wretches but you are something else. You a merc? I think so. I have no use for rogue red court assassins. Your masters are gone, now you die murderer.” Veronica leaps up to defend me, “No! Don’t hurt her!” Crack! Literally the shot heard around the world she took an AK round through the temple. She was dead before she hit the ground. My friends all screamed and jumped to her.

One of the gunmen said, “Cease re, these poor wretches have been through enough. This woman is a problem,

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she could kill a hundred before she falls.”

The gunman raised his ri e and said, “Stay on mission.” The others repeated, “Stay on mission.” The motto of the fellowship. I found them.

I said,

I am a Fellowship Soldier.

I am a Warrior and a member of a team.

I serve good, and live the Fellowship Values.

I will always place the mission rst.

I will never accept defeat.

I will never quit.

I will never leave a fallen comrade.

I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and pro cient in my warrior tasks and drills.

I always maintain my arms, my equipment and myself.

I am an expert and I am a professional.

I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy the enemies of humanity, in close combat.

I am a guardian of freedom and the right way of life.

I am a Fellowship Soldier.

The gunmen immediately click on the safeties of their ri es, and lower weapons. The one gunman said, “Now

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that is something that never got far from any base camp. Sorry ma’am it’s hell out here. What’s your name?”

I said, “Susan. . . Corporal Susan Rodriguez.”

He said, “Well good to see a sister out here Susan, I feel like shit about that woman I’m so sorry people. We don’t know who are friends from who are enemies out here.” Jill said, “You fucking monster, does she look like a threat? What the hell could she have done?”

The gunman said, “Quite a lot. If she had a pistol, or worse explosive ordinance she could have taken one or all of us down quick.”

I said, “Doesn’t make it right bud. You know my name what is yours?”

He said, “Sargeant Miller, Dwight Miller. Everyone calls me Sarg.”

“Well Sarg, just so you know, we’re all tight here and would be quick to lay down our lives for each other. We don’t know you yet, I would like some private time with my friends here so we can decide what to do next.”

“Granted. You take what time you need. We are going to make camp here for the night. We’ve been in cover for hours here observing you all and we are tired. Especially tired given we killed an innocent today.”

“I hear you. We’ll debrief in the morning then as to where we go from here.”

“You are welcome to travel with us if you decide so. We are heading south to nd base camp, if it is still there. Most of the reteams I’ve met up with are doing the same. We need to regroup and gure out our place in this new world.”

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“Who are your people then?”

“I’m Sargeant Dwight Miller; some say I look like the punisher, the comic book anti-hero. We also have Edgar the spook Chalmers our warlock; he’s a dishevelled mil-lennial. Our heavy hitter is Jamar aka Jobu, like in the old ‘Major League’ movie; He looks like Michael Clarke Dun-can. Then there’s Strength our scout; We sometimes just call him injun. The nally there’s Doc Seth our medic, sometimes just called bones; he looks a little like Jeremy Renner I guess.”

“Well, you don’t have that superhero physique Sarg. Otherwise I guess sort of. Spook looks like some kind of evil hacker, are you sure he’s a warlock and not working cyber warfare? Jamar is chiselled and not nearly as friendly looking. Doc de nately looks like Hawkeye, hands down. You didn’t mention Injun, I guess he’s just a wiry, sure footed, long haired native american. A small man but he is the quickest and quietest soldier I’ve ever seen. Sarg how’d you get infected?”

“I didn’t. My wife was infected and one of her children was her rst kill. Our other children were killed immedi-ately after. Then she ed without a trace. I left my life to come here as a human to ght in my families memory.” I gasp, and rest a hand over my heart. “You wouldn’t be

the rst. I’m so glad the red court is gone.”

“Perhaps, as long as I live though I will never set aside my vigilance.”

“I understand. Even if I wanted to I don’t think I ever will either. I’m shocked you have a warlock? He’s precious as gold. You must have anti-vampire ordinance then?”

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“Or as we call it now supernatural ordinance. We have

more than vampires to worry about out here.”

“Yeah, I know. Lord do I know. Thanks Sarg, I’ll let you

know what we decide.”



“I am not going to go anywhere with those assholes. We’ll roll on our own, I would rather fall on my sword than travel with them.”, Jill said.

Vinnie said, “I will believe to get us to be loved in a jerk or will be lived love during when they are far. For spectacles believe they fear. A jerk or by far. Lots by far. Lots spectacular. I will by want us in. Want us to get ass cheeks.”

I smirk, and roll my eyes.

We were gathered around in an area not too far from our campsite, far enough away from the soldiers we hopefully won’t be heard easily. Without the vampire part of the fellowship, the infection, it’s much easier to say we are out of earshot. The infected or half vampires like I was had supernatural hearing nearly as good as full red court vampires.

George wiped his eyes and said, “The more of us the more chance some manner of contagion might invade the group. That’s what Veronica would have said. I vote nay, we go it alone.”

I said, “It would be safer, we would have a better chance of getting somewhere safe. It only makes sense.”

Jill said, “Oh yeah, so we should believe the one who lethally fed o f our friend Daniel? Sucked him dry, I seen

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you. I know. We all know. Here we are and you wont damn well touch us.”

I sat there feeling surreal. This is what I worst feared.

They knew.

Craig said, “Great. Thanks Jill that helped. Now we’re going to lose our vampire and along with her all hope of getting better.”

I said, “Hello, I’m right here. I have a name you know. I didn’t think you knew about Daniel, I’m so sorry. I know saying I was hungry doesn’t help much. I guess I wish I could have munched a bad guy there just weren’t any around right then. That didn’t come out right sorry.” Jill said, “No there is no good way to say it. I know you didn’t mean anything by it Susan it’s just the way you are. You need to feed soon though or you are going to kill again. I’ve lived with reds long enough to know, you need to accept us or you will kill again. It’s your nature. I love that nature, please be the vampire you are it is a noble and beautiful thing.” She grabs her fang necklace and holds it tenderly.

I sat there thinking. She’s right. The soldiers killed today to defend themselves but my hunger is worsening and it will eventually make me kill to feed. The soldiers had no choice but I do. I can’t keep on starving myself. I have to have enough wisdom to realize if I’m stubborn and blind to the reality of my new nature I will kill again and again. I need to eat a regular diet so I don’t gorge myself. Just like anyone.

I sat there a moment. Then I looked at them and I said, “OK, I’ll try. I only know to kill though. I refuse to feed

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in the hope I wouldn’t need to and then I just end up killing from hunger. I’ve never fed normally. I don’t even know if I have venom, at least not the kind you need. I’m sorry guys I don’t know for sure what I am, I’m scared. I’m scared that I am a monster more horri c than any of the reds could be.”

Jack said, “You’re a vamp. I don’t know how you could be a daywalker after only having risen a few days. Maybe you have amnesia, you’re old but can’t remember. You’re just a red though, you drink blood. I don’t care what Jill said, wings and talons and such. She tells long tales.”

I look at Jack and raise my arms. I give him a little smirk in the hope he is not going to attack me and then I extend my talons. Everyone except Jill jumps back. Jack pulls up his sts then backs down. Everyone looks at Jill. Jill said, “I told you. It’s all true she took on that thing, changed to some kind of vengeful angel and drove it o f. There’s her talons like I said. It was all true.”

I said, “If you want me to try feeding I will. You can see now I’m not any red that any of us have ever seen. I’m not the same. So you know feeding is a risk. I still say we need to join the soldiers. It’s not about whether they are worthy or not, it is not about what happened to Veronica. She would not like us putting ourselves in danger just in stubborn de ance especially for the sake of her memory. You know that. I’m starting to realize my abstinence has been putting your lives in danger too. So if I’m taking the risk with feeding, please take the risk in joining with the soldiers. These are fellowship soldiers, not mercs. It’s not for sure we are safe with them, they may have forsaken

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their oath but at least the fellowship *has* an oath.” Laura nally piped in and said, “I agree. These soldiers give us an excellent strategic advantage in our plans. I will follow them. The odds are well placed. It is less likely they will betray us than other men of war and that possibility weighs well against the tactical defensibility they would provide.”

Jill said, “Agreed then. We follow them. Let’s camp for the night. Laura it’s your turn to tantalize the vampire.” Vinnie chuckled, then said, “Provide for the lift of the need to cause food. If takes for Life and heinous food, in the chef nutty nutty nutty impact. Heals needs thy Food, nutritious for lift of thrones ornate food, nutty Food. To top the need for methyl of their cough, if youth for continuous.”

Laura said, “Understood.”

I snorted and laughed.

Then I let out a kind of maniacal giggle, thinking of willingly taking thralls. I’m not entirely able to accept the reality quite yet. I have thralls. Whether or not I choose to feed from them they will follow me. Jesus. I have thralls.

That night Laura snuggled up to me. I nuzzled her for a while, slobbering on her like a dog. She started giggling and moaning, when she started falling limp I was aroused to feed big time. Then I just let go and bit and fed from Laura. She let out a deep gasp and moaned intensely in pleasure. I heard Jill from the other side of the tent, “Thank God. It’s about time.”

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Vinnie said, “Thunder cheese.”



I let the Sarg know we decided to accompany them. He made the order to make ready to escort the refugees south with them to freedom. Or hopefully so.

He said, “Strength take point.”

A quick and silent native warrior said, “Aye.” and slith-ered into the forest silently and quickly. So silent I couldn’t hear him myself with my vampiric hearing. Amazing.

Sarg said, “Jamar take rear.”

A huge african-american bear with ma deuce broke his way to the back.

Sarg said, “Seth stay with the people, make sure they aren’t wounded.”

A man that looked like Dr. Strange from the comic books, grey at the temples, moved amongst my friends to check them. He’s a medic, he carried medical gear.

Sarg said, “Edgar stay with me, corporal Susan same stay here. Spook we need more jars, we deployed too many on those blacks a few weeks ago and haven’t got any back yet.”

Spook looked like the epitomy of the lanky greasy haired computer hacker.

Spook said, “Aye. Susan do your people have any jars? Like literally empty jars of any kind?”

I asked, we had a dozen in the unlikely case we found a warlock. Freaky, we actually did.

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We started out. Laura had no interest in world domi-nation today. She looked like a teenage girl in love. She would steal glances at me from time to time and was just generally in her own happy place. I’m not one to talk though, I felt the same. When we made camp for lunch that day we sat together. I noticed the venom caused a vampiric reaction on her skin searing it. I cooled it with a rag and some water. She is going to make sure to cover her neck and upper torso from the sun to protect herself.

“I should have known better. The venom always kinda turns skin vampiric. It’s just been so long since I’ve pro-vided to my master.” she giggled, “you were wonderful Susan thank you.”

She snuggled in with me as the lunch was being cooked at the re and I felt a rush of joy go through me from her touch. Like that being young and in love feeling. It was great. It made no sense. I just don’t care, it feels so innocent and wonderful. I held her close and kissed her tenderly on the cheek. I love this.

Everyone seen us, and we made no attempt to hide any-thing. My friends, or, thralls, were looking very confused. I heard one soldier say to Sarg, “Uh, Sarg. I think our new corporal is. Uh. You know. Like playing for the other te—”

“They look happy. I’m glad. How much longer for lunch, how are our rations. . . ”

Jill came up to us and asked Laura, “Girl, does it feel the same? Is the venom as it should be?”

Laura said, “Perfect, feels exactly the same. Exactly what we need Jill, Susan’s a keeper for sure.”

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Jill said, “Uh Susan, you’re acting a little bit di ferent from what you should. What are you feeling right now?” I told her what I could about how I felt.

Jill said, “Susan have you ever been fed on, ever?” I said, “No, I just got turned as far as I remember.”

Jill said, “It’s just that what you’re feeling mirror the e fects of the venom with only a few di ferences. What happened at the turning?”

I said, “Dear God. Well if you want to know grab some-thing to vomit in.”

So I proceeded to recollect my experience of the turning, and my thoughts about it.

“The turning. I could probably turn some-one too, it’s an instinct, I just never tried or had the interest yet.

“My experience was very intimate. My clothes were torn and my body exposed, then Bianca in true form took me into her arms and ca-ressed me, sliming me with her bodies excre-tions. That is, that slime they excrete like sweat in their true form. She continued mas-saging the uid into me, and started cud-dling me intimately. She drank from me, until I was delirious and near death. She savoured the taste of my blood for an eter-nity while my delirium worsened. I was nearly passing out probably from blood loss. I seen something change in her face, a kind of ecstatic release I guess. She rose up from me and her body started heaving. She leaned

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toward me like she was going to give me a kiss. Her claws sunk deep into my back im-mobilizing me. When our lips connected she started vomiting directly into me. It felt like worms inside me and I seen writhing beneath my skin. The feeling passed as she cuddled me. As the wormy sensation dissi-pated my senses seemed to just awaken as if all my life they were merely sleeping for lack of a better word. The dark room became like twilight. I was still confused and semi conscious from the lack of blood which I guess was returned to me when she regur-gitated in me but I couldn’t snap out of it. The bloodlust was there right away too but I didn’t know what it was. I was thrown into a room, my love Harry was thrown in after. I nearly killed him but he snapped me out of it, the rest is history.”

Jill held a hand to her mouth and looked a little green. She said, “Oh Jesus. I didn’t know it happened like that. My God that’s disgusting. They threw your beau in the room for you to eat? Who pissed o f the red you or him?” I said, “Him. He is good at pissing people o f.”

She said, “God, were they ever vindictive. I’m so glad they’re gone. I want them back again but not like that. If only they could be the noble creatures I know they are deep down. Like you. You’re de nitely a keeper Susan you’re a sweetheart.” She smiled and rubbed her fang necklace, snuggling it to her cheek.

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I said, “I already killed two people Jill, your friend and some random dude driving down a road. I don’t think sweetheart applies.”

She said, “All things are relative. The reds were really aw-ful, you aren’t. You are still a vampire Susan. A predator of humans. Apparently the de nition of thrall with you has become a human who dedicates themselves to the proper feeding, care and protection of a vampire. What a brave new world it is. The slaves are the keepers of their master.”

We talked for a while, and came to the conclusion that I’ve established a telepathic link to Laura and am shar-ing her pleasure. Nonetheless at the time of feeding I still had to contend with the mania, until it settled into this sense of connectedness. We noticed a di ference, my connection to Laura showed a dominant aspect. I want to protect her. She wants to please me. There is a bond of love between us. George said it was the natural thrall relationship of love restored. He said that it is based on the trust of a big strong wonderful vampire. He said me and Laura are going to have a beautiful and eternally lov-ing relationship. That’s George, he sure has a air for the dramatic.



After a few days had gone by, I have had a feed from all the thralls. We all feel interconnected and on top of the world. We have a telepathic bond of some sort. The soldiers are suspicious but can’t seem to put their nger on it, or at least we haven’t been confronted.

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We heard a hell of a racket close to camp, everybody leapt up.

A person raising a war cry, roaring of great beasts. Trees are crashing down and yells of pain. Someone outside, one of our team, is in a life and death battle with a great monster. Or perhaps many such monsters. They need help urgently.

Me and Craig were in the middle of the joy of feeding me. Needless to stay we stopped cold and were working furiously cleaning ourselves up. Jill and Laura helped. He was intoxicated and fell back to the sleep roll. We explained to the soldiers he hasn’t felt well tonight. Sarg is worried we might need to stay camped an extra day, or drag a stretcher tomorrow.

Sarg said, “Who’s on sentry?”

I said, “Jack. Oh God Jack.”

I heard gasps from my thralls behind me.

Craig said, “He’ll be ne. He is getting his senses back now.”

Everybody looked straight at Craig, then the thralls looked at me, and all the thralls raised eyebrows and smiled.

Jill said, “It’s working.”

Sarg said, “What? What’s working?”

Jill said, “The increased bre in my diet, I’m more regu-lar now.”

Sarg said, “Jesus fu— Nevermind, you clowns stay here. Grab your gear men and get ready to engage.”

It was getting quiet as soon as the soldier left. Soon we heard the call, “OK people, it’s safe to exit the tent.

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Conan the barbarian butchered some Jaguars.” I said, “Pardon?”

Me and the thralls left and headed to where the soldiers are. Jaguars? Plural? The hell? We seen quite the sight. It de nately looked like a Frank Frazetta sketch. Jack took down six fricking jaguars with st and kabar. His shirt and pants were torn and his massive bodybuilder physique shined with sweat. Blood trickled from his breast with what precious few injuries he had taken. I turned my eyes away from him, between the trickling blood and that outrageous body I was getting two or three di ferent kinds of hungry.

Jack said, “I was cool in the ght. I’m not berserking anymore. I was hungry for the battle, and fought with strength and skill, but my wits were about me. I’m me again. Thank God, and thank you Susan. Thank you so much.”

Sarg said, “For what? What is he thanking you f—”

I said, “—Sarg, all things considered do you *really* want to know?”

Sarg said, “No. Actually no, that’ll do just ne.”

I said, “Sarg, I’m moving up with you and your boys. Jaguars aside our own personal X-man Wolverine can take care of the thr— er, civilians.”

Sarg said, “Granted. It will be good working with you.” We need to keep moving south quietly. The last thing we need is to have some hostile force come down on us due to some territorial bullshit. Soon after that thought a bullet hit a tree and we hit the dirt. We need to take care of this quickly. I found my telepathic link to the thralls

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was strong now, strong enough for open communication. I said telepathically, *“Hit the dirt people, we have in-*

*bound* *re here.”*

Jack said, *“Damn. Hear you loud and clear. Bloody* *amazing. Everybody Down!”*

Everybody answered in their minds tongue. I listen for activity; there is something on the road. The road is 500 yards out; I hear a vehicle. I said, “Stay down Sarg, I’m gonna look.”

Sarg said, “Aye.”

It’s an APC, about a dozen soldiers around it. It looks like militia but they are probably raiders.

I said, “Sarg, looks like a dozen. Irregular troops, trained

civies. An APC also. If you don’t have anything I have a

20mm ri e with incendiary rounds for the APC.”

Jack transmitted by thought, and said *“I have movement* *due south of us Susan. Sounds like a rabbit but if there is something up there it could very well be hostiles down here also.”*

*“I hear you Jack, I’ll listen to see what it is.”*, I said toJack.

“There is something in the bushes around our people Sarg, I might be able to nd out what it is.”

Sarg said, “How the hell do you know that? Never mind. Do your shit.”

I listen 150 yards away, where the thralls are, and I hear something like a housecat, moving silently. Or almost so. I squint my eyes in concentration and hear the breathing. A large animal. I hear a whisper, “Alpha tango, target appears to be refugees. I see nothing of value except sup-

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plies.” I don’t hear the reply but in the bush the voice of the hostile soldier returns, “Aye, order understood.”

I said to Sarg, “They’re checking us out, it sounds like raiders. They may not realize our people are distant from us. I believe they may think our people are the whole of our contingent when the troops on the road red at us thinking we were the same group. This may work to our advantage if they don’t know there are organized fellowship soldiers within reach. I say we start to move back slowly Sarg, I will try and gather more intel on the way.”

Sarg said, “What the fuck are you using for intel woman? You got some cybernetic implants I don’t know about? We are going to have a real come to Jesus conversation soon if you don’t come clean. Agreed, we stealth south to our people.”

Another shot hit an inch from the soldier Jamar’s head. I said, “The force on the road is trying to keep us down. Likely it’s in order to allow the team south of our people to make their strike.”

Sarg said, “How can you you deduce that? Were you working intelligence?”

I said, “Yeah actually. I was a journalist before infection so that became part of my duty. Intelligence, counter-intelligence, in ltration, special ops.”

He said, “Ok. I’ll run with it then. Wait, you’re special ops? Do you mean you’re a ‘Snake Eater?”’

I said, “Um, yeah. I was on some international assign-ments. I’m from the special forces personnel.”

He said, “Fuck. Can you ease Joe Boo’s troubles back

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there?”

I said, “Aye Sarg, I’ll get it done.”

I moved over that 150 yards in ve seconds slithering through the underbrush, like a wild stallion on a straight stretch. I reached Joeboo snapping o f his pistol to keep the enemy down, only to draw return re. He is hit in his left shoulder so likely won’t be able to wield the ma deuce but it’s hard to say.

I said, “What’s out there?”

He jumped back and got a radio call. Over the radio Sarg said, “Joeboo I’m sending Susan your way. Found out she’s a snake eater give her a wide berth to work her craft out there.”

Joeboo said, “Yeah. She’s here now.” Sarg said, “What the f—, Jesus!”

It sounded like a hive of bees the bullets were ying so close. As I was there Joe Boo took two in the chest and went at. I took one in the shoulder as I went down beside him, casting an oath as I went.

“Jobu how bad is it?” his eyes were wide and glassy. I opened his fatigues and he was bleeding badly. Deadly badly. Damn me to hell it looked yummy. I had to look away. I was drooling like a dog again.

“I’ll get you help Jamar, somehow I’ll get Bones here.” “Too weak. . . need to get that bullet out. . . , Susan please try. My medkit has surgical supplies. . . ” He nearly passed out, I shook him, “Jamar stay with me, come on man stay with me!”

He said, “. . . supplies. Dig and stitch. You remember training? Just try.”

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Stay on mission

I got his medkit. Why he had a eld surgeons kit I may never know but his was complete. I got sanitizing wipes, scalpel, tweezers, and more. I tried, I didn’t know how to stop the bleeding. Without stopping the bleeding I didn’t know how to see to remove the bullet. I can’t stitch him without removing the bullet. I still remember enough from my training to know Jamar is a dead man with this much bleeding even if I did get a patch to suck the chest wound. I can’t stand the hunger anymore, I set aside the tools. I said, “I’m sorry Jamar. I thought I could do this, I don’t know how.”

Jamar looked at me with empty eyes as I leaned in to nish him o f. I’m drawing his blood through his wound. I inadvertantly drew the bullet out from feeding. Scalpel be damned I extended a talon and removed the bullet with exacting precision. More precision than even the best surgeon could ever do. I had the steady re exes of a vampire using an extension of her own body to do her work. I grabbed some stitching and pulled it through quick as a sewing machine using my talons.

I noticed the areas I touched with my venom during feeding were not as in amed as they were so I used the venom like an antiseptic as I closed up the wound. I used the shirt from his fatigues to wrap him and keep the venom soaked skin out of the sun and out of the danger of burning. It also worked as a anesthetic as well as soothing him and bringing him pleasure. I tried not to use too much in fear of addicting him.

I said, “Jamar, I need to take down these motherfuckers so you lie like the dead until I get back. Don’t forget to

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stay alive because if you don’t I’ll kill you OK?” Jamar laughed, “No promises I’ll try.”

I said, “There is no try—”

He said, “only do or not do. OK I will.”

He looked at me as I left. Confusion maybe, no emotion at all; he just stared. As if he was trying to look inside me; as if he was trying to gure out what I truly am.

Then I listened. Facing to our groups rear I’m looking north. 150 yards out, a rustle in a bush 10 degrees left, then a short burst coming from 45 degrees right, and the sound of a mag being changed 30 degrees left. I hear a small group 300 yards distant, rustling, rattling and some but not much incoming re. OK what’s around here, pretty open to the north, and to the east the treeline opens to a eld leading to the road. West there’s a depression. I walk over to the depression and nd it’s a stream bed, not much stream though. I slip into the depression and listen north, a slight rustle, no inbound re. One soldier it sounds like. I look and they’re 300 yards out and hidden well. I caught the sight of their earring. I make my way quickly and quietly and take the soldier down quickly. using a talon in the lung they couldn’t scream and fangs to the neck made it a deadly feeding. I hid the body well. Looking to the east I see the four behind a very large fallen tree. These people are well armed! If they move forward Sarg will never get back in time to save my thralls.

Using telepathy I said, *“You guys have got to move out* *now! Grab what you can and get to the Sargeant! These people back here are formidable. They will plow through our rear guard and all of you right quick.”*

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Stay on mission

My thralls replied, *“We’re moving now Susan, we’ll get* *forward to the Sergeant as fast as we can.”*

If I re o f my M16, with the tiny little 5.56 rounds

I won’t penetrate the tree. The 20mm would punch

through the tree and take one down, at this range it would

surgically punch through the tree, one soldier, and a hun-

dred yards of trees down the line re would have perfect

little holes until the last one has a ery explosion. That’s

no good. Besides I could drive them forward rather than

back if I open re from here. They know Jamar is the

only one between them and their target and if taken on

multiple fronts they will go for Jamar or ee. With him

injured I doubt they will ee. I need to make them run

or dig in. Scaring the bejesus out of them should do the

trick. Facing a vicious unseen predator should do it if I

can be terrifying enough. I’ve decided then, I must eat.

At the thought my vision changed. It darkened and

became clearer, like a good pair of sunglasses. I was also

seeing beyond normal vision, the colours and aspects of

true vampire vision. I shook my head and closed my eyes

for a moment and it was still the same. I had a small mirror

I used for camou age face paint. I looked at my eyes and

they weren’t human. They weren’t the pure black of a

red court vampire either they were a terrifying pure white.

They seemed to glow in the light of the sun. I forced my

eyes closed and did what I could to calm my hunger a

little. I looked again and something swooshed towards

the bridge of my nose and my human eyes returned. Well

shit, I seem to have nictitating membranes. They pulled

out to protect my vampiric eyes for a daylight hunt. I’ve

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never seen that in any red or any supernatural species I know of. I wonder if that’s why Jamar looked at me funny. Things are going to get weird if we all get through this alive.

I crouch down moving in silently, not even so much as a leaf or a twig moves. I hear them plainly but the words are drowned out by the thrill of the hunt.

A movement in the leaves behind the log they’re hiding behind and one peeks up. Like a shot I darted out of the bush I was hiding behind and without even touching the ground I hit him broadside and hurled ourselves silently into the brush east of them. The force of the impact had broken nearly every bone in his body. I immediately went for the kill while I listened intently to the remaining raiders behind that log.

“Where did Jim go? I was just talking to him. I swear by Christ I was looking right at him and he up and vanished like a fart in the wind..”

A second man said, “The hell? What manner of sorcery is this? We have to get in and get the slaughter nished.” The rst man said, “Don’t forget to save two or three for the slavers we should be able to herd that many with us. The black court of vampires were looking for human components and hides for their own rituals we should check to see if there are any of these humans that could be harvested. It fetches a high price Tom, you know it’s worth it even if it is disgusting.”

Holy Jesus fucking Christ they would do that to their own species? Oh my God these particular humans are all food, I’m taking them all down. First I need to keep them

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Stay on mission

away from the camp. I stealthily drag the corpse south of where they are entrenched and separate the parts with surgical cuts from my talons and some tearing.

one of the men entrenched north of me said, “What is that sound? It sounds like someone’s eating chicken, tearing o f the legs and stu f.”

Another one said, “Dude, that ain’t no chicken.”

At that I hurled the head still attached to the spine right behind that log. They were screaming like little girls. As they ran north to escape I took to the trees and easily caught up to them. I reached the lead man and with my talons truncated his torso from his legs and hurled his legs into the raider immediately behind. I had a pretty good idea what was coming next. I took the torso to the trees, an old thick tree that looked like it would stand up to an rpg easily.

The raider shreaked, shouts of terror came from below and they opened re in every direction. Clip after clip, m249, m16, ak47 handguns rpgs everything was getting emptied into empty air. When it stopped it looked like a forest re had torn through. Smoke was everywhere and the trees were little more than jagged torn trunks to both sides of the raiders below. Only the oldest still stood, which included mine. They never shot into the trees, they never thought of it. They were too terri ed to think of it.

In the meantime I fed. There wasn’t much blood left in this cadaver and no life left in the blood that was left. It was disgusting I stopped drinking. I just don’t seem to get anything from humans that arent still alive. I tried

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sucking the marrow from his bones and never was there a sweeter food. It was like the icing on the cake. I will need to remember that. The rest of the cadaver is like the rind of an orange or the shell of a peanut I don’t like the taste of esh and I refuse to eat it.

One said, “We got him. We had to have gotten him. Nothing could survive that.”

Another said, “Ok, moving south. Let’s get what we came here for and get the hell out of this place.”

I move in to the south sliding down a large tree, purring like a great cat. Just loud enough to hear.

One said, “Dude what’s that sound?”

Another said, “Just a monkey or something, forget it, keep moving.”

“You’re a fool, if a monkey survived the onslaught we just laid out for it pray mercy I never have occasion to see that monkey. Especially not one that purrs like a great cat.”

I lash some vines to the torso and suspending him upside down I skin the cadaver and strip it’s organs. I weave together a jute like bag from the undergrowth to create a kind of fetish and lay the organs inside. After I move into the trees some distance away.

I hear a scream, a cry, and vomiting. I peer in their direc-tion to see them circling around themselves back to back. each of them were checking their weapons one by one, reloading as necessary.

“Tom, what do we do? My God man what do we do? The devil himself has come to harvest our soul. I swear it’s true. What else can survive the destruction we’ve dished

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Stay on mission

out? He’s come for payment he has, come to take us back to hell with him.”

“Shutup idiot. There ain’t no devil this is just some

earthbound creature. If we can catch it we can kill it.”

I see them moving together tightly packed. If I deter-

mined some earthly creature was the enemy I would do

the same. They are getting too close to Jobu I need to get

back to him to gure out a way to get him out and in a

safe place.

One of the raiders said, “Tom, you and I both know it ain’t no monkey. No earthbound creature. It ain’t the devil neither man. What sits in between these two ideas hmm? What is the most sensible idea?”

Tom said, “A goddamn supernatural, of course. a vamp or demon. No a vamp don’t sound like that, can’t survive what we dished out. Willy you’re the warlock what is this?”

OOOOoooo shit! There’s a warlock with them! That is the one thing that could be a worry to me. Jars and other supernatural ordinance can do me in. Move you’re ass Susan get to Jobu if you take on a warlock you might not live to help him.

I stop bothering to listen to them and focus on getting to Jobu. He’s in bad shape.

“Are you able to move Jamar?”

“Not a chance Susan, I’m sorry. The shock is wearing o f and I can’t move even so much as a nger without crumpling up with pain. I’m done. You’re hurt Susan, you’re covered in blood.”

“Not my blood.”

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“All the screaming out there, they were utterly terri ed. You’re covered in their blood. . . ”

Does he know? I hope not. If he thinks I’m a vamp then I’m an instant enemy.

“. . . You’re one of our elite aren’t you? How are you so good without infection? Man, you’re the real thing. A real elite soldier. Special forces material.”

Just then the enemy soldiers yell, “Whatever you are, what manner of supernatural creature know now that we have supernatural ordinance and we’re rearmed. You won’t win. You are going to su fer for what you did to our people.”

Fear washed over me. I’m in real danger of death or banishment now. They don’t even know what I am yet they are breaking out the crafts of their warlock. It’s their only hope if they come across a supernatural adversary. When I was fellowship we would wait to see the whites of their eyes before we rearmed with supernatural ammo, or antivamp, whatever you want to call it. I have them really scared.

“Susan their coming this way. Leave me, get to safety.” “I do not leave a fellow soldier.”

“I saw the fear in your eye just then, you aren’t exactly human are you?”

“. . . Well. . . not exactly no.”

“Then what. . . are you?”

“I don’t know Jamar, I’m learning more everyday. I have red court characteristics but—”

I extend my talons

“There are other things about me that aren’t the same.”

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Stay on mission

“So you weren’t in any real danger before, were you now?”

“I’ve been jarred before Jamar.”

“You are in danger now, grave danger. Why won’t you run now? Why are you ghting for us, what are we to you and you’re species?”

“I am a fellowship soldier Jamar, same as before. I won’t leave a man down. I won’t turn my back on my mission. Sarg sent me to do a job and I’ll see it done or die trying. It is a point of honour and by honour I abide.”

I felt a pressure in my back for a moment. I felt like I grew a foot taller, maybe ve. I think I’m learning what it may take to transform to that dark angel true form. It’s not a matter of trying but of being. I have to be the person that it represents. First piece of the puzzle is honour.

A bullet hit me in the side and I screeched. Deathstone ammunition. Mordite. A stream of disintegration fol-lowed the trajectory. It’s outsider technology harnessed by warlock spells. It is, anti-matter. The bullet missed anything vital but that wound is not going to heal any way but naturally and slowly.

Jamar said, “Christ, Get out now Susan! Run!”

I said, “I have a duty Jamar, stay low. If I die out there it won’t be as a coward. The fellowship is and always will be my family and there are innocents here that we protect. Now stay low, let me do my duty.”

I run toward them moving to the west side. Jamar said, “No! Susan get out it’s suicide!” I make a rustle here and there as I go to draw re away from Jamar. Disintegra-tion followed me as the deathstone bullets ew. I dove

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and rolled through the ditch I was in some time ago. I overtook one who laid wait in the ditch and pierced his ribcage with my talons hard enough to exit the other side. He couldn’t scream I was on him and drank him dry. Screw the games I left him to lie. I grabbed his deathstone grenade launcher and moved north. Leaping out of the ditch they opened re. They must have expended some personal enhancement technologies. Technomage, not a warlock. They have a frickin technomage! They are able to bind mystical spells and items to modern technology. Weapons especially. They have the covetted ability to merge outsider materials to modern weapons. I thought they just had one shot and jars. I was wrong. The forest behind me disintegrated from an explosion of gas, au-tomatic re and grenades, and became the landscape of mars.

I red my launcher back at the raiders and saw a purple ash. A wave of cold lashed back at me freezing the trees and vegitation around me. Looking there appeared a life-less pocket of twenty by twenty martian landscape. Two of the raiders didn’t have much left and three were left there with a muddy appearance but otherwise untouched. Counter mordite technology. Their buddies didn’t have it and weren’t so lucky, they disintegrated from the round explosion; they just simply ceased to exist. I feel bad for the devil, he won’t be gathering their souls. It is the most dangerous substance in our universe, in all creation or should I say outside of creation, because it comes from the chaos beyond our universe. The “outside,” the outer chaos.

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Stay on mission

I throw a rock to hit one and it disintegrates. It must be attuned to them somehow, it is acting like mordite in protecting them. I need a warlock to counter this. I’m grabbing Jamar and running, I hope I don’t hurt him too bad doing that.

Jamar had some bouncing betties, I’m not sure if it will help but I plant them then run. I’m trying hard not to hurt him so it is going to take a few minutes to get south. We heard a mine blow but I was pretty sure that wouldn’t do much against mordite technology. Sure enough a few minutes later I heard another blast as they hit another mine. We are getting fairly distant now and my friends should now be up with the sargeant.

When we got up to the Sargeant to nd his battle was successful. He blew the APC with a recoilless ri e and it looks like he took down a dozen soldiers as they came in from the open area around the road. Nobody was injured and here we come limping in like we were coming from Io Jima.

“Sarg shit is coming from the south, got them outsider tech down there,” I said.

“Jesus christ Susan these people didn’t, why would they?” Bones said, “Yeah they did Sarg, this one has a ton in his ruck.”

Jamar said, “Same here Sarg. They just would waste deployment on a conventional enemy. Mostly jars here it wouldn’t work on humans anyway.”

Sarg said, “bloody hell, we gotta get outta here fast..” I said, “I can hold them o f Sarg, I might not be able to nish them but I can at least slow them down—”

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Sarg said, “Absolutely not. We’re a team, we all live or we all die.”

Laura said, “Get me to that APC. I’ll get it running and we’ll be gone.”

Sarg said, “Nobody could get that thing going I plugged it with a Carl G.”

Laura said, “I ain’t just nobody, trust me, it will run. I’ll make it run.”

“Are you willing to bet your life on it; to bet all our lives on it?”

“I would Sargeant, damn right I would.”

“Well we don’t have a hell of a lot of choice here. I haven’t known you long Laura but either we go or we die. How are we getting there without getting killed in the open?”

Edgar the warlock said, “I’ll lay down a spread of decoys Sarg, it will redirect them away from us as we run.” Sarg said, “Do it now. Everyone grab what you need quickly. We can go encumbered, grab only what you need and we run fast. Spook do your work I’ll pack shit for you to grab as you’re running.”

All of us are scampering doing what needs to be done as if we were mice being chased by cats. Spook was chanting burning and dancing, quickly burning embers scattering into the forest. A terrible cold surrounded him, black magic, what is he doing? Personally I don’t see any decoys but if he says so I’ll go along with it. Why black magic for decoys? Stop thinking Susan move faster.

Sarg said, “Spook, do we need to go? I don’t want to leave you it’s suicidal for any of us to stay.”

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Stay on mission

Spook told Sarg to hold ve, then he said, “right, all is set Sarg let’s move.”

Sarg said, “You heard the Spook, everyone move full speed to the APC, gather to the far side 20 meters north where there is a drainage ditch. We stay there, if there is inbound re we’ll take it away from the APC if we can. Laura we will try to draw re from you but God help you.”

Laura said, “God be damned, I’ll get it done.”

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04

Collateral Damage

We heard screams from the wood. Spook is acting re-ally odd, he seems, narcissistic somehow. I looked into the wood and saw a horror show. They are laughing;

they are laughing and tearing into each other; they are disintegrating each other; they are laughing and eating each other; they are enjoyed the taste of each others esh; they relished the sensation of being consumed by each other; they tore each other apart piece by piece, organ by organ, esh for esh, disembowelling, consuming blood and drowning in absolute ecstacy from it all. Death came slow to them and yet they embraced death like a long lost love. That’s what the cold was, Spook wasn’t casting a distraction he cast some kind of very dark spell.

It took about an hour, far longer than Laura thought

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but the raiders were cannibalizing each other. They paid no interest in us. The forest became more and more quiet as they died. Spook’s eyes became more and more empty as the e fect of the black magic he cast took hold. The fellowship warlocks that were infected could cast black magic with impunity but now that they are human every use of black magic causes ever greater corruption and insanity. Human spellcasters have been this way and the white court of wizards have known this. They have wardens whose duty it is to decapitate anyone who even so much as makes a single act of black magic. We were overlooked simply because we were their allies in the war against red court vampires. What about now though?

I make my way to Spook. He doesn’t make any sense, he is maniacal and quite psychotic. It isn’t him who is speaking now, he is trapped inside himself.

I said to Sarg, “Have you noticed Spook isn’t quite right?”

Sarg said, “I’ve noticed. I don’t know what to think except he needs some sleep. It’s been a hell of a haul for all of us.” Then he spoke out to everyone to board the APC. I took spook aside for a brief feeding in order to try to make a psychic bond with him.

I said telepathically to me people, *“Is everyone OK? We* *haven’t had long to talk.”*

Jill said, *I’m OK. Tired as hell. I’ll be glad to get south* *to safety and rest.”*

The others, in turn, said essentially the same. They hadn’t felt any connections to the kills I made. I guess it takes consistency. Maybe it takes willingness.

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Collateral Damage

I’m scared for spook. He might get lost inside himself and never come back. I’m his only hope. If I can’t come through for him whether it’s the wardens or not we are going to need to take o f his head. There is no other way for his own safety and those of others who might be harmed or killed by him in his insanity.

I moved in towards Jill to talk a while. I said, “I’m sorry Jill I failed you guys. I tried so hard. I had them scared it should have been so easy to take them down. Jamar got hurt and I don’t know if Spook will ever be the same. He is falling to the corruption of black magic and I don’t know if I can save him”

“Susan you didn’t know they had paranormal ordinance. How could you? There’s nothing you could have done. What happened to Spook would have happened eventu-ally. But it happened now. And you’re here. Guess what? I didn’t feel the connection to the other enemies but Su-san I felt spook. Just a little. I think what you believe is a failure may be hope for Spook. Maybe you can heal him, maybe even galvanize him from the corruption like he was during infection. You’re here now. What if he fell sick from his magic later when you weren’t here? I believe in you Susan, you can save him.”

“It doesn’t make it right Jill there must have been some-thing more I could have done, you guys took down a dozen of the bastards I couldn’t take down half a dozen, and I’m easily ten times the strength and speed of any man.”

“Yeah but you’re not counting the women.” I laughed and said, “OK. OK girl. I hear ya.”

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“It’s not about the speed, or the strength Susan. Gotta outsmart them.”

“They brought out paranormal ordinance, if I tried to drive them o f rather than kill them it might not have happened. Spook might have been OK. He’s falling into dark magic corruption trying to save us. It’s my fault. I caused it.”

“Bullshit. Get a hold of yourself Susan. Sarg send Jamar south to guard us and he was wounded all the same. Jamar didn’t know enemies were coming from the south. He didn’t want to get injured anymore than you wanted them to pull out the mordite and come at us. I’ve lost people in my life too Susan, I could blame myself and get stuck in woulda, coulda, shoulda but that doesn’t help anybody. You faced mordite for us Susan, you faced death for our sake. You didn’t run away or avoid the danger. To show such courage what more could anyone ask of you? Hindsight is twenty twenty and we learn by our mistakes. You didn’t fail us you stood and fought through it all.”

Something took a hold on me. It was like I saw Jill as who she really was for the rst time. It wasnt about telepa-thy, it was deeper than that. She is just such a beautiful soul. She accepts me for who I am; she accepts me for what I am. She’s there for me in everything, feeding me, consoling me. I raised my hands to her cheeks and smiled. Then I kissed her; it was a real kiss, a passionate kiss. I took her into my arms and held her tight; held her like there was no tomorrow. I kissed her again and released her, then held her hands intimately. I released no venom, the feelings I was developing displaced my hunger. She

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Collateral Damage

was becoming to me something far di ferent than a thrall, and it left me confused.

She said, “Um, Susan I really don’t swing that way. You’re my vampire and all and I show you great love but I can’t be your mate. At the moment I wish I could but I don’t see how.”

I laughed and said, “Where have I heard that before? I guess the tables have turned hmm?”

She was confused a moment then laughed. Then she said, “of course, when we rst met I tried to draw you close and tempt you by spooning you. You told me then you don’t swing that way. If that’s right why make a move on me?”

“It’s about the feelings I’ve come to have for you. Maybe it’s not love; maybe it’s not a crush. Maybe it’s a squish. Whatever it is I want to follow how I feel.”

“Well let me think about it. We’ll talk at a later time about it. I’m just not ready yet, I’m confused. Let me be your thrall at least for now. I need the healing properties of your venom Susan and if changing our relationship takes that away then we can’t. When you made you’re move, God help me, you didn’t release venom. Need I say that scares the hell out of me.”

I felt so embarrased. I said to Jill, “I understand. I don’t think my feelings will change but I’ll let you have as much time as you need.”

She said, “Thanks. For what it’s worth I love you too. Don’t feel embarrased. I just need to search my feelings to know what it means to me; I need to understand the consequences of any decision I make.”

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She was absolutely right. I made mistakes but I acted with a lionheart. I didn’t hide or run away I moved in and did what I felt was right. We had to ee, but facing mordite weapons there was nothing else anyone could have done. The gods themselves would ee mordite.

We did OK. Jamar is injured but alive. We are all alive. Spook isn’t well, his spirit is corrupted. I need to bring him healing somehow. We had to leave behind a lot of our gear when we ed. We now have an APC though.

We aren’t going to be able to stay out here very long without our rations. We have some on our person but we need to nd somewhere to reprovision very soon. This APC has got to keep running, to get us south before we starve. What if our main camp has fallen? What if our people had to relocate? Oh God I hope not, I don’t know what we would do.

Right now I think the most important thing for me to do would be to help Jamar, I can talk to Bones to see what I can do. Spook needs me, Bones can’t help him. Noone but me can help him and even then I can’t be sure I will be able to rescue him from the darkness that is consuming him. I will try and convince Sarg to let Spook stay with me and my thralls so I can feed my way to a deeper connection with him.

I’ll talk to Sarg tonight to take Spook in with my peo-ple. The fellowship soldiers have enough to worry about tactically without worrying about spook so it shouldn’t be a problem. I think he is in the most need right now Bones can work with Jamar but it is far beyond his ability to treat Spook in any way.

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It’s up to me, I’m the only one with supernatural abil-ity and the only one then that can cure a supernatural ailment. I know my venom and bite can heal, I need to heal him. I need to nd a way to spin this to prevent the soldiers from suspecting me of being anything but human for my own safety and maybe even the safety of my thralls. They wouldn’t know if they are infected and with their loyalty to me the odds are they will be executed along with me as traitors to the human species.

I go to Sarg, “I want to take spook into camp with us Sarg, with our people. We have always camped alone together with out own gear and we still need that privacy at night. You have enough tactically to deal with and Spook is a burden to your people in his current state. We can take care of him.”

“Granted. You all can take him but we are going to have

to take his head soon, he is going to be a danger to himself

and us too. I have a lot greater tolerance than the white

council regarding the corruption of black magic but then

again warlocks can be life and death for us out here.”

“I think the fellowship as a whole feels that way. Per-

sonally I am even more tolerant than before since most

of our warlocks don’t have the protection o fered by the

infection.”

“Yeah. I don’t know what we are going to do. Assuming the fellowship is going to continue even accepting the warlock refugees from other places in the world may just invite greater danger for the fellowship and others.”

“There are a lot of decisions to be made in the near future. I guess we just continue one day at a time.”

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“Yeah. One day at a time. Damn right.” So I talked to Bones about Jobu.

I said, “Do you need any help Bones? I’m mostly in-volved with my own people and we don’t have the same military responsibility as you and the other fellowship people.”

“I’m good looking after him at night. We all need sleep though so if you want to have one of your people watch over him so everyone can get better sleep. As it is having the one sentry rotation at night works out well and I would like us all to stick with that.”

“OK, one of us will rotate at night to watch him. How is he anyway?”

“One of his wounds has become infected. Badly in-fected. He isn’t in immediate danger right now but he could get a lot worse very soon. I have him on antibiotics and I’m hoping it will work to cure the infection soon.” “A personal question, do you have any experience in psychology at all?”

“I was in doctors without borders when I got infected, took remedial training to support the people out here. So yeah. You got issues? Need to seek help?”

“Yeah doc a labotomy and a straightjacket oughtta do me. It’s like a. Err. . . Ka fka f, sex thing. . . ” “OooOOOoo, having female issues?”

“Not exactly no.”

I go on to explain what is happening with me and my feelings for Jill and how I like guys and not girls so I’m confused.

“Jill you’re just bi-romantic that’s all.”

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“I am not gay doc I already told you—” “No no not bi-sexual, bi-romantic.” “That’s a thing?”

“Yes that’s a thing. Maybe it’s the changes in your life since your infection was cured or maybe the current war or the possibility of resuming your pre-infected life. I think something triggered it to surface. It may be uid-ity and your romantic orientation changed. Regardless romantic orientation is who you get feelings for, seek companionship and intimacy with and maybe even fall in love with. Just not necessarily having sexual attraction for. It’s just how we’re wired.”

“Oh I get it. It doesn’t make things any easier, it might even make things harder, but it helps knowing.” “Anytime Susan.”

That night I took a feeding from Spook to try to heal him like I heal my thralls. Then we all went to sleep for the night. As I slept I had a vision of Spook. I seen a creature like an octopus attacking him in the darkness. I could see his psyche batting o f tentacles. Every once in a while one would pierce his body and he would scream and pull it out. Sometimes another would pierce him while he struggled with the rst. Then sometimes he couldn’t get to one in time and it sank it’s barbed tentacle deep inside him and he was powerless to pull it out. Slowly one after another pierced him deeply and the octopus drew in closer slithering the tentacles in deeper and deeper. Parts of his psyche were killed little by little by the tentacles invading his mind. The tentacles then slowly took over his mind creating anger, jealousy, mania and senseless

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behaviour. He can’t control the parts of him that are dead or dying, under the control of the monster. I drew myself closer and the octopus creature, being somewhat humanoid in appearance, bowed and began to back away and leave him. It meant the creature was tearing out the barbed tentacles. Spook was shrieking at the top of his lungs as his psyche was being ripped apart. At that moment I awoke shaking. Jill and the other thralls were also shaking as well as vomiting from the vision we shared telepathically. We ran to look at Spook and his eyes were glassy; his mouth was foaming. His hands were clawing at his chest and tore open the skin. We heard him moan in an empty zombie like way. He bit a piece of esh o f his arm and we leapt at him and restrained him with a rope. He was chewing peacefully on the chunk of esh he tore o f himself. We held a piece of gauze to his arm to stop the bleeding and Craig ran to wake Bones to patch him up.

“Susan we can’t leave him to su fer any more. He has gotten far worse tonight and it’s clear he is a danger to himself now. I’m going to talk to Sarg in the morning and recommend to him that the time has come to take his head. It was commendable of you to try helping him but there is no cure for the madness that comes from the practise of black magic.”

“I just need more time Bones, we can help him. I only just started to reach him tonight, please don’t do this.” “I’m sorry Susan but my medical opinion stands. He’s gone, we need to execute him before he causes harm.” I need to do something to save him, Bones isn’t going

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to give Spook a chance to recover, no chance for me to heal him. I need to do something to stop this. I know Sarg won’t have a choice but to order the execution now that Spook is harming himself.

I nibbled on Spook for those last few hours before sun-rise, trying with faint hope to bring him back before we break camp. The soldiers are camped outside under one man tents we found in the APC. Me, Spook, and the thralls are inside. Once we are underway there is no way I can nibble on Spook without getting caught. Oh please Spook get better. Please get better before it’s too late.



That night at the camp re the fellowship team carried along a solar radio. “Who wants to live forever” started playing and Injun took out a harmonica and played along to the tune. It really e fected me. I will live forever. I will see people be born; I will see people die; I will see the cycle then start anew. I will see empires rise; then I will see them fall, rulers will rise and then they will be thrown down again and again throughout my existence. I will not know a friend who I will not lose; I will not know a lover who will not be torn from my arms. Even the very earth itself will change before my eyes, seas will rise and mountains will fall. Yet still will I be here; yet still will I walk this accursed realm. Long will I long for a good death, to see my parents who bore me and the friends and family long passed before but such mercy will never come. Never will I know peace; never will I nd real belonging in the world

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again; there will only be that damnable cycle of feeding; there will be that damnable curse, neverending. Is this all for having killed Martin? So many men have killed other men and yet death comes to the good and the evil why not me? Oh why not me.

Who wants to live forever. Not me. My head hung low and tears started to run down my cheeks. I press my eyes closed and shake my head. I can feel the familiar ecstasy, the manic release as the esh mask falls from my ngers and my talons begin to emerge appearing retracted and like the claws of a red court vampire. I look down to them as my tears owed, exed them and looked on the physical proof of my nightmare; the physical proof of my deathless state.

A revelation of this proportion is di cult but I need to keep this from becoming a deadly revelation. I need to control myself, the last thing I need is for a greater change to come over me now.

I started to come back to reality and realized I just re-vealed myself. Everyone knows I’m a vampire now. I should be afraid; I should run but I don’t care. I just don’t care anymore. Let them take my head. The fellow-ship would kill it’s own when they turned and only jar them as a nal resort. It is the only mercy we would allow for our fellow soldiers who fully turned. The mercy of being destroyed.

I slowly looked up. My thralls were looking at the fel-lowship soldiers with eyes wide enough they risked falling out. Jill began stroking her fang necklace and wringing her hands. Jamar looked over at Sarg quickly and spoke

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in a soft voice, “Sarg, no worries ok, she’s been righteous. She ain’t got no claws on her but talons she ain’t no red Sarg. She ain’t no red—” Sarg said, “The hell she isn’t. I know a red when I see one and she’s been deceiving us this whole time. The reds ain’t dead this has been their plan all along. They went somewhere and this one got left out to die, and die she will. We need to nd their strategy in this Jamar, she obviously took out our warlock because he is the only one who is any threat to her. Bones, check the supernatural ordinance. Are our jars accounted for?”

Bones checked and said, “Aye Sarg, everything is fully accounted for.”

Jamar grabbed Sarg with both hands and lightly shook him, then said, “Don’t you see Sarg? She ain’t the enemy here. Something happened to her but she didn’t turn red. She’s something else and she ain’t corrupted. She saved my life man and risked her own against the raiders despite supernatural ordinance. She’s righteous man don’t ask it!”

Sarg said, “Injun, get the katana. Jamar you son of a bitch you’re gonna cut her down else I’ll take you as en-thralled and cut you down as well.”

I remained still while they argued, then assumed a kneel-ing position slowly in front of Sarg. I intended to show him the obedience he deserves as a sargeant of the fellow-ship and place myself willingly before the blade. Besides I do still wish this to be over. I don’t wish to be incarcer-ated on this earth inde nately, I want to go to the sleep of death and rise to my heavenly destination where I could meet the family I never knew and the soldiers that had

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fought and fallen by my side. I grieve for them all so much; their death has caused wounds on me that have never healed, nor will they ever fully heal.

“Sarg, look. She kneels before the blade. Still she’s righ-teous to her vows, she’s one of us Sarg she’s. . . uncorrupted.” said Jamar.

“It’s a trick! Injun check the perimeter, Jamar back up and cover her with your ri e; ready a jar in case you need it. Bones cover Injun when we nd the bastards you and me are gonna open up on them. Ready the jars.” Bones put a hand on his forehead and dipped his head slightly. Bones said, “Jesus Christ, Sarg this is ludicrous, think about what you are doing. The way of our life is one of paranoia but we both know fellowship divided will fall. She hasn’t in any way shown herself to be corrupted. This is madness, there is no contingent in this bush.”

Sarg said, “You’re the one that is mad, the only good red is a dead red.”

“Perimeter is clear Sarg.” said Injun.

“Bullshit, ne there is some other scheme. Well I won’t be swindled by this bitch whatever is up she has a purpose here and that purpose ends here and now. Proceed with the execution Jamar, time to end this.” said Sarg.

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Clang! I look up and Bones had swung his ri e in the path of the katana as it came down, tears owing in

Jamar’s eyes.

Bones said, “Goddammit Sarg, I hearby relieve you of duty Sargeant Dwight Miller on cause of madness. Jamar you will take leadership of this team until I deem Sargeant Miller to be t for duty again.”

Sarg said, “You have got to be kidding, don’t fucking joke Bones I ain’t in the mood and there’s an enemy among us. Jamar get it done.”

Jamar said, “No Sarg, he is our medic and he has the authority. You are acting mad right now and you need to get your squirrels out.”

Sarg said, “What a goddamn clusterfuck, you people

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have a goddamned screw loose she must have poisoned the rations, or you all got enthralled! Bloody hell that’s it you all are going down.” He pulled forward his ri e and clicked o f the safety, “for the fellowship, for justice!”

I didn’t know if I could do it but I know the reds could hypnotize by looking into a humans eyes, control them from afar. I quickly raised my eyes to meet Sarg. In-stinctively reacting to my intent the black vampire eyes unveiled themselves as my third eyelid covered over my eyes and I could see the world again as no human could. The vitality of my human companions was evident, the health of their bodies and the vision of their blood ow-ing through them. Their psychic aura presented itself revealing more about them than they knew about them-selves if I chose to observe them intently but there was no time and no reason for doing it. My eyes drilled into Sarg’s and I pierced his psyche; I pierced that burning red aura that revealed without doubt the sheer anger he was feeling; I pierced the madness that had surrounded him and consumed him. His thoughts lay before me at my mercy, to be twisted by my will but this I refuse to do. I raised my hand and blew a cool breeze from my lips as if I was blowing a kiss and moulded it into a psychic wind that washed over Sarg extinguishing the re and madness that was consuming him. I could see him fall limp but his re once again began to grow. Bones grabbed his ri e and threw it while Jamar covered him with his own ri e.

I’m trying to fall back into a fully human form but it’s not happening. I never did anything like that before and I have no experience that would allow me to know how

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to return. I see the ice surrounding Sarg, the cone of ice formed on the ground from me to him like some kind of telltale sign that neuromantic power was just unleashed. It’s inevitable, I’m trying to hold back the ocean as I con-tinue my change into another form. I’m clenching my jaw, I’m holding on for now but not much longer.

Bones said, “I swore to you that I would keep your con-dence Sarg but I will not do so in the face of murder. You have never resolved your pain from the loss of your wife we both know that and I do believe we both knew it would someday cause you to make mistakes. I hoped that it would not cause too much trouble or put anyone in danger but this lunacy is far and above what I thought. I take the blame for that you should never have had a position of power in this fellowship. I pray to God above may he have mercy on my soul for making such a grievous error as this. Now you look at that woman and look real close, who do you see? Who do you see in her you fool?”

Sarg looked at me, wrung his hands and rolled his head. He held his hand to his chin and then I seen his eyes start to grow. His face grew white. He started to shake and turned to the side to vomit into a bush. Sarg said, “My God, Jennifer! She looks exactly like Jennifer!”

Bones said, “That’s right fool. Your wife. You’re trying to bring peace to your wife. Is this your wife Sarg? If it is I weep for you man but I do believe she said her name was Susan did she not?”

Sarg said, “She isn’t Jennifer. She looks like her but I knew Jennifer, her likes, her dislikes, the way she could make me laugh and inspire me every day. My love knew

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her and still knows her and no this is not Jennifer; this is not my beloved Jennifer.” Sarg was on his knees now facing me, with his head hung low to the ground he wept. Bones let out a long whistle and shook his head as he turned towards me. Jamar in his new command declared, “I’ll watch him doc, take a look at Susan she looks like shes trying to shit a brick.”

I was clenching my teeth and now I’m clenching my whole face. I’m feeling dizzy from the e fort and sweat is pouring o f me. I have tightly clenched sts; my body is trembling. Jamar gave a very fair description. I’m desper-ately holding o f the change.

Bones looked at me and said, “What is it about today, ain’t no full moon that I know. Oh Sarg, goddamit man, what did you do to this poor woman in your mad display. Susan what is going on with you?”

I looked at Bones and said, “The e fort I put in helping Sarg, I triggered something. I’m undergoing some sort of change. I’ve been holding on the best I can; I can’t do it forever. I’m scared Bones. I can’t know what this change will be and it scares me.”

Bones looked to Jamar who was close enough to hear me out. Bones said to Jamar, “OK call it boss.”

Jamar said, “Right. Bones and Injun take position twenty feet equidistant from Susan. Sarg, we’ll cover the civil-ians.”

Jack said, “Damn straight. ’bout time you took notice of us over here. We’ll grab ri es as well to support you guys.”

Bones said, “Good. Cry ’Havoc,’ and let slip the hounds

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of hell, Susan let yourself go.”



I let go. There was nothing for a moment then I felt a trembling from deep within me. Then like a distant explo-sion the re and mania poured through me and seemingly out of every pore. It pulled me into the air; I hovered; my wings broke free from my back and my clothes tore and fell to the ground. I grew to a height of ten feet tall; my body owed into supermodel proportions; my hair fell out in wild abandon and my legs transformed to a digitigrade stance, with my talons extended. My calves grew sleek, sexy and furry. My foot talons then folded to form hooves. My body was rm and gorgeous like the greek goddess Aphrodite. The men surrounding me left a lake of drool t to sh in. I stretched my wings slightly. Flap- ap, ap. . . ap. I descended to the ground landing on my pseudo-hooves. The sheer power of my aware-ness was overwhelming. I lowered myself down to one knee and covered my head in my arms to try to block out stimuli. It was too much for me to process and it took a few moments for me to block it all out. I looked up again, now holding back the torrent of sensations; I am in fear of cracks appearing in that dam I erected; I rest precariously on nothing but my own strength to keep me sane.

Sarg was getting his senses back slowly, enough to say, “That ain’t no red. She be a greek god maybe or some fallen angel but she ain’t be no red by God.”

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I slowly looked myself over. I grabbed a mirror and seen myself dark with midnight hair owing like in a breeze yet on this day when the air is still. I’ve never seen anything like this. I look out over my friends to behold a sea of thousand mile stares, their psyches overwhelmed. I see Spook, but not in this physical world. My eyes perceive an in nity of realities, all time, all places, all things and spirits are within my knowing and all these and more I block out but I see him in a place that is not of this physical plane. Oh yes his body is here but I see that he has been stolen from us and imprisoned in a dark horror of his own creation. Yet in my being, as I am, I know this place to be in my reach; and it is mine to travel; it is my duty to seek him and to nd him; it is my duty to bring him home.

I am burdened by miraculous purpose and focus on Spook. I lift myself up on these wings of glory and follow a mysterious path. I ew not in any of the directions of a compass, nor up or down. Into a foreign and twisted reality I ew and the world faded like a thick cloud coming over the sun; it faded like those same clouds passing into twilight; it faded from twilight to night, then from night to the darkness of a cavern in the midst of the earth. Yet once consumed by this new reality I nd it is vast, truly endless. My eyes adjust and all I can see here is shades of grey. It appears as if everything here was once alive but has long since become dead. Not even decay has survived as everything has become simply dust, time has had no power to consume that which has been and death has become immortal in all that I see. The burden on my

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heart is profound, the pain of the descent of oblivion has settled on me. I am raging against the psychological e fect of this corrupt and dark environment assaulted by guilt, horror, terror, hopelessness. This place seems to attack me, it wishes to assimilate me into this horrible death that I see before me. I must reach Spook, and quickly, my new form and the burden of this place will soon be too much. I cannot let myself be consumed.

I began walking to where I knew Spook was. I don’t know how it is that I knew, I just knew where he will be. Lea ess trees and grass still in it’s perfect shape but falling to dust as I walk on it with with my hooves. After about a mile I noticed the fur on my calves and some of my skin was turning black. The damned dust is necrotizing my esh. I leap far into the air and thrust out my wings. I’m going to try to y there. I’m going to exhaust myself before I get anywhere near Spook. I try extending my wings out as far as I can. I nd I can lay out a wingspan of fty feet and glide like an eagle. Perhaps I will get there ok after all. The landscape below passes quickly but not quickly enough Spook is far away indeed. Far beyond the horizon.

After a few hours I’m exhausted. Flapping or not I cant go on like this. even if I was driving a car I would have to stop from time to time but the ground is toxic I can’t stop. yet neither can I keep going.

I must have fallen asleep, or passed out, either way I skimmed the top of a gnarly tree and tried to pull up. I hadn’t the strength to. As I neared the ground I pushed up hard with my legs but it was no use. I tumbled to the

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deadly ground and lay in a pile thoroughly exhausted. I can’t a ford to lose track of what I’m doing. I need to stay focused and I can’t make any more mistakes. I shouldn’t have changed, in part or in whole. I drove Sarg to madness and I don’t know if he’s OK. If he isn’t I don’t know if anyone can bring him back. I don’t know if I can bring spook back. I don’t know anything about what I am or what I can do. It seems rather evident to me I’m not going to get to Spook and it’s not even likely that I’ll live through the attempt to rescue him. I’m an idiot. Why did I plunge into this realm not knowing whether I could do this? All full of valour but without any common sense. So what now Susan? Lay down and die like a fool it seems I can’t see any way this could come out any di ferent. Well, no, I don’t need to be a coward either. I’ll get my rest then at least I can walk for a while, esh eating dust be damned. I know where Spook is, I kind of know where I came from. Kind of. At least that’s something. What’s my chances? ten out of ninety? ve out of ninety ve? Pretty much guaranteed death. Well I don’t know where I’ll die out here, so there isn’t any reason for being late in getting there.

I pull myself up, and walk around slowly to get the circulation back in my limbs. The necrotization hasn’t spread any farther, so I’m lucky for that. I start limping toward Spook.

Well OK, so I can’t y there but maybe I can travel a little by foor and then by wing. Maybe the necrotizing e fect of this dust and soil isn’t as bad as I presumed. Maybe. The trees are nothing but dust, touch one and it crumbles

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into nothingness. No help there. Flat dusty surface for as far as I can see in every direction and Spook is beyond the horizon.

I tried moving slower, rolling my hooves over the ground to prevent stirring the dust. It took some practise but I think I can do it. It’s hard though that dust is very ne. Also I don’t know if my hooves are immune to the necro-tization e fect. Only time and long travelling will tell.

Flight gives my legs rest, for the next few miles I try alternating ight and travel by foot and it helps. It’s sus-tainable.

That’s how I’m going to do this, ight and slow careful ground movement. No need being in a hurry. Slow and steady and hope whatever dust does settle on me has little or no e fect on my body.

I decide to try ying at higher altitudes so I can glide farther with less fatigue. It’s working. At least until I see something come towards me from over the horizon. I ew too high, and now it seems something has taken an interest in me.

I just need to approach this peacefully, I’m sure this entity has better things to do than pick a ght. This should be over quick and I can continue on my quest.

I continued on my way until it came closer. A dragon it seems like but more serpent like, not the typical fantasy dragons. It seemed to be swimming through the air like it was water, and was extremely agile. It was truly massive and the agility it displays just seems to defy what one would expect of such a large creature.

I said, “Hail spirit. I am Susan and I travel in peace.

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What might I do for thee oh noble spirit?”

It said, “I have come to destroy you. I must in order that all that is may be saved. Prepare yourself.”

I said, “How does that make sense? I said I travel in peace, you think I deceive?”

It said, “Nay I trust in your word, your intentions are good. I have come to destroy you for it must be done.” I said, “Dude, you forget your meds this morning? Who wakes up and says to themselves what a lovely day I should destroy Susan today?”

It said, “Don’t concern yourself with why, I must de-stroy you, it simply must be done.”

I said, “What the actual fuck? You need serious help dude. Somebody needs to put you in the spirit world psych ward because I’m pretty sure you gotta be talking to lamps—”

I felt a sledgehammer hit one wing and it threw me into a spiral. I hit the ground hard creating a huge cloud of dust. I stood up after a few minutes and dusted myself o f thoroughly.

I don’t know where it came from but I heard a booming voice say, “I am the great Leviathan. You who are known as Susan will be destroyed by my hand.”

Great. You make friends everywhere you go Susan. Es-pecially anyone with homicidal ideation. I threw my arms up in a profound shrug.

I said, “OK buddy, come get a little.”



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It was rather quick as it came down and nearly swal-lowed me alive but I rolled to the side just in time only to have it’s tail slap me hard and throw me thirty feet into the air. I was breathing so hard I felt like I was going to pass out but managed to pull myself together and fought hard to get my wings to move again. Oddly being slapped around like a hockey puck does wonders for invigorating tired muscles.

Not even touching the ground after it’s stra ng run it pulled up and headed straight at me. I went into a dive and rolled in the air again just missing that huge maw, one razor sharp tooth catching me in my side then again the tail hit and threw me another 30 or 40 feet. It feels like it’s holding back it’s strength but not it’s determination. Every attack is more than strong enough to tear me to pieces.

It said, “You’re quite fast, I’m impressed. Yet I’m faster as you will see.”

A snap of the tail and a crack, my shoulder is broken. The shock sent me hurling to the ground. I managed to snap out of shock and ap my wings once at the last minute slowing my descent but still hit hard.

I grit my teeth and punch the ground hard, pushing back my pain I take to the skies again. Being airborne is my only chance against this thing.

This time when it came at me I ew toward the ground, speedily moving out of the way of the giant maw. With lightning re exes I pushed back up and strafed the crea-tures torso with my talons as it’s momentum pushed it by. I nally got a good hit in, it faltered in the air. It fell into

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a dive but pulled back up with a uid motion just before it hit the ground. It pushed toward me with it’s talons ready to tear me up. The creature banked to the right and I did a ip that would make any pole jumper proud, right over it’s leg. I sunk a talon into the leg as I came down the other side and spun raking it’s leg as I planted my leg talons into it’s torso. Not to make the same mistake twice it snapped itself around pushing it’s maw at me hoping to catch me like a y on pasteboard, talons sunk deep into it’s torso. I was quick enough to use the leverage of those talons to throw myself fast and hard away from the crea-ture as it’s maw washed by missing me. Unfortunately it’s tail came up hard on me and sent me into the sky like a home run in the big leagues. I felt something snap on my chest and a sudden overwhelming spike of pain. I was in a tailspin again hitting the ground with such tremendous forward motion I felt like a commercial jet making a crash landing in the Mojave. I was tumbling like a stone.

When my body came to rest I checked myself over I seemed to have broken about every bone in my body. Broken bones were protruding from my wings, one arm and one leg. I’m done for.

Leviathan came in for a nal attack, I didn’t feel the hit, it was just lights out, game over.

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Identity Crisis

When I came to Leviathan was standing over me. I think every bone in my body is broken, it took me ve minutes of excruciating pain and an unnatural power

of will but I managed sit up and face him.

He said, “How can you still live? I intend to destroy you so that you might manifest. If the whole is destroyed how could I ever make manifest the one? Damn you Susan let go so that I can bring you forth.”

I said, “Jesus Christ would you make sense? You in-tended to kill me why haven’t you killed me already? Take your meds man doctor knows best.”

He faced me directly and said, “RENICH VI ASA AVAGE SVZN LIRACH.

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NOASMI OL OLLOG ACHOT OL LEHAFGIN MAD OLANI OI NIIS LENABBEI NOSTOAH

1. ML OE OL MRH. NOASMI NIIS GAHA OIAD NANAEEL OL NANAEEL MONASCI JADEN TASA HOET NACA LIVYATAN.

”

Something awoke in me, and it wanted to emerge. I fought with all my will to keep control but it was too strong, and I was too weak. The world became surreal, and I became an observer of myself as some thing took over my body. The lifeless realm around me shook to it’s foundations. The necrotized parts of me healed over and I started to mend. My wings extended and a diabol-ical sounding hiss came from my lips. I feel a sense of omnipotence.

My lips said, “IRGIL LEHAEZ OL LEORER OLLOG LOAGAETH OL TENUMAH ESIASCH BAGLE NENNI OL MUTZHAR FALZ MIRC LI NANAEEL OL IPAMIS LADNAH NANAEEL SETIRAH HH IOLCI OLLOR IPAMIS OL LONCHO TZRH OLANI LVLM L ANGELARD OL NOASMI

CORSI OIAD SHOTEH. ”

I was far too weak to translate the language before but it is de nitely the same magical language from when I encountered Damian. The words that passed my lips

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were, “How dare you rouse me from my slumber brother, Why have you declared war upon me? Do you not know our con ict would bring an end to all creation? I never thought you to be such the fool.” What is going on?

Leviathan said, “I humbly beg your forgiveness sister, I suspect it was your enn that summoned you. You did not hear the discourse that I had spoken. I feared I could not subdue your earthly aspect and call you forth oh great mother.”

So this entity, her name is great mother. Doesn’t help me understand but I have a name and I remember Harry told me names are very powerful things. I felt a change, the overpowering sense of omnipotence was displaced by shock and excitement.

My lips said, “Are you shittin’ me? My mortal aspect manifested and travelled the path of Osirus? Oh my fuck-ing God, oh my God—”

That is something I would say. Big momma must have been sitting in my psyche long enough to learn modern english. Yet she still makes no sense.

Leviathan said, “—The prophecy has been ful lled in my sight, dæmon, God of Gods, substance of creation makes an earthly home for the rst time in the history of creation.”

My lips said, “I am extending my glory to her, I know she will grow powerful and wise for she is me. Godspeed Susan, I know you hear me, go get’em girl. I am returning to my peace now dear brother, now is Susan’s time not mine. Thank you for what you have done here.” Leviathan said, “Godspeed my sister.” Then he swam

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away and was gone.



My head hurts. I think I have multiple personality dis-order. Something must have broke in me at Chichén Itzá. Is this all a dream? Is any of this real or is it some kind of psychotic episode? They say an insane man is always con-vinced of his sanity so I guess my doubts give credence to the thought that I’m still sane. Yet look at me, and look at where I am. I am on a mad quest to nd a mad warlock in a mad mad world. Oh well if even there’s a chance Spook is out there I need to keep on the quest. Hell, it may be a quest I can’t complete but there ain’t no use nishing late. I start walking forward, convinced that this realm isn’t going to hurt me anymore.

Did I endure more mental trauma than I can handle in my transformation? Is my time limited before I must be imprisoned or destroyed?

If I am now as supernatural as what I have seen, and whatever it I am now, maybe there is something deeper.

I wrap my wings around myself and sit down, grooming them instinctively, deep in thought.

Maybe there is another spirit in me. Maybe more than one. Maybe a good Susan and a bad Susan; a mighty Susan and a lowly Susan; God help me maybe there is a true red court vampire Susan as well as the unchanged human spirit that I identify as being the true me.

I have a hearty laugh thinking of something I’ve heard before. Fuck it. Alanis Morissette was right.

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I’m a little bit of everything All rolled into one

I’m a bitch, I’m a lover, I’m a child, I’m a mother I’m a sinner, I’m a saint, I do not feel ashamed I’m your hell, I’m your dream, I’m nothing in between You know you wouldn’t want it any other way

So take me as I am

I say it’s best just to accept that I’m a complex being and move on. I may make mistakes along the way yet I will also save lives like I’ve done as well as beat the bad guys. I gotta give myself a break. Nice to meet you, “Great Mother”

I tried to sleep, wrapping my wings around me like a feathery sleeping bag but the deadly silence was unnerv-ing and the cold penetrated through my wings. After the troubled rest I started again by wing and by hoof to rescue dear spook.



I bore no hunger, no did I have any food to eat. Rest did not come, I was weary from day to week to month. This place stole my hope; it stole my laughter and my song; it stole every happy thought; it stole my memories, replac-ing them with abominations of truth; it stole my inner light, my sanity, my very soul. Evil has no place here, nor does good, there is nothing. It is oblivion, nothing made manifest. Every moment I fought dark thoughts that

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entered my mind; fought by logic; fought by disbelief; fought by will and by anger.

Like a child who learns life on the street I learned survival and I learned how to ght. I learned about the darkness; about it’s desire; about it’s attacks; about it’s strengths and weaknesses; and most importantly I learned how to manifest the power of my own spirit in battle with the darkness. I found within myself spiritual weapons. I fought my own darkness, my own inner leviathan, and I grew strong. I grew tough. I grew undefeatable, immortal, within my own psyche.

I don’t know how long it took to reach Spook, perhaps it was months; or maybe it took a year, or many years; or perhaps it took a millenium. I believe the more likely would be a thousand years yet in this place a moment is like an eternity of emptiness and inner pain. Regardless of how long it took Spook remained alive, I knew it in the deepest part of my soul. I never doubted it for a moment. I just kept moving forward; always moving forward. the only way out is forward; the only good is to save Spook and so I move forward.

On the day I arrived I came to a bank on a river of blood. Spook lay on the bank in tattered clothes. Spirits circled and taunted him continuously and his body looked like a putrid corpse. Stinking, rotting, slithering with worms. I thought at rst I deluded myself in thinking he was alive but that worm-eaten corpse sat up. His one remaining eye widened in disbelief.

He said, “Susan?”

The guttural zombie-like tone is de nately not Spook’s,

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yet it de nately is Spook. Is he ever a mess.

I said, “Spook? Jesus man what happened to you?” He said, “What happened to you? You look like some crazy ass Sumerian Goddess—”

Before he could nish I was on him trying to gure out how to help him. I realized if he was going to be dead he would have been dead a very long time ago. What happened to spook, well it’s unnatural. It’s just, wrong. I tried picking out the worms and maggots and they fell to dust then another would appear in it’s place. Necrotized esh healed itself but only back to it’s original necrotized condition. Spook’s state was the closest thing to a zombie I could imagine. I don’t know what to do. I have no idea. Spook said, “Susan I don’t know how you got here but I the path I chose in life led me here. I lled this river with blood and stole the life from my own body. I don’t know how you found me but go nd your own rest and leave me be.”

I said, “I’m taking you back with me Spook, I won’t leave you here.”

He said, “Or you can y o f with those wings and lay an egg. I am not in any way going o f to a vampire afterlife with you.”

I said, “Spook this is not the afterlife, last I remember you were alive and not so well back on earth. You went mad.”

He said, “Damn. warlocks madness. That explains some things. This didn’t seem like any sort of afterlife I knew of. I think this place may be on the astral plane Susan. That’s been my presumption. I guess I should have been

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more careful using black magic after my half vampire side died. The road to hell is paved with the best intentions they say.”

I said, “You think you might know something of this place?”

He said, “I’m not sure really, only theories I researched in my magical work. The astral plane is in nate and is formed by us when we choose to travel and build a do-main there. The madness of black magic is a choice of will. It never seemed to me after seeing a mad warlock that it was in fact them there. Their eyes were just, empty of soul. Some degree of my theory appears to be true.”

I said, “Do you know how to get the hell out of here?” He said, “Oh tell me it ain’t so. You came all the way here with no idea how to get back?”

I said, “I only had the one chance to get here as far as I knew. I had to take it, and gure out the rest as I went.” He said, “Oh pity the fool, I can get us home, but I need to get access to my astral temple. It’s a wizard’s tower and has been across this river ever since I got here. I tried to swim across it but the tide pulled me back everytime. It’s part of the cruelty of this place I believe, that I should see my salvation within reach and yet I have been prevented from reaching it.”

I said, “What exactly was it like here Spook? What really went on?”

He said, “A dark fog had been growing around me ever since my vampire half died. I seemed to o fend people but I didn’t know why. I had thoughts of attaining power that I didn’t have before. It didn’t take me long to realize

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it was the warlock’s madness coming on me because I felt it grow worse when I used my dark powers to assist the team. I thought I had it under control until this happened. I guess I was still wounded from before I was partly turned years ago. I just caused more scarring on top of what had already taken place so many years ago.

“I didn’t realize what would happen. It was so sudden. It was like my spirit was pulled under from a strong tide and I sank to the bottom of a cold black abyss. I landed here. It feels like it’s been a millenium. I found scraps of trash and built that little ve foot doghouse over there out of torn aluminum roo ng to sleep in. These bleeding riverbanks are abundant with lth and trash. Nowhere else on the horizon did I see anything but wasteland, trees and dust. Yet here there was garbage piled around me. I was thrown in a heap of trash as if to say this is what you’re worth. I gathered some lthy clothes for myself out of here and tried to get by. I am always hungry but there is no food, thirsty but all there is to drink is blood from the river. Yet despite this I do not die. Soon after I got here sores started breaking out on my body. Worms broke free from the sores and they spread. My esh was constantly being consumed endlessly. My worms never die, if I kill any others appear to take their place. No matter what I do I cannot die. Like you said I am deathless, and as far as I know I’ve been here a thousand years.

“Every moment I hope for death, but it never comes. I hope for an end to my pain but it never stops. Yet across that river might be my salvation and I think maybe I might reach it but I never do, the tides always pull me

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back. Even though I might be feet from the shore they pull me back and throw me into despair. Year after year I rest but never sleep, ght my thoughts, and endure my pain. I wash my clothes in a river of blood and wash my body with my tears.

“I have been told madness and condemnation come to those who choose the dark side and the ways of black magic. Yet even as I sit here in my own hell I will still swear that not all that choose the darkness are evil, and not all black magic is diabolical. What of those who curse a cancer? what of those who hex madness or bring death upon starvation? How about those who return life to those die senselessly despite the skill of the surgeon, or heal the psyche of the person villainously attacked by an evil wizard?

“The white council of wizards condemn all these things because this is our end. I condemn them for not helping us who use dark power to help others. I hope to see them here for their calculating ways, in not helping us nd the cure for the dark physicians who do for others what no one else can.”

Howls erupted around us. Emerging from the landscape came some manner of hellhounds. Not what might be seen in the Fae, their skin as tight to their esh looking mangy and leathery, like a corpse. Fire poured out from their eyes and mouth, as well as parts of their body that seemed uncovered by their terrible esh. They howled again then roared with an unearthly sound. Slowly they encircled us and stepped forward.

I said, “Spook, these friends of yours?”

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He said, “Hardly, one often comes at night and mauls me. I would assume it would kill me but I am unsure whether I might consider myself alive or dead in my cur-rent condition.”

I stood in front of Spook and lifted myself into the air on my wings, spreading them wide, and unfurling my talons ready for battle. The hounds stood wide eyed at me, then backed up one step. They shook their head and sneezed re, continuing forward with a roar.

I said, “Spook I apologize ahead of time, this might just hurt a little.”

He said, “What? What is going to hurt? I’ve had enough hurt Su—”

I grabbed him quickly with my foot talons as the hounds dove for us and I pulled us hard into the air. I threw him up into the air and grabbed him in my arm. The squirming of his worms reminded me that he is better in my claws, forgive me for saying it. I dropped him and grabbed him with my foot talons again.

He said, “What the hell did I ever do to you?”

I said, “Sorry Spook, you’re just really disgusting right now. Bite down on a talon if it helps but I’m not wearing your worms I’m sorry dude.”

He said, “I’ve su fered worse than this in recent memory, all things considered though I would really prefer not to su fer at all.”

I said, “Preaching to the choir brother, preaching to the choir.”



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We heard a screech from above and what would appear to be undead birds of prey descending. Only half their feathers remained on their body and their skin was dry, leathery and tightly stuck to their bones. Their legs were nothing but bone and talons and there were holes in their skin. Smoke poured out of them especially from the holes into their ribcage. Smoke, oily black smoke, poured out of their beaks and empty eye sockets. We heard splashing from below and seen a manner of sh to whose fearsome features were many magnitudes greater than even the most horrifying abyssal sh. All the creatures were man-sized or somewhat larger.

These abominations were headed straight for us.

I pulled a loop straight up into the air as a wave of birds ew past brandishing their talons for the strike. I con-tinued the loop down again as Spook was letting o f a long string of obscenities in spite of the G-Forces he en-dured. Behind me three more ocks were bearing down, closing the gap between us as I ew as fast as I could. I was burdened by Spook though and there was no way I could outrun them. The hellish sh below in the river of blood jumped out of the water to observe and bear their teeth hoping for us to freefall into their reach. Some of the sh, all of which looked as dead as every other crea-ture here, seemed to have what could best be described as resembling shrunken heads. Not actually shrunken but very distinctly human, like a corpse long dead. It made me ponder the nature of these creatures.

I said, “Spook, some of these monstrous things seems to have human features, do you suppose they are other

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mad black sorcerors?”

He said, “Susan, considering the deathless way I look I’m pretty sure they are. I don’t know how they came to be animal like but I concur.”

I said, “Why are they not human?”

He said, “I’ve only been here a short time, I still have esh although it is quite broken. My anger has become greater and greater as I’m attacked night after night. These creatures who used to be humans may have been here for thousands upon thousands of years, and have been twisted in ways I dare not imagine. They are no more human now than this horrible and diabolical place is wholesome.”

I agreed. We need to destroy these things somehow, and destroy the horrors of this place. There must be a way. A bird dives from above striking my left shoulder, I spiral downward and lose my grip on Spook. He spirals downward towards the demon sh blasting obscenities all the way, “Jesus Chriiiii—”

I dive straight for him but one of the birds crashes into my from the side, a beak plunging toward my left eye but I counter attack and throw my head to the side. It screams and black oily smoke pours out smelling like smouldering esh. I throw it with my talons but it’s own talons grab into my shoulder and a beak plunges into my back. I scream and start into a free fall. The sh below thrash the blood of the river into a fowl foam anticipating the meal. Another bird comes from the side and slashes across my ribs as I try to throw the foul creature o f my back. The second bird comes back for a second run and I throw my

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back towards him. He lands his talons deep into the rst bird and I hear it scream. It releases it’s claws from my back and I push it away from me. The two birds start ghting each other ercely falling towards the river. I manage to get my wings working again and push hard toward Spook but it’s too late. He is engulfed by one of the monstrous sh.

Then as the sh closes it’s mouth a bird hits Spook on the side. It is consumed by the sh and I catch spook, skimming the river. Avoiding one sh after another I’m still wounded by dozens of smaller sh of di ferent sizes. As I’m desperately trying to pull back up into the air Spook hits the river and said, “bloody fucking hell what are you doing Susa—”

I tumble into the river and see a glimpse of the birds being taken one by one by the sh above. Two ocks appear to have ed already. As I hit the water a large sh comes out and hits me hard from below sending me and spook into the air. Spook is again knocked out of my talons into the air and the frenzy of the sh below is continuing to intensify. A huge sh launches itself at Spook but doesn’t quite make it to him and Spook said, “Goddamned motherfucking Moby Dick Jesus H Christ Susan—”

I push my wings hard and snatched him with the talons of my hands and threw him up into the air as another huge sh comes up. I navigate myself away from it’s maw but I get hit nonetheless. I manage to form my talons into a hoof again and use the momentum to push myself to Spook. I unfold my foot claws and snatch him out

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of the air as three birds head our way. I pull ourselves down hard toward the river as the beaks and talons of the birds strike each other and they too begin to ght each other. I noticed the pattern here. I grab Spook by both hand and foot talons and head toward the water as Spook curses my name and many varied and creative ways. I skim the surface of the water only just touching the surface of the water and the frenzy of sh explode out of the river behind us. Most of the ock get consumed as some try to dodge the sh and others try to ght them. Another ock start towards us from the front causing their own frenzy behind them. These Kamakaze creatures won’t back down from a ght, they are so evil they are stupid. They are nothing but emotional and act according to the vile anger and maliciousness that consumes them. They are easily tricked.

The ock is getting closer. If I pull up they are going to have me, if I slow down the sh will have me. Move to the side they turn to the side and have me as sure as if I went up. Only one way to go.

I push hard and gain speed. I move faster; I keep moving faster; the birds keep getting closer. Any moment now they’ll be here. They’re almost here.

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07

Run hard, Run fast

Imove Spook up towards me, and pull down even closer to the water. As I see the smoke from the lead birds eyes I touch down of the river and begin hydroplaning. I lay myself as close to the river as possible with my wings raised slightly ready for action. As I skim over the river I bump the occasional bird as I move at incredible speed. The action of touching the river stirred the sh to launch into the air behind me consuming the birds I move past. Before I lose all my speed or push my wings out and use the last momentum to ap and move myself 5 feet into the air and move of as the sh consume the last of the

surprised birds behind me.

The ocks are decimated now, only a few remain. Most of them are attacking each other and one by one fall to be

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consumed by the sh. One of the few remaining creatures, which is heavily injured, ies toward me to make a nal attack. I move Spook down to my foot talons and grab the creature by the neck. I break the bones of it’s limbs to completely hobble it. I look into it’s eyes to try to nd a spirit, a spirit that exists in all creatures. I must have a spirit, even if it is deathless it is still a creature.

Nothing. There is no aura. There is no spirit. Only evil is left.

I see in it every dark and terrible nature of man. First and foremost I see madness. Within the madness I see: anger, arrogance, bitterness, coldness, paranoia, rage, re-sentment, envy, cruelty, sel shness, hatred, viciousness and of course violence.

It is sad that a person can be consumed by darkness but I never thought I would ever see someone consumed to the point where the spirit is utterly destroyed. I never thought I would see such horror.

I break it’s neck, and throw it to the shes.

Time to move on.

We y o f resuming the course we had started in. The re-maining creatures ght each other, ee, or get consumed. They no longer pay any attention to us. Now I know why. They prey on the weak, and heed the strong resentfully waiting for their chance for treachery. We have proven ourselves strong, and we are going to leave this evil game to these creatures in their wretchedness.

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Run hard, Run fast

There is no redemption for these creatures; there is no redemption for this place; there is no spirit to be found in this place, only abominations of life that once was diabolically animated to mock the life that once was.

Why did this happen? What has created this horror, this place?

I said, “Dear God Spook what happened here? Why did this happen?”

He said, “I wish I knew Susan. To some warlocks this is justice but to many this fate is a crime. No one has the answer, even though many warlocks have searched for a cure for this fate none have yet found it.”

I said, “Is there no way to evoke the magic to do the same things without descending into the accursed place?” He said, “No. Anyone who uses the black magic, who bends magic too far will come here. Even using black magic a single time will create a draw on a warlock to use it again. Every time a warlock uses dark magic the draw gets stronger and the damage to their ethereal body becomes worse and worse.”

I said, “Yet the half vampires could use the black magic with impunity.”

He said, “Yeah. We were impregnated with undeath, we had the dark nature within us by being infected by the red court. Now we don’t.”

I said, “So what happens now? Can we destroy this place?”

He said, “No. This place is part of the curse that we don’t know how to undo.”

I said, “So what happens then? If there aren’t any more

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half vampires to work dark magic for good purposes? In the fellowship it was part of our burden, there was a lot of dark warlocks among us to do healing that no others could.”

He said, “Susan I don’t know what happens. I guess dark warlocks just have to make a choice to follow the dark path, and accept the destiny that will come to them. I don’t even know if there are enough people with magical talent su cient to replace those that are lost. Maybe in the end more people will die from magical and ethereal disease and that’s just the way it will be.”

I said, “Spook that’s horrible. No way, I’ve seen the horrors in these creatures but I’ve seen worse horror in the ethereally ill. Left as a vegetable, with an ethereal body torn to shreds in horrifying ways. Destined to live all eternity su fering in pain from wounds that never heal and a body that can’t release them to the afterlife. I could never imagine how terrible a fate that is anymore than I could imagine the destruction of a spirit like these once mad warlocks had undergone. I only hope that most of these were truly evil in life.”

He said, “They were. The majority of dark warlocks seek wealth and power through magic. They were evil before they even took up magic. It’s the minority, the well intentioned dark healers that share the same fate. It’s unimaginable that there is no way to stop the carnage.”

We just need to get to Spook’s tower, nd a way out of here. I don’t want to spend another minute here to con-sider the injustice that surrounds me. I don’t want to even think about it anymore. It’s wrong in every imaginable

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Run hard, Run fast

way.

I said, “Spook, when we get to your tower what do we do, to get out I mean?”

He said, “My ethereal tower has all the magical material I own. It is not only duplicated but books and equiment that are long lost to time remain in my tower safe from anything that would ruin them. My tower here has been here since I was an apprentice and will be here until my dying day. Probably even after I pass. It’s the nature of the Astral, even though time passes quickly here nothing that has come into being here ever will cease to be.”

I said, “Time passes quickly here?”

He said, “Yes, quite quickly. I can work and study a long time here and time in the real world has not passed as far. I never measured the di ference but there is de nitely a di ference. I have an exit spell that I used once, it worked well, it is an emergency spell but unfortunately it does take some time to cast properly. I’ve been here a millenia already I’m pretty sure so what’s a little more time?”

I said, “You and me both, or so it would seem anyway. This God awful place is an abomination unto itself.”

There was a magic circle set into the ground inscribed with strange sigils. Spook said they were the sigils of the four elements.

All still remains quiet. we climb up into the tower. I was startled by an unearthly growl to see an animated corpse. I spring back and prepare to destroy the monstrosity when Spook calmly places his hand on my shoulder.

“It’s my own creation Susan, it wont attack any friend of it’s master. The soul has long since departed and it is

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no use leaving their shell to waste. The former owner certainly has no use for it now.” said Spook.

I said, “How many of these are here?”

He said, “About half a dozen, and in the crypt below the tower roam the oldest servants skeletons and mummi ed corpses. I don’t let any creation go to waste.”

I shudder, yet he smiles. He is without a doubt a true warlock to nd this necromancy acceptable. I’m glad he’s on our side. Dear God the smell, the unholy smell of rotting esh. I can’t help but gag yet manage to get it under control.

“My library is on the third oor.” said Spook.

We climb up and see endless shelves of books. As far as the eye could see. This library is far larger than should t into the tower we entered which was quite small in circumference.

I said, “I take it the usual laws of physics don’t apply here?”

He said, “Precisely. I de ne the laws of existence in this realm of mine in the astral. My library is in nite, although sadly more often than not mostly redundant. What you see is vanity.”

I said, “Good. I couldn’t gure out how you acquired all this in your short lifetime.”

He said, “A magical exercise in recursion. Over here, third shelf down. Let me see—”

Just then we heard the most horrible scream coming from outside the tower, still some distance away. We looked at each other and his zombie minions grabbed polearms. With a growl they shu ed down the stairs.

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Run hard, Run fast

I said, “What was that?”

He said, “Inspiration. Lets get what we need and get the hell out of here.”

He described the book he needed. Bound in human esh I found the grimoire and he let out his breath in relief. He disappeared on the next level up with some in-gredients. He had stones, herbs, oils and other items. We continued down and checking the grimoire he gathered items of esh. I dare not ask what exactly they were or where they came from. Once on the ground oor he be-gan setting up candles at four points. chanting he dusted around the circle holding the grimoire, reciting words of power as he went. A purple light began to eminate from the circle and black oily smoke arose smelling like burning esh. I could hear distant sounds of crying and screaming coming from the general direction of the circle. Spook gently touched my shoulder and led me with him into the circle.

The door smashed open.

The spell shattered as I entered the circle, the landscape around us lled with deafening screams as the tower broke to pieces. We are sent hurling into darkness as the world around us seemed to consume itself into a break in reality, consumed by a black hole that left behind com-plete nothingness. Where once was a land and sea that nearly consumed us now we are witness to the horrible plane having consumed itself.

Are we next to be pulled into this darkness, to meet our doom?

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Free falling

The darkness slowly began to burn away and I seen that Spook and I were high in the air above a precipice.

I could make out a small group of people below.

As we continued in a soon to be fatal plunge I noticed I have returned to human form and Spook noticed the same wide eyed. I can’t hear, the sound of wind rush-ing around me is too intense. I can’t reach Spook. We hurtle closer and I see it is our group down there. Time has passed we are somewhere else. Over the precipasse I see a huge encampment. Vast expanses of medical tents are surrounded by armed forces. Fellowship forces. We found the encampment we’ve been looking for.

Directly below us there is a pire. The bodies of me and spook lie on it.

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Sarg lights a torch, me and spook are waving our arms and yelling as the pire is lit. What is this? We can’t be in two places at once? I notice we are hurtling straight for our bodies. I wave to Spook, it took him a minute before he cleared his thoughts and realized we need to go faster not slower. We aren’t falling to our doom we are racing to save our lives. We need to reunite to our bodies before it’s too late.

We tucked ourselves into olympic divers pose and slipped through the air like a knife through butter. We pulled our-selves in tight hoping for once two people might attain to break the law of terminal velocity.

We get closer, and closer. The re is spreading up the pire. We can see the ames strike only feet away from our bodies. I have an idea. I pull Spook closer, aiming our dive at the re. He waves his arms in confusion and I make a swooping gesture to explain. He smiles. If we are rejoining our bodies it might cause a physical jolt. If we aim for the re we might be snapped laterally into our bodies and the jolt might roll us away from the re. Maybe.

Everything went black.

The next thing we see is our people standing over us, Bones is kneeling down checking us over.

“What happened?” I said.

“You tell us” Bones said.

“That was unexpected. Jesus what the hell happened?” said Spook.

“I think it’s clear noone knows what happened. Do you two know what happened in the last couple days? We

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Free falling

assumed you were braindead and decided to light you up. There are no words to describe how shitty I feel right now. I almost killed someone I love. I don’t think I can ever forgive myself—” Jill said.

“You didn’t know hun. How could you have? If I was braindead to bring my body to peace would be an act of mercy. An act of love even. It will be ok.” I said.

“well, at least I can say we aeem to have made it. Just below that blu f is the Fellowship encampment we were looking for. I know from Sarg this is de nately it.” Jill said.

“How long were we gone?” I said.

“A few days, doc seen to it you were provided sustenance intraveneously. You and Spook too of course. We would never have put you on a funeral pire otherwise please understand Susan.” Jill said.

“Its ok Jill I understand. No worries.” I said.

I looked down and seen a huge encampment. We stood at the top of a towering embankment and seen the en-tirety of the camp. There was a long road leading down to it but from here I seen a vast tent city. There was a long series of huge tents marked with a red cross indicating a medical encampment that could hold what looked like twenty thousand souls. Surrounding the medical facility was a well provisioned military presence, and a fully in-tact airport which was our greatest hope. I can get out and bring help to our cause thank God. Things are - nally looking up. What horrors lie in those medical tents though, is it for the care of earthly wounds or the horrors of the supernatural unleashed on defenseless people? In

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tgis part of the world it’s hard to know. I’m hopeful it’s not the latter.

“Well, I feel like an asshole so let’s move on and start marching towards our salvation down there. I think that’s what matter the most right now. Every one of us has a place in cleaning uo this mess whether we admit it or not and you all know it. All of us start makinf things right down there by God” said Sarg.

It wasn’t terribly eventful on that journey but me and Spook had time to talk over the past events. I was so far from underatanding what happened.

“There is something very dangerous in you Susan, noth-ing like I’ve ever seen or heard by word of mouth. I don’t know what to make of it .” said Spook.

“How do you gure Spook?” I said.

“Well, really it’s what happened in the incantation. I don’t see any reason why there should be such a reaction to you entering upon it. The only reason it should create such havoc is as if you were the sourcw from whixh all dark energy owed. It just doesn’t make sense Susan no matter what form you may take. There has been a change in the fabric of the plane as a result. It indicates you are more than you appear and yet still you are just Susan there has to be another explanation.” Spook said.

I said, “What are you talking about Spook? A change in the fabric of the planes? What planes?”

Spook said, “ The part of the ethereal plane that we are aware of. Since we left I had a chance to scry upon it to aee what has taken place. It is without form. The evil of the darkness has somehow been dispelled. it is without

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order if it makes anu sense to you. The best way I can discribe it is that that part of the astral has been unmade since our passing. The evil has been expelled but to where I don’t know. It would take an intelligence of extreme power to do what I perceive has been done. I need to maintain humility in the matter though Susan I may be an experienced warlock but I can only say be damned careful there is a primeval and terrifying power about you.”

I said, “Understood Spook. I honestly don’t know what is going on with me. Not since Chichén Itzá have I had any idea what is going on with me. Pray God if you know anything please tell me Spook I don’t know what is going on.”

Spook said, “I don’t either Susan honestly. I’ve seen power, earthly and demonic; I’ve seen power heavenly and otherworldly; I’ve seen the power of fae and of the outer chaos; I’ve seen the power a forded to demi-gods; I’ve seen the darkest powers of the greater gods, the destroyers of worlds. Few powers have the potential to reshape a plane the way you did. I can’t know how vast your transformation was but I’ve seen that if it wasn’t all encompassing it certainly was vast.

“Let me put it this way Susan, whatever has touched you is epic, primeval even, I would not work with a power that great the conse-quences of failure are too dire. When I en-counter such a power I give it a wide berth

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until it’s presence passes from my percep-tion. I don’t even make my presence known to such a power; I would suggest to you even the fae would do the same; I suggest even the gods would do no less.

“Be careful Susan, if you can safely escape this power do it. Whatever this is it was not meant to be made manifest; it was not meant to dwell upon this earth. Let this power be known to the greatest of gods alone for I trust only the wisest and most power-ful among them to be t to have contact with a dark power such as this.”

I said, “Jesus.”

He said, “It’s well and good you might be a vampire as your heart is the heart of a hero in spite of your nature. There are few benevolent vampires in existence and cer-tainly you are one of the good ones. Be a vampire with the power expected of a vampire Susan. Get away from this power you currently have safely, but expeditiously. This situation you are in is very dangerous for everyone and everything.

“The curse is broken. You deserve to know that. The bane of the warlock is no more. We aren’t chained to the fate of madness anymore. Madness will only come if we are found wanting in our psychology. Since time immemorial we have been a icted and even the gods who seen t to break the curse could not. Respect this power Susan, if you can set it aside do it the good you can do isn’t worth the risk.”

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I’m shaking. I’m terri ed and cold to the bone. I trust Spook and he expressed well the danger of the power I’m holding in my hands. I want to walk away but what if it falls into the wrong hands? Spook is thinking of me too in what he says, but unless I knew this terrible power were placed in the right hands how could I risk setting it aside? How would I even know the god I should entrust it with would be a wise caretaker of such a thing? I have so much to think about.

The journey to the camp was fairly uneventful. the descent was slow as we travelled on a trail that was cut into the side of a sheer cli f. A couple times I had a sense of something cool and wet on my shoulder but when I touched my shoulder there was nothing there. The way things are here in central america I gure if it isn’t trying to kill me then it’s alright. Presumably it was real that is Spook had me very, well, spooked earlier.

We set camp for the night. One more days march should get us there. We did get down the cli f though. We are set-tling into an overgrown area for the night to stay hidden, having hacked into a small clearing with machetes.

Jill was entering into the tent I shared with my compan-ions. I caught her arm gently before she went in.

I said, “Jill, I’m going to sleep alone tonight. I’m not really hungry.”

She said, “Oh Susan we didn’t know, please don’t turn away from us you know we need you. It’s been a long time and our troubles are starting to return to us.”

I said, “Oh no no it’s not that Jill, I’m just shaken over my experience. Everything is ok with us. I just need some

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time alone to think that’s all. It was di cult and terrible unlike you could imagine and I need to digest it all.” Jill said, “I’m not sure I believe you but I trust you. Just remember I love you and if there’s anything you need come get me.”

I said, “Absolutely. I de nately will. Thanks hun.” We hugged long and hard.

I grabbed a sleep system pack and let Sarg know where I was crashing out, some distance from camp. He paused, yet didn’t take long to realize why. Not a word more needed to be said. He gave a nod to me and turned back to the sentry for the night leaving me and Spook out of rotation.

In the wee hours of the night I heard a rustle. I woke up and seen something that looked like a goth. Ambiguous looking with straight and long owing black hair, and whose eyes looked like the depths of the ocean. In a mo-ment my kabar was in my hands and I leapt clear of my sleeping bag to slowly circle the stranger. I need to drop this fool before someone gets hurt.

I said, “Who are you? What is your purpose here?” He said, “You are my purpose Susan. You are lost.”

I said, “I know exactly where I am, I think you should consider yourself lost if you think you can overtake our group. How many of you are there?”

He said, “I am one but we are many, I have not come to ght but it would please me to meet your blade in battle. Prepare yourself then.”

I said, “You haven’t answered my questions. Answer me one then, who are you?”

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He said, “Of course, pardon my failure of etiquette. My name is Leviathan, and I am dæmon. We meet again Susan”

Oh shit.

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Quietly in the still of the night we circle each other again, this time in human form.

I said, “Why do you stalk me? What am I to you?” He said, “You are my sister though you do not know me.”

I said, “I have no family. I have no brother. A ne brother you would be to do battle with your supposed sister anyway.”

He said, “Hah, dæmon is always ready for battle my sister. As above so below, existance is a struggle, the clash of swords, the victory and the defeat. The way of war is the way of life and of our existence for we are existence.” He stood at ease and raised his hands palm up.

He said, “Will you stand down my sister and hear my

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wisdom?”

I stood easy and slowly opened my palms, my kabar resting easily in my open palm. Slowly I returned my blade to my sheath and we stood facing each other. I’m still very much on edge.

I said, “Speak.”

He said, “I am Leviathan. I am dæmon. I am not the Leviathan of evil legend, I am not that same creature. Me and my kind bear accursed names but we are spirits replete with wisdom. I am dæmon of water. In this I am no god of water I am water. I am the very element made manifest. As long as creation has been and as long as it will be so also will there be dæmon for we are creation.

You are the reason men fear the dark;you are the reason they fear the night. The events of Chichén Itzá were a quickening. A catalyst as it were, to bring you forth in power. Ever since you have been you were the same, only now you are blooming into your true self. Fear not yourself.

I needed to speak to your learned elder aspect, now ac-cessible to me since Chichén Itzá, to do so I needed to weaken you enough to cause her to come forth so I bat-tled with you. You are beloved to me Susan, and I am at peace with you now.”

I said, “You’re long winded dude. So basically you say I’ll be ne, and I got some juice. So what if I fuck up and like blow the world up?”

He said, “Just don’t.”

I said, “That inspires con dence.”

I decided to nickname him Levi. It helps me di feren-

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tiate him from the biblical reference and it’s just easier all around. I guess I got more juice than an east German female powerlifter. Not that I know what I’m doing yet. Give a kid some nitro glycerin and tell them not to blow themselves up. Good idea. Fucking Chichén Itzá.



In the afternoon of the next day we arrive at camp. It be-came apparent that the tents were full of victims addicted to venom. The bad ones. Just like any bad drug some people are more susceptable to addictions than others. Some life-threatening in fact if the drug were removed too quickly. These are the bad cases. Many are restrained. Many show signs of blown voice boxes from screaming. Most are cadaverous from not eating and limited intra-venous because they thrash too much to keep the iv in. Most are restrained, most show self-mutilation like goug-ing out their own eyes or peeling the skin from their own face and body. A man in the distance is being worked on after the stress caused him to have a heart attack. He looked like he was in his mid 20s. They are heavily ad-dicted and su fered horribly. Many have given up hope and died by their own hand so that they need not su fer anymore. A majority are a icted with some manner of madness often mocking the nurses saying the reds are the masters and will return soon to exact vengeance great will it be to serve at their feet great will it be to die by their hand. There is no cure, they have faint hope of living

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long before the withdrawl kills them, a month on average or so I’ve seen before.

It’s like hell on earth. Fucking red court vampires.

It took no time at all for the sentries to intercept us. we identi ed ourselves with an old sign countersign. So we were just detained rather than stripped of belongings and thrown in the clink. I give thanks for small wonders. We met the general who said, “either you’re a useful asset and you stay or youre useless and you go. We dont have the resources to keep any nonessential personnel here. So choose.” Needless to say we found ourselves being useful. Me and Spook took the rst assignment as work-ing with the warlocks in their research tent because we told the general about our recent adventure. I mostly organized tomes and scrolls while Spook worked doing actual research.



A familiar face came running up to me while I was on sentry. Geo frey, from the house of Windsor in the UK. Anotherwards a member of the royal family.

When the reds were still around some British represen-tatives were present here. In one of the fellowship raids I freed them when they were held hostage. It was in our best interest to clue in the monarchy and get their support in our resistance. So we took the risk to free them and send them back with some fangs procured from dying reds. Needless to say they clued in and we had support that was desperately needed.

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He said, “Lady Rodriguez, it has been a long time. I see things are changed but not better here. It is a travesty the people of central and south America are so relentlessly a icted. Pray God should have mercy on these su fering souls.”

Oh yeah. I was knighted for my courage by the queen in a fairly secret manner. It doesn’t change anything in my day to day life so I often forget the fact.

I said, “Wassup Geo frey?”

He said, “I’m acting as an attache to the queen. She wants to know what is happening down here. Her wiz-ards reported a massive release of black magic some time ago. I’m told the reds were consumed in the release and the fellowship here reported a truly historic event at Chichén Itzá. Needless to say it was assumed you were burnt to dust. I’m glad you are well but what happened to you?”

I said, “I woke up with the world’s worst hangover.” He said, “ok. You could just say you don’t know. There’s no reason to always drip sarcasm you know.”

I grunted.

He said, “Well, anyway. I’m looking to take the rst ight out to report back are you leaving north I assume? Your journalistic ways are less useful down here than ed-ucating the northerners on this tragedy.”

I said, “Exactly my thought. I’ll need to gure out how to get noticed but I need to drum up support from up north somehow.”

We met the base commander, a general Kraghstrom. He advised me my journalistic background makes me rst pick for a mission north. An outbreak of zombies seems

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to be underway and it carries the risk of apocalypse if it is viral based. When I return he will see that I am on the next ight north to undertake whatever means necessary to get support to us down here.

That night I walked among the tents and considered these latest events. I laid plans to achieve my goals. This could move me closer to having enough clout to be heard up north if I can report something credible. No-body north of Mexico will believe raw stories of demons and zombies. Something believable is what I need. That will carry my message to the eyes of those whose support we need most.

I can get closer to my daughter. I am always her mom in my heart and I need to be close to her but am I still her mom in body? I’ve undergone a tremendous physical change that goes far beyond what I could ever understand. Oh little Maggie, your mother is dead, long live your mother.



Ten days of cleaning; of walking sentry; of guarding the sick.

One night I was on patrol after sunset in the camp. As I wandered by an area dedicated to research many re-searchers are on edge, and competing with each other to nd a cure. Only one of these researchers was hav-ing undeniable success yet her continued research was threatened.

I heard loud angry voices coming from her research tent.

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“We can save them dammit, general I just need more venom to complete my research my test subjects have shown improvement”, said the woman.

“Are you telling me you experimented on multiple pa-tients? You know I only authorized you to work on one patient”, said the general.

“How am I supposed to make progress with a cure with a single test subject? When I seen it help one of them how could I bear to keep it from the others? Look at the suf-fering of these souls, surely we will be held to judgement on what we do here while they live”, said the woman.

The woman waved her hand over the multitude of pa-tient tents.

“You’re right Jane, we will be judged. Surely we will also be judged if our pride leads us to harm these people in spite of such su fering. I won’t cause it and I won’t allow you to cause it. you have the one man and only one man and I won’t jeopardize a mission to obtain more venom from old fellowship camps. it is only good to ease some people back. Very few. This work of yours is fruitless. Expect me to pull you from this self-glorifying project soon and put you into another project.”

“No you will not do that, I won’t let you. This will work I just need more venom, I can synthesize more if I can isolate it’s makeup. I am so close to creating a powerful anti-toxin that reverses the craving and lets the body heal. it works. The recipient isn’t showing the signs like the others if I complete my work I will have created a praise Jesus cure for these people. You need to understand this is the only hope for these people. This needs to happen.

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Get me the goddamned venom”, said Jane.

“Tell you what. If you pack up your belongings and report to Colonel Bennett by Friday I won’t demote you to sentry duty. Besides if you spit in a beaker you will nd you have quite enough venom already.”, said the general. “Fuck you Joe. You’re damned right I have venom for you, this is fucking bullshit. You’re betraying me, you gave me your word I could research and test until I found a cure. What’s changed?”, said Jane.

“Venom. You need venom for this work and very little was kept by the fellowship over the years. Even if you only need it until you are able to fabricate the necessary com-ponents how do you know we are going to nd any more out there at all? This is likely a dead end and without venom it is most assurredly a dead end. The Colonel has a good chance and could use the help. Most importantly the Colonel doesn’t need any goddamned venom for his proposed cure. It’s realistic.”, said Joe.

At that Joe walked away, and Jane took an old pipe and smashed a nearby table into pieces. Her face still red she walks back to her desk to read a research report but drops it. She violently sweeps everything o f her desk and combs her ngers through her hair.

Curious I stealthily enter the tent. she isn’t moving. Looking around I see some relevant material on her re-search. I can’t understand medical research myself but Laura might. I’ll get her to look at it.

As I’m leaving Jane turns around, “Who the hell are you?”

“Um. I’m Susan. I overheard that conversation you had

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with the general—”, I said.

“What business do you have eavesdropping on a private conversation?”, she said.

“Lady that conversation was anything but private. Is mu n getting a bit tired? Do you need to go down for your afternoon nap? Momma ever tell you to use your indoor voice asshat?”, I said.

She was so red with rage she was blind. I took the oppor-tunity to snatch a handful of paperwork, ducking just in time to evade the st that sailed quickly toward my jaw. I backed away, and apologized. I slipped out of the tent and made my way back for Laura to examine the journals. “This is quite advanced Susan. She may in fact have done it but I don’t think it’s possible to synthesize venom. Her work in that area is quite far from a working solution. She is going to need venom.” said Laura.

I said, “Would any of this help you guys?” I said. “No. Maybe synthesized venom but that is the weak area in her research like I said. We don’t need freedom from addiction as you well know we need the healing e fects of venom.” she said.

I said, “I needed to ask. I just can’t be comfortable with my friends being so dependant on me.”

She said, “I agree Susan. We’ve been together long enough I don’t feel I need to butter you up anymore. On another level though all of us love you dearly. You are the kindest and most caring vamp we’ve ever seen.”

I said, “Then there’s Jill—”

She said, “She loves you more than the air she breathes. She adored her evil vampire masters as undeserving as

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they were. Now she nds a lover in a really good and decent vampire. Heaven would have nothing better to o fer that woman. Please don’t start to glitter.”

I said, “If I do you have my permission to stake me.” I shuddered.

She said, “If you don’t mind me asking, I never thought you played for the other team?”

I said, “Subtle. No I never found I want any woman in any way like that I just don’t want that. It’s an intense romantic involvement. I’m not sure how else to explain it.”

She said, “That’ll do. Just wondering.”

So I knew as much as any other member of the fellow-ship we really didn’t keep a stockpile of venom. There just wasn’t any need to do so. Jane is fucked. So are those poor victims. Laura said at out Jane is not near enough to be able to synthesize venom if she ever will.

What are her options then? I could risk providing my own venom somehow but I need to go north to get help and I need to ensure my thralls are provided for as well although they are no burden to me realistically. Providing like that puts me and my thralls in danger too, we don’t really know these people. Raiding to obtain pre Chichén Itzá venom stocks is unrealistic. She will need to produce venom somehow.

I shuddered. I better nd out if she is truly sincere about her willingness to do anything to help those people be-cause unless I can think of another answer there’s no way back from the road I would have her travel.

Something new is about to come into this world with

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the power to either save it or to destroy it. May the world forgive me if I have made the wrong choice, but my choice is made and I am going to see it through.

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The next afternoon Spook caught me on my way to nding another excuse from going on nursing duty in the medical tents. I dislike the way the patients seem

to know exactly what I am and how it couldn’t be more obvious to others that something is amiss if they threw themselves at my fangs they’re so desperate to receive the venom. I have no idea how they know I got it, they just seem to smell the red court on me.

He said, “Susan do you have some time this evening? I want to apologize for what I said earlier about your powers, I didn’t mean for it to come out the way it did. It is what it is. I’ve been doing nothing but paperwork in the warlock’s area today and I’m going to be doing my daily magical practise. I thought that perhaps we could

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get together and I might help you in understanding your abilities. You were scheduled for duty in the patient tents, I asked and they seemed relieved you could be somewhere else. Something about the patients aren’t right when you’re around. I’m not surprised.”

I said, “Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Spook. Oh thank you.”

We stopped for some bangers and mash at the mess tent and retired to his assigned tent. I think he’s the only one of us that was assigned his own tent due to his being a warlock and thus his importance within the fellowship at this time in history.

He said, “So what do you know so far about your new abilities?”

I said, “Fuck all. When I woke up in Chichén Itzá I was true form red court. That’s still my most natural state if I’m tired or very hurt. Putting on a esh mask and holding it is some e fort, but not much really. That bird-like true form thing I’ve found I can turn into only when I’m being true to myself. I have to be right in my heart. It’s about focusing on what and who I am rather than just wrapping myself up in something. Once I’m a bird though I can just stay that way I just need to refocus inside if I want to change back to a bird. Not really a bird but I don’t know what else to say about that form. I feel it’s my most powerful and exalted form I’ve seen yet. I have the infamous venom, and the infamous hunger. My eyes have strong hypnotic ability. I can see a lot more in people with my vampire eyes. When I went to get you I seemed to have transported myself by instinct. I don’t know how

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I did it. I have mistform of course, good to pass walls or just plain disappear then reappear somewhere else nearby. I can move around on any surface even inverted like a spider. I can walk around during the day which many vampires can’t. I’m not sure if it matters but I’m not bothered by cold but love the heat. I’m sure I’ll nd out more as time goes on.”

He said, “So it seems you’re a shapeshifter of sorts. That doesn’t say much the reds were a bit like shapeshifters ex-cept that really they were just wrapping themselves up in a mask. The bird shape as you call it, that is real shapeshift-ing though which makes me think you have a greater depth in that area. Look Susan I want to explore that a lit-tle more tonight. What about the eyes Susan? Sometimes human, sometimes black and sometimes white regardless of your form. Can you explain that a little more?”

I said, “Yeah sure. It’s after dark now so it’s a little easier to show you. Basically human eyes are human eyes. I can see farther and sharper than other people but not much more. Honestly as the days go by I’m learning new things about myself and new things are developing in me on their own time. The bird form I didn’t know existed until it spontaneously happened and over time I learned to better control it. That’s the way with all of this. It’s just taking time.”

He said, “From my experience with certain entities that seems to be the way. You might be able to do something one time then it just doesn’t happen for you the next, like the long process of learning your instincts naturally rather than an animals faultless instinct to breathe.”

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I said, “That’s about right yeah, I can’t really depend on anything special I got except what I knew back as a half vampire. Well, and more and more the bird form seems to be reliable. Now about the eyes—”

I switch over to vampire vision, my black eyes.

I said, “Now this is a busy set of eyes. The white eyes you seen are just nictitating membranes to protect these vampiric eyes from the daylight, and maybe other envi-ronmental hazards but I think mainly sunlight. That way I have abilities and senses I would normally in vampire form after dark. Pure white or pure black eyes are just di ferent forms of creepy. When I’m walking around I just have the human eyes. In vampire vision the stimuli is huge I’m only now just scratching the surface. A whole new range of colour, if you can say colour, is available for me to see and I’m just going by instinct as to what I’m seeing. I’m using it as an enhancement of watching body language. I know what hungry looks like by watching people in the mess tent over time, just studying what I see.”

He said, “Here I might be able to help with that. Do you have any special ability to detect deathstone by any chance?”

I said, “No. No special sense of it. I wish I did.” He said, “I wish you did too.”

He walked over to a bookshelf, trailed his nger along the spines of each and withdrew one book carefully. It was a work composed by a still existing magickal tradi-tion. The name on it was The Secret Doctrine of the Rosicrucians, Part XII, The Aura and Auric Colors.

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He said, “I’ve found it to be quite accurate for me, and many of my colleagues swear by this one. The ancient traditions have done a lot of good work. Every person or group has it’s fallacies, each warlock needs to determine for themselves what works for them best and some peo-ple I know cannot use this tome. I would like to know which group you fall in perhaps I can help in this area. Remember Susan don’t trust what you see out of hand, I know magic that will alter or obscure my aura to the aura of others and most warlocks possess the same abilities.”

I noted that little piece of information. We looked over the book together and I found that from what I can recall my experiences conformed to what was described in the book. Auric abilities are powerful I can see that now. It’s a bit of a game to play though when I consider what Spook said about how auras can be altered. What I read does not completely encompass all the breadth and depth of what I see through vampiric eyes but this does solve some of the mystery involved. It gives me a foundation which I can learn with.

He said, “Now for the shapeshifting. Let’s take a walk it’s quite dark out now.”

He grabbed some things and we headed out into the night by the light of a fuel lantern. It is a very black night. It’s overcast, there is no sign of neither moon nor star. Rain is likely coming soon it is humid and still, a stillness like would come before a storm. He took us into an area of the camp that is unused during the night but far enough away from the camp borders that it isn’t ever patrolled. I made note of the area, I think I could use this

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knowledge later.

He put down the lantern and turned to me. Taking some spell components from a small leather pouch, he whispered some words in enochian and the components were consumed.

He said, “Could you extend and retract your talons Su-san? I want to try and observe the underlying mechanism that causes the e fect.”

His eyes glowed deep green. I did as he asked and a shadow of green smoke passed over and through my hand as I did so. He looked at my arm. He asked me what form I am in currently I said masked red court form. He told me to expect a sharp poke and he drove an ice pick through my forearm. No blood. The esh appeared necrotic from the inside and I was black as a rubber tire behind the esh. He removed the ice pick and the wound healed over as the ice pick was being extracted.

He said, “That’s a fast heal. Are you okay so far Susan?” I said I was. He told me to expect a cutting sensation. He took a bowie knife, I took the bowie from him. After a sincere petition that left him with a black eye he gave me a local anesthetic. Just because I’m a fast healer doesn’t mean I know no pain. Then he proceded to llet my arm from shoulder to wrist. The esh came o f and became a tar like substance on the ground, and new esh grew behind the blade as it was cutting.

He said, “That’s a goddamned fast heal Susan. How are you feeling?”

I said, “Hungrier by the minute. I don’t think I should do much more healing tonight Spook I’ll eat somebody.”

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He said, “Understood. What about the hunger? What is your experience of it?”

I said, “I’m not as hungry in the birdlike true form. As a matter of fact I just kind of exist in that form with a manageable abiding hunger that never goes away. If I’m too hungry then I’m too weak and vice versa I can’t leave this red court form. For the time in which I’m in the bird form though when I return to a red court form I’m neither more nor less hungry that when I left it before except if there’s a reason I should be, like I got hurt, which weakens me, eventually forcing me back to the red court form. I feel better being the bird and I’m better o f that way I just can’t walk around that way inde nitely I just don’t t in with polite society. I’d rather just be human again anyway. It’s what I always wanted but never got.”

He said, “Bite down on this leather, there’s going to be another poke in the area I anaesthetized and it will hurt.” I bit. He poked. I screamed into my other arm so as not to alarm anyone nearby because that hurt like a mother-fucker. I looked as I seen a deathstone dagger snapping back into it’s handle. My arm had a hole. It wasn’t heal-ing. I could see straight through my upper arm although the hole wasn’t a big one. Icepick size maybe. I looked over at Spook.

I said, “I’m going to shove that up your ass later. I take it this is a further experiment?”

He said, “It is. If I help show you your shapeshifting ability might you forego on inserting deathstone into my anus?”

I said, “Done. You show me that then I will owe you.

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What do you have in mind?”

He said, “First shift to red court true form, I’ll check the wound and you can do some exercises for me.”

I did. He nearly hurled on my talons. It is not a pleasing sight for anybody and especially not for a fellowship sol-dier. I felt like I was at the doctor’s getting a physical. He put on some thick gloves and used a number of instru-ments to learn more about the slimy rubber composition that is my H. R. Giger alien born of a vampire bat form. He checked the wound which was still there from before. I changed to the bird form. The wound remained still as it would in any form. Deathstone needs to heal natu-rally. He analysed the action of my furling and unfurling of wings. It made him smile. Then I did extending and retracting talons on both hands and birdfeet. I curled my talons into hooves and the forming of the digitigrade stance which I learned some time ago just out of instinct. He pushed back against the curling of my talons and the reshaping of my legs during the transition, and the ac-tion of entering into a digitigrade stance made him smile again.

He said, “Susan everything you’re doing hints at shapeshift-ing. There is signi cantly more conscious thought in the actions of entering your digitigrade stance and the unfurl-ing of your wings. Your wings appear of xed size but it appears you can unfurl them to have any span you want. It is a supernatural capacity and it is true shapeshifting for every act you take in refurling your wings. In taking the digitigrade stance, the action is instinctual but the execution is a conscious e fort. I see that the folding of

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your talons is conscious when I had you push back against me, and the same with the changing of your leg structure. You were making a conscious e fort in the change, and pushed back against me in the ways I prescribed for you to do. You have full control in those 2 particular trans-formations and it is my presumption that if it is so then you do have the capacity of a true shapeshifter. Let’s do another exercise to see how far we can take this thought.”

He took some more components from his pouch, and with a few more words of enochian his eyes went from green to leathery eye sockets with a thick brown smoke in place of eyeballs. He had me turn into mistform, and the smoke intermingled with my mistform in a way that seemed rather intimate. I wasn’t very comfortable at rst with the sensation but he explained he was making a deep connection with my psyche in order to guide my intu-ition and conscious action, helping me realize the actions through which shapeshifting takes place. Reaching that deeper level is what caused the sensation of intimacy, it is my psyche being protective of itself. I felt things I never felt before. Things I didn’t know where there. It was like someone was walking me around inside myself with a lantern illuminating things I never knew were there. He helped me do things within myself and it didn’t take me long before he said I was ready to start learning on my own. He concluded his spell and I returned to my birdform.

He said, “Now focus on me, remember what I showed you in mistform. Focus on me, and be me.”

I did. I couldn’t see myself but he smiled big. He said it’s

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been a good night and beckoned me to return to his tent to wrap up. He asked me to focus on him again when we got back. Then take the internal actions I was taught to gain the sense of being him. I did that. He asked me to hold it and look in the mirror behind him. I did. I was him. He showed me that I can bleed as a human, to see that I am true human. Completely shapeshifted. I refocused my thought to become me again, and to project myself contingently, to see my human self at my true age. I did it, and I did it well. I have a couple wrinkles, I cut myself and I bleed, I’m human. I rolled back into a red court form with esh mask and lost my older appearance but my wound healed. I’m hungry. I wasn’t hungry when I was human but there was an e fort sustaining the change.

He said, “You’ve done amazing tonight Susan. For a long time you are going to nd it rather draining main-taining a shapeshift for long. It means it will drive you to feed more often. It will get better with practise. I’ve worked with recessive populations of shapeshifters before and I’ve learned some things about it. Also you will be able to more easily shift into forms you are familiar with. Foremost your trueforms which seem to be the birdform and the red court forms. In my work with you it seems you resonate more with that birdform I think that’s your genuine true form. The red court forms are a legacy from your vampiric ancestors. It’s the di ference between walk-ing and crawling, it’s preferable to walk around but if worse comes to shove if all you can do is crawl around then all the power to you, red court forms for the win.

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Like I was saying more familiar forms would then be true forms, your own human form you are familiar with or like you just did a form of yourself projected contingently to change age, hair colour, etc. Other humans wouldn’t be too hard. Just don’t try for rocks and twigs yet unless as I stated you have a preexisting understanding of what it is like to be a rock or a twig. You’ll get better.”

I grabbed him hard for a long hug. A really long hug. This is such a huge self-discovery I’m almost in tears. I can be the real human me now and I know how to do it. I’ve waited a lifetime for the chance to be human again and now I can be.

He took some references on vampires and magical use o f his bookshelf. He also grabbed a really old dusty ref-erence on dæmon. He helped me delve into some magic workings but after having read a few words and seeing the energy spark and snap around me we decided to take our show on the road again to the abandoned area of the camp. My magical ability isn’t like a warlock, it’s not human, and it’s not fae. Spook said it was like magic was attempting to cast unto itself and created a feedback loop which had an in nite escalation pattern. Working with me we found I can use magic if rather than focus on it I go zen and acknowledge my awareness of my intentions and let it go. Keep ritual brief or use simple somatic or verbal components, a wave of the hand or an enochian word or sentance. The most important thing for me is distraction and not focus. We found during the course of our investigations that when I was working with him I created many magical e fects without even having done

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anything, or intended anything. I fart magic. I have no magical training and know enough to be dangerous. To myself as much as others. I can cast the same spellwork and I may or may not ever get the same result. Testing for magical leakage as he called it further indicated I have a perfect e ciency, and unlike human casters will have no issues with technology whatsoever. What he taught me was enough to get by in the presence of magic and have some self-control in it’s simple use without causing an implosion of all that is which is what he was greatly worried of.

He took the reference on dæmon and formulated a test, a residual test for dæmonic energy. He brewed up a beaker of liquid and took a drop of my blood, it was supposed to turn a colour depending on what type of dæmonic energy was present. The dæmonic isn’t like demons that can possess, the in uence of dæmonic is very rare and often subtle but in nitely powerful. As Spook said before every wizard and warlock he knows avoids working with dæmon for the very reason that it is far too dangerous. Like trying to lasso a speeding locomotive. The beaker imploded on itself and fell as dust on the ground. Both Spook and I fell backwards on the ground from both surprise and the shockwave. He examined what was left. He said, “I’ve never heard of anything like that. I won’t be able to complete the test until I can nd a way to re-solve that problem. According to the colour of the dust, pitch black, I think it might be the presence of pure black magic. The dæmon who is the personi cation of black magic is unknown to anyone colleagues. We have seen

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instances where such an in uence has been seen but it is a mystery what name we could place on it. When we have seen it, well one instance was in the mass presence of creatures of the night like vampires, in an unholy place, a holocaust cemetary, which was the active site of truly vile black magic. Just as a reference if that colour appeared in the liquid in the beaker I would have said de nitively that it is what the powerful in uence is on you. This colour with a deep blue hint is water, the in uence of Leviathan. This colour with a little grey speckle is the in uence of the death dæmonic of which it is said there is more than one. Earth tone would be Belial, the earth energy. I guess what I’m trying to say is with slight di ferences this could mean just about anything and it’s made even worse be-cause of the fact you are a full blown vampire. You are exuding this energy already just by your very nature. That said few vampires we’ve tested had even tested positive for any direct in uence of this type of dæmonic energy. I’ve still never seen this test do that, implode into pieces. Maybe I’ll be able to research a better test later on to nd something out.

“For what it’s worth this is what I know about the dæ-monic. Their in uence is actually inherent. The dæ-monic is the created universe. They each have their per-sonalities though, being anthropomorphic personi ca-tions. The universe as understood by many of my col-leagues at this point is multiversal. Each particular in-stance of a universe has all it’s own parts, it’s own nev-ernever, it’s own gods even. What doesn’t change is the white God who stands above all and in recent research the

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dæmonic seem to exist in their own realm that intersects the whole multiverse which means true omnipotence is applicable to not only the one white God but also to dæmon.

“Coincidentally although I don’t get it correct all the time, traditionally those who have dealt with the dæ-monic have had trouble keeping a separation in naming convention between the malevolent demon and the be-nign dæmon. It originally came from the Greek de nition and carried down through the ages primarily through our hermetic research. Much of what we know of dæmon came from our hermetic scholars and their astral work. We have tried with keeping speci c spellings, and by us-ing dæmon as a singular entity. Like saying: summon a demon, raise a demon, raise demons, I am a demon, that is a demon all would refer to a malevolent being. Saying: summon dæmon, raise dæmon, we are dæmon or I am dæmon helps refer to the benign dæmon. Pronunciation of Daimon helps, which is greek for divine power which seems suitable. Still questionable though as we don’t see dæmon as having a direct in uence on us as much as an indirect in uence through the gods or the mundane. Indeed it is the gods that we expect to actually tap into the power of dæmon to create in uence in our world, like a god of water such as neptune would be no god of anything without water. Water in turn would have no in uence on our world without neptune to create that in uence. Imagine the surprise our ancestors had when they realized that water indeed had it’s own voice, person-ality, and name. That name is Leviathan. Philosophically

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I’ve wondered if the demoni cation of dæmon pardon the pun, was a way for the church to direct the ock away from the worldly things toward heaven according to the doctrines of faith. There is nothing more worldly than dæmon afterall. I digress though, you said you had en-counters with an entity that called itself Leviathan and named you as his sister? Pray tell me more of that now that we have some time.”

So I retold the story from when I went to rescue Spook. He hung on every word but admitted he didn’t know much about what it meant. He took notes as I spoke and said he would consult with colleagues of his to see if he can get any more knowledge. There aren’t any hermetic scholars around at the moment and he doesn’t know how to contact any but the next time he sees one he will parlay with them.

When I got home I experimented more with my shapeshift-ing. I can shapeshift my clothes into my new forms which is something I was starting to realize back on the road to the camp. Anything I wear can be changed but like Spook said I have to be familiar with being what I change to. I’m familiar with being clothed. I’m familiar with being naked. If I hold a spoon I’ll be damned if I could do anything with it as I’m not familiar with changing into or out of a spoon as I don’t know what it’s like to be a spoon. Similarly I can’t just be clothes. I’ve been naked and I’ve been clothed, but I’ve never just been a set of clothes. I’ve been capable of mistform for a long time but that doesn’t mean I can be smoke as I’ve never before known what it’s like to be smoke.

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I wandered o f to spend time with my thralls as I need to recover the energy I’ve lost with all the shapechanging I’ve been doing tonight. I truly believe that one day, I will be the spoon.



Later that night after speaking with Laura I gathered the paperwork together and headed back to the research area. I found Jane’s tent and see her searching for some papers. I strode in burdened with inglorious purpose. I placed the documents on her desk and stood there facing her. She looked straight at me for a moment then walked from the corner of the tent where she was searching. She looked down at the papers then back to me. Her face reddening.

“What in the blue fuck is this about? Did you do just lift these o f the table when I wasn’t looking? Who sent you? Colonel Joachim? The general is going to hear about this don’t fucking move bitch”, said Jane.

She started moving toward the door of the tent but didn’t any more than turn around before I caught her by the waist. She said, “Get o f m—”

I took her fast and pulled her close. My vampire vision came out and she was hypnotized. I could see her aura and life’s blood, she was very strong in spirit. She was self sacri cing and relentless. She is very much the hero I hoped she would prove to be. I brought her lips to mine for an intimate kiss.

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This isn’t what a person might assume. Venom is quite e fective if deposited on the skin but works best if trans-ferred through mucus membranes. The mouth is the most generally accepted target. Other areas vary from slightly more awkward to the kind of place that unless you are really into that person it’s, well it’s just wrong.

It’s what has been called, “The Kiss” in the red court. We are actually wired to take down our prey with a kiss, it’s in our genes, it excites us.

The moment seemed like an hour, I could feel her suc-cumb to the e fect in my arms and it was pulling me to the kill. I gently pulled away from her. I really didn’t want to. Dear God that felt so good.

I said, “You were confused about something hun, where do you say I’m from?”

She said, “The red court—”

She gasped and wiped her brow from arousal, then leaned gently on her desk to help her keep on her feet. My mouth is drooling with hunger.

She said, “Why? How are you still here? What are you going to do? Do you want to destroy the only chance these su fering people have to live? You god-forsaken vindictive creatures your empire falls in tatters and you take it out on the sick and helpless. We are going to kill whatever of you are left I swear to God if I’m gone others will come. If you succeed in killing our sick you can be sure we will give you a very painful death.”

She sighed in excitement. I wiped drool from my chin.

I said, “I suppose that would be what you would think.

That’s actually not what I had in mi—”

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She brushed her ngers through her hair, then threw her head back and moaned. She looked at me submissively and gasped. She said, “Then what? What could a red possibly want besides revenge? What are you scheming? You damned creatures are always scheming. We are going to nd out and we will stop you. Kill me if you like I will never help you, before you enthrall me I will kill myself you can never have me.”

She grabbed a letter opener from the desk, I caught her hand and it dropped. She sighed. I looked at her like someone who hasn’t eaten for a week sees a smoked ham. She said, “Just take me. I can’t handle this any longer I need you to take me. Just take me now.” I swooped in for a bit but tore myself away just in time.

She said, “What’s the deal bitch? My blood not red enough for you?”

I said, “Shut up Jane, ok? Just shut up. I hit you too hard with the venom although just enough given you have such ght. We are getting out of here see? We have somewhere to go. Look at me and tell me if you under-stand. We have to be quiet and not arouse others interest. Tell me you understand you can be sure I will know if you lie.”

She said, “Not before you answer me this. I deserve to at least know what your intent is in this.”

I said, “You said you need venom for the cure. I intend to get you the venom you need to cure all these and any others in need. I’m the only one who can do this for you and unless you chanced to meet another red and didn’t tell me I think I may be your golden goose so don’t you

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dare fuck this up for yourself.”

Her eyes were the size of golf balls, by her aura she seemed to accept what I’m saying. She was swaying, hold-ing onto the desk. The venom is dangerously close to paralysing her, she looked intoxicated.

I said, “Do you have some booze?”

She said, “I think I’m under enough in uence right now why would you need booze?”

I said, “If there’s something here for God sake just get it.”

She went to the back of the tent and in a pile of papers just beside a le cabinet she grabbed a mickey of whiskey in a paper bag.

I said, “Perfect, let’s go.”

We left the tent with her slumped over my shoulder half-paralysed with venom. I sprinkled some ne single malt over us and took the bottle of whiskey for a walk in plain sight. We passed people by as they shook their head in understanding. Two people passing us said, “Yup. Told you. She’s snapped. Working too hard for too long and I even heard the general has shut her down and reassigned her. Yup, that’s what Dave told me yesterday. Seen it coming from afar.”

So we stumbled and dragged ourselves to the back quar-ter of the encampment close to the embankment. The sentries in this area are placed further up the embankment and all that’s here are supplies, having already passed the ammunition tents. We found one that looks like it hasn’t been touched in months. Inside it’s still dry and there is metal shelving holding mostly used clothing, both civil-

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ian and military. I found a pile of exercise mats in the corner and took some to put Jane down on.

She said, “So what’s the deal, you going to camp out in this lthy place for me to milk venom? I can do better for you than this shithole nobody knows what you are and I’m not going to tell anyone. You’re helping me help thousands who can’t help themselves.”

I said, “I really can’t do that. The general is going to search for me if I go missing. He may not keep me in the encampment and eventually ship me out which I know for a fact he is going to do soon, he has already given me orders. I’m a journalist and need to go north eventually to nd help and support among those who have it. Besides whatever arrangement you can make is eventually going to be found out anyway and sure as shit the fellowship is going to kill any red they nd, probably also those who conspire with them most notably you in this case. Your patients lose not only hope but their most outstanding doctor. Using me to harvest venom is a losing proposition.”

She looked at me, “You deceived me, I believed you. Why did I believe you? Now you have me here, I’m such a fool. You intended to kill me here to hide the evidence and use the drunken stagger from earlier tonight to make it think it was something I did in my drunken state. Fine go ahead and kill me, give me more venom and make me like it more. Bitch.”

I said, “Oh no, I told no word of a lie, I do intend you will get the venom you need. Believe every word I told you. Just not from me”

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She said, “You aren’t making sense, if you won’t give venom then who—”

I said, “You.”

At that last word I leapt like a tiger. I was on top of her in a split second and drowned her in a deep kiss. Her eyes went as deep as the ocean as waves of venom owed through her.

She said, “No, please, no.” and gasped.

She threw her head back from pleasure and she said, “Yes, Please. Yes”

I dove into her neck and fresh beautiful blood poured into me, my whole body quivered in a new way in re-sponse to my intent. Her body became cold and her eyes dead as glass. I shifted to my own true form, the bird form, and held her in my arms. She is quite dead. Inside my blood meal is stirring. I feel myself beginning to heave. My body is incubating my seed into my bloodmeal. The excitement is building in me as the moment comes. I lock my lips with hers and deliver our life back to her. I see her eyes open pure black. I wrapped my wings around her and held her tight. My seed is consuming her etheric body and looking down on her aura I can see that part of her die and the vampire take it’s place. On the completion of the infection she releases a hiss for the rst time. My rst baby girl as a vampire. What will she be like? She didn’t regain consciousness for an hour while I rocked her, or at least functioning. She laid there still, her eyes large and black and unblinking. Honestly, I thought my rstborn turned out a bit wrong until she spoke.

She said, “Hungry. Want food.”

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I said, “I don’t think you need food dear. I’ll be here un-til you gain your senses and can decide that for yourself.” She sni fed the air and looked around like an animal, “Smells good, out there, there.” and she pointed to the main area of the encampment.

I said, “I know dear. It smells good.”

I sang a lullaby to try to take her mind o f her hunger. After a while she said, “Where am I?”

I said, “Jane? Can you hear me?”

She said, “Who, who are you? Where am I?”

I said, “Jane my name is Susan, we are in a supplies tent at the back of the encampment.”

She said, “Why? What am I doing out here? What’s wrong with my eyes things look funny.”

I said, “Stay with me a while. I’ll look after you just relax Jane while things start to come together.”

She said, “I feel a hunger, I’ve felt this before not so long ago. Something’s wrong. Something’s terribly wrong.” I said, “It’s all wrong Jane, there ain’t nothing right here.”

She said, “That’s damn straight. I’ll take you up on it, I’ll rest here a while.”



She said, “Bloodlust? Oh Christ I remember, you fuck-ing whore goddammit you fucking turned me you fuck— ”

She looked up at me, she said, “Oh.”

I said, “Yeah, oh.” as I gave my wings a shake and tucked them behind.

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She said, “What team am I playing for now? What’s the color?”

I told her of the events so far from Chichén Itzá until now.

She said, “Sounds like we used to be the red court.”

I said, “Don’t even say that. We have some red court genes.”

She said, “I like that better. Still have the half turned stage as well, you left me half-turned.”

I said, “I left it your choice what path you wanted to take from here. I feel it’s your right to choose.”

She said, “You’re right, and you took that away when you didn’t explain what you had in mind. I don’t want to be back in the position of infected. No fellowship member would.”

I said, “If I did you wouldn’t have gone through with it, I know that.”

She said, “You’re right. We might have still found venom at some old encampment. Now it doesn’t matter what’s done is done. I understand your reasons. I want you to stay away from me. When you leave this place don’t come back I don’t want to see or hear from you again.”

At that she left. I hope this was the right choice; that I should turn her; that it was her who should be turned rst; That she should have been turned at all. May God have mercy on us all if I have chosen wrongly.

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San Jose

I’m making my way back in the morning to the tent I was sharing with my thralls. I didn’t see any sign of

Jane, nor did I seek her out.

The general was waiting for me.

He said, “The time has come for you to head north. We have a huey on the helipad and our teams patrolling north are in place now. Things are clear for the trip now but it has to happen now. You have a radio to call extraction among the gear that we placed in the chopper. You’re going in alone, move your ass.”

I didn’t have much more time than to say be safe to my thralls. I hope I’m not going to be too long I don’t want them to get sick again.

Once I climbed into my chopper I had a vision of a small

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tent. A persons quarters, dresser, clothes, cooking area. It was so clear it was like I was there. Things were tossed about the tent. In my hand was a tissue. I am aware of where I am but also aware of this other location and it feels I’m here too. My eyes are full of tears. I’m not controlling my body in this other location, or it doesn’t seem so, but I rise from sitting on a bed and see my re ection in the mirror. It’s Jane. She is su fering a lot of sorrow from her change. I tried to will her positive juju as they say, project the love I have for her as my rstborn. I see her looking around as if startled by something then the vision fades. I wonder what that was?

There is a sargeant ying with me that gives me a brief on the situation north. It’s a report of a zombie outbreak. It’s in an industrial area noone is going through at night any-more, 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.



We touch down and I’m sent to a Catholic parish, whose pastor has agreed to house me.

I was scared to death about crossing the threshold. I might not be able to and it would be hard to explain why.

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Everyone I’m pretty sure knows about the destruction of the red court by now the reworks were seen all over this part of the world maybe farther.

I said, “Umm, I haven’t been in a church in a long time father. I’m a little afraid of stepping in that doorway. There’s a darkness on me.”

He said, “It will be okay my child, the Lord our God is merciful to all sinners, he longs to bring you into his house.”

I said, “Maybe, but there are some reborn of darkness, the children of the night, who can’t pass that door. What’s to say my dark heart is any di ferent?”

He said, “I am gifted by our Lord that I can sense a great darkness like that and I do not see it in you, and how could that manner of darkness be in you my child? No living person could possibly have a darkness so great as to one born of evil. Be at peace child it is safe to enter into this house of our Lord.”

I took his word that he has a sense of the dark super-natural, and if I’m not setting o f his spidey sense then maybe this threshold will accept me too.

I said, “I will try father but if my phobia gets the best of me we may have to make di ferent arrangements for a place to stay.”

I think that is the perfect excuse, well maybe a little strange but relying on a short-circuit in the brain to me seems a no-brainer. I slowly move one foot toward the threshold and felt a heat. A lot of heat. I looked at my foot and it was red. Otherwise it was okay. I laced up my shoe again and inched closer. Still the heat, like a shower

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that had only the hot water coming out. In the end I decided to take the plunge and walked straight in quickly and found once I was past the threshold that scalding hot water feeling slowly receded like someone turned on the cold water in that shower. I was quite red and the sweat was pouring o f me but I was able to cross into the threshold of the church and live. It’s rather amazing I wasn’t repelled back due to my red court bloodline. Well I’m glad I’m not so limited seeing as I can otherwise walk around in the day and live a fairly normal life as humans would see it. Well, as I see it too I feel half human a lot of the time. The way I completed my turning is a real clusterfuck.

Father said, “Oh my dear child look at you. Here let me wipe o f that sweat, I have some cool water over here let me take a cloth and cool you down a bit”

As soon as the water touched my forehead it felt like it was boiling water. I grabbed fathers hand and moved it way gently but in record time before the e fect was obvious. Again a good thing my forehead didn’t go up in smoke and ame. I looked over and found father dipped the cloth in a font. Well that answers that question.

I said, “No no father that’s room temperature. If it’s cool water you want go run a faucet for a while and get it cold.”

I’m clenching my teeth

He said, “I swear it looks like the font water scalded you. It’s rather singular. Okay Susan I’ll go run some tapwater.”

He said his name is father Gomez. He is going to keep

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San Jose

me with him in the rectory as he is a bit worried someone might lay a hand on me in this fairly rough neighbour-hood. 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.

He asked, “You want to know more about the zombie trouble.”

I said, “You 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.

First stop town records. Lets see who owns that ware-house. 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 ight 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 o f shift.

So it looks like the warehouse was owned by a company called ACME boot. Checking the micro che around the time of purchase in the late 1950’s to early ’60s the com-pany was heavily promoting the rst western boot store

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in central America. It never got any traction, was repur-chased 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 nd a safe spot a stakeout would be best. Keep quiet, close this case. I see Jane again. I am her standing over her research desk with an empty mickey of whiskey in front of her. I hear her say, “I can’t even get drunk.” she sits in her chair at her desk staring at the empty bottle. Then the vision fades.

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. There are tire marks coming from the locked gate, looks like trucks. There is an old rusty chain and padlock on the ground cut o f 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 continue to walk casually to the warehouse, and pass into it is gaseous form. I seriously doubt the bank has been anywhere near this place looks like it’s ownership documents went through a shredder. Inside looks like a Freddy Krueger lm. There is blood everywhere, small body parts, deep scratches in the oors and walls. Some really solid looking steel tanks have deep indents in the forms of sts and steel girders have chunks bitten o f them like they were ta fy. Jesus, what the hell

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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, Monsantus Genetic Engineering LLC. MGEL for short I guess. Fascinating. There is some paperwork left behind also, it de nitely looks like an engineers handiwork I can’t make most of it out. What I can pick out are words like specimens, candidates, t for deployment, un t, 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. I nd some urban camo bdu and threw it on, and hit the oor with a 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 housecat in a garbage pail. “reowww” and it was gone. Handpalm. Good enough then. A.J. takes me back to the rectory.

Great, so rather than answer questions I only have more questions.

Hope lost, I need to followup now on nding the right needle in a pile of needles.

So it’s really not much good yet staking out the location the research comes rst. If I stake it out too soon they may spook and take o f to some location I don’t know about. We have a company name, and some engineering documents. Let’s start with the company rst.

That night I relaxed for supper and tune in my radio. I updated my handler at the encampment and he thanked

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me for my work. That evening I borrowed fathers com-puter and booted tails. Let’s see who this MGEL com-pany is.

I found it. A biological engineering company working in the medical research eld. 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 de nitely 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 continued looking into the location but to no avail. So it looks like I’m going to be making another trip. In ltration would be the best way. It was practically a way of life in the Fellowship. Get in and get out without notice. Get the job done silently and awlessly.

Just as I intended I go to the location and nd the en-trance has a guard and is using a biometric entry system. The employees are the usual nerds with pocket protec-tors. 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 grab guards ngerprint pattern from a book, the sentry desk, and even the biometric scanner itself. It just takes time, the guards can’t stay their post inde nately nature will call at some point and that’s when my opportunity presents itself. I keep it up for a week and get quite a bit of intel, names, weekend activities, relationships, shift

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patterns, work area. Thank God for the outgoing and chatty guard he almost did the work for me.

I studied the available data of the employees. Now how to get in. I need to bring a laptop to gather network info once I’m inside.

I have a good pro le of the guard. The night guard is likely best. The one named Peter is scheduled o f Monday and Thursday the poor bastard. I wait around until the guard goes for a piss and shapeshift into him. Then I use the biometric samples I got earlier and I’m in. Who is going to suspect the guard of a security breach.

I had a vision of Jane. She is working with one of the patients. She is trying to insert an IV. Despite the patient being strapped down the needle lacerated the patients neck. I feel intense hunger and see her moving to take the man, then I see she is running as fast as she can out of the tent. Then the vision fades.

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

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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 the guard. 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 oor is empty, 9 to 5 people work here presumably. As-signed 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 worksta-tion. 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 o ces are anyway?

Up to the third oor. Executive suites. O ces and con-ference 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 no-body around and I get through the door no issue. Oh my God, morons. No supernatural shielding on the door and system passwords written down on all the equip-ment. Multiple Vpn tunnels for di ferent department, connection information on a corkboard. A complete

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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. I go gaseous but there is anti-supernatural shielding in place. 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 oor. 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 oor.” “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. Fuck. Good job on faultless in ltration Susan. Every little fail-ure like that could spell disaster. I’ve overestimated my abilities, no matter what power I may have I can’t avoid chance. I completely failed to get the paperwork, I didn’t gather the info I needed so much.

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Note to self, don’t take chances like that. I’m still Susan, whatever I may be I’m not all that yet if ever I will be.

I shapeshift back to myself and head o f an emergency while I’m there.

Well, 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 un-leashed out there.

Hmm, how to do this. I don’t have to be onsite but I need to check the di ferent 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 tra c through a box I control. Kind of a man in the middle. I probably wont get all of the internal tra c but if I get tra c to and from their headquarters that is likely going to be the most likely slam dunk anyway. I’ll need to gure out where to nd a location that has enough bandwidth to handle their tra c in and out reasonably, if I can nd 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 con gure one or more of their internal routers to push all tra c 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 tra c. That might make my head explode

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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 tra c through the tunnel then there would likely be nearly negligible tra c which would make things easier from this end, I won’t need much bandwidth for the redirection. Con guring 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, co fee bar, or wherever else one may go.

Now the rst thing is to nd 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.

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Time to Rock. Get some items for pistol smuggling. Swing by the sporting goods store for rearms cleaning supplies, ammo and the like, then o f 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 com-plete.

OK let get to work redirecting their E-Mail. Turn on the laptop and 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 adminis-tration 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 o ce.

**#traceroute admin.mgel.us**

**traceroute: admin.mgel.us has multiple traceroute to admin.mgel.us (173.194.2**

* **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 \* \* \***

* **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**

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**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 ru es. 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 nd 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**

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* **su root Password:**

**#**

Not like in the movies it’s really boring actually, except for the likely chance of getting caught. No power of mine makes that any less likely. Then there’s prison time, or torture, or worse. These seem likely nasty motherfuckers, I would say losing toenails is high up on the list of likely-hoods. If what I’ve seen so far It’ all but guaranteed they would have deathstone ordinance.

That “su” command escalated me to root from the man-deville account. Mission accomplished. Now I need to check if I can access the internet rewall. The redirection will need to happen there. Secureshell otherwise known as SSH is the one and only way to connect for most ad-ministrative 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 Su-san think, what did we use back in the day. Port scanner, sticky note here, nmap! right, It can read digital signa-tures for an idea of what this thing is. OK let’s give it a whirl.

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**# 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** | **ldp** |
| **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 “of-fensive” tools resident on network servers. I wonder what the deal is here? I need to tread carefully.

What do we got? 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. Refer to 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 some-

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thing up and get caught. I need to create a rule to use in order to redirect tra c 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 ip 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 o cial 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 y out of Obama’s ass this is hitting the front page of any paper! So the search proceeded speci cally for electronic equipment. The general had with him an o cer 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

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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 o f for a co fee and refuse to register out. We go out chasing some Goddamned shade midafternoon just to nd 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.”

Yet again Susan you did a right ne job. Go back to school. I’m rustier than a sewer pipe. I’m taking chances not only with my assignment but with my life. Again I performed an in ltration and only succeeded. I neither got anything setup nor did I get any hard evidence of any-thing. Just passwords. Just another chance to get caught from logging in again. What is the chance of logging in twice safely when the rst time I tripped an alarm? Better think this through better next time.

The military has their way with words. Anyway perhaps 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. Fasci-nating 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 nd out more about that. Maybe the

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rst thing is to nd them physically. What is their as-signment? 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 rst. 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 so-phisticated keyword search if you have the right words it’s easier to pull better stu f out of the muck. I think I will have that bath. I can’t stop thinking about it.

I start getting ready. I shape shift into marine fatigues with full webbing and ruck and strap on a glock. I shape shift a KA-BAR under the other arm. Various little sup-plies I put in the webbing and make it real and ready for an in ltration. I include among other things my phone for photographic media and recording and a really boring brown colour trench coat to conceal the warrior under-neath.

I see a vision of Jane, she is milking her venom into a beaker. She turns around quickly and the general is entering the tent. He is very joyous speaks for a bit then leaves. Jane leaves the tent and enters the nearest patient tent. It housed a few hundred sick. a quarter were healthy already the rest were very much improved. She said, “If you’re listening Susan, and I hope you are, you were right. It had to be me. As soon as my work started producing results, I told the general I didn’t need the venom afterall. The general had me quarantined in the patient tent in

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the presumption I was in league with some remaining red court contingent. He never considered I produced my own venom now. He was satis ed then that I was operating without the venom after a time of quarantine. Of course he gave me a verbal beating about all the time I could have spent nding a way without the venom. The killing would have started all over again if I failed to continue consistent results.”

I decide the best course of action would be to try to stake out or in ltrate the warehouse one more time. Last time it was abandoned so it seems straight forward if there is activity I stake it out if there is not then it seems reasonable noones home I’ll in ltrate. I damn well am going to get it right this time, in and out without a trace, quiet as a mouse.

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 hu-mid 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 out-side the building this time. I put away the cloak, nish my dress with things like putting on the boonie and nishing face paint as well as tying back my hair. I go over to the front edge of the roof and use my supernatural vision to see in the far distance to be able to see the truck assuming it’s coming tonight.

Sometime after midnight I see the lights of a military

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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, ght, relent, and so on. They are tak-ing orders like soldiers and being commanded to ght. 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 scien-tists 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 vampires are obedient. They are taking orders and ghting. There were 2 who broke free but the soldiers present took them down with death-stone weapons. 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 putri cation 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

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well so they are protected.

“How many of the subjects have been able to indepen-dently carry out orders?”

“We have released 6 subjects in the last 2 weeks general,

4 have returned and we have con rmed 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 ght alongside them. Incredible.”

My stomach turned. I’ve heard of monstrous experi-ments 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 ultimately united for the sake of self-preservation at the very least. 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 crea-tures stop what they were doing. The were sni ng the

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air. Like dogs. Some of them climbed the walls ten feet sni ng. 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 re the general and all the softie scientists hit the oor. The general opened re 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 rst 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 re 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 re but he yells, “hold re you morons, there’s a soldier on the roof. You goddamned

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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. O f 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 re!”

I burst straight up through the pile and blast three rounds straight down. 2 exploding skulls, 2 more down.

The general shouts, “hold re! Jesus Christ who is this? 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 re-move 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 o f 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 re on it but it leaped the fence and was gone.

I’m a moron. This happened twice now. A near miss and now I’m caught red handed. Even if I do worm my way out of this I’m going to be marked. It is unlikely

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I’ll be able to nish this mission I’m a made woman. I can’t pretent to be a soldier to complete my mission I will without a doubt be found out and it will be a world of pain for me. If I sneak away I know by my track record I won’t be able to nish this mission without accepting the same fate. I’ll be tortured and likely killed. I don’t even know what my death may do, there is so much mystery about me, the may be greater harm to the world at large that I can’t forsee. I just hope I haven’t started any wars today.

The best I can do at this point is gather everything I can as fast as I can and getting the fuck out, hoping I haven’t pissed in anyone’s corn akes. I’ve caused enough shit. Whatever evidence I’ve got I’ll use and hope it’s enough, I’ll call in the extraction right away and y this place before I end up pissing anyone o f.

The general walked up, “That was some bit of ghting soldier. I don’t remember seeing you before you got ID?” I check my pockets in a fake attempt to nd 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 ne. 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 wait-ing 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

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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 veri able 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 nd me.

I had another vision of Jane, I seen Jill and my thralls with her.

Jane said, “Thank you all so much, it’s getting out of con-trol. I can’t get the warlock tattoo to control my hunger. If I asked I would get killed o f as the only red left. I needed help.”

Jill said, “Susan is beloved of us Jane, we will help you any way we can. We will just have to chain you up at night so you can feel safe to rest. I don’t know what else we can do.

Jane said, “Jill, tell me more about Susan—”

As I walk out I nd myself ambushed by the black court. There’s about 2 dozen maybe more. There aren’t any people around now so I can let rip so not so bad. They

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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! Don’t 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. If I do manage to clear out all these vamps would it set me up for more? 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 aren’t going to forget and that’s 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 get-ting escorted back to the day spa they o fered me.

Trouble was i didn’t 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.

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Light black smoke was drifting o f my body and i was getting real hungry. One of the vampires broke through my esh 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 threw a st before they moved and 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 owed 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 in confusion then prostrated in the same way. 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. Not like in the red court days. I would take o f a vamps head even as it wept. They were incapable of

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feeling. I seen the atrocity and I know. I don’t think they will take it back because I have no idea what tipped them o f. Granted what my instinct did was weird but I would hardly describe it as something majestic. Oh this is not good, not good at all. I’ll play dumb.

“excuse me?”

“you are the long awaited great mother, the one proph-esied to lead the vampire courts to world domination! You are her. You are 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 Susan the Christ of the left hand path. Perhaps I should speak parables. I can’t bring them back to the rectory I don’t think. Their skin is falling o f 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 gure 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”

I had another vision of Jane, I see her on top of a man a second away from making a kill. Her venom is dripping on him and he is writhing in ecstacy. A loud blast from a shotgun and another man drags him away. Jane is thrown 10 feet away with a hole in her chest. She regenerates in a few seconds and I feel the overwhelming hunger. She runs into a patient tent and grabs a fresh test vial. The nurse said, “Hey where you going with that?” and Jane

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ew out the other door into the forest cracking open the vial, drinking the contents, still running.

This is bad. There’s deathstone waiting for me in this. I’m becoming known for being what I do not know. I wonder how bad it is that other creatures should know me better than I know myself. Are they even right? Maybe there will be death awaiting me when they realize I’m not their queen. I accept that what I did by instinct back there was something altogether new, but to call me queen it’s not like mountains crumble before my will. The greatest elders of the red court were gods by right and yet they were certainly not considered kings or queens. If that is so what would a true monarch of the vampire courts be like I wonder. Even the monarch of a single court would be strong. As strong or greater than any current leader but to rule all the courts, it’s scary. I can safely say, it ain’t me. I don’t have that kind of juice, I just don’t, no matter what Spook may say.

The word of the day is survive. They expect a queen, and they are not beyond killing another vampire, especially not one they think is a red court. From what I seen if I don’t carry myself as the queen they would have me be they would consider me a red, then death will come swiftly.

So if they expect a queen, maybe I’ll give a speech on something. A feast perhaps, many mortals gathered for a decadent meal. I can’t control what happens I wish I could. I could abstain perhaps.

Well, tomorrow I start the network redirect to check for useful E-Mail and gather the papers and photos. I’ll also

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start my report. What I have now is damning enough alone but there is no such thing as too much evidence. I start the redirect of network tra c 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 nd 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 in uence them in ways combat can’t. He said try, the worst thing I could do is fail then I’m just back to not being an in uence having lost nothing for trying. Hell that seems ok to me. If only he were right.

I strip cleaned my glock and did that laying down thing again. I like it. Its very comfy. I wish I had deathstone to load it with. Sure there are specialty ammunitions like silver that can work with some supnaturals but nothing as universal and sure as deathstone. Don’t leave home without it.

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 arti-cles. The best i’ve done to date i think and the electronic surveillance is just started.

I see a vision of Jane again, walking back into the en-campment. Her hunger is still barely manageable. People

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are talking about the assault, the victims symptoms and lack of the body of the attacker. People are thinking the red court might not be as dead as they thought. She enters her research tent and begins work.

Time does y. 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.

As I see it, I’ll play the queen and get out fast. I won’t have to be here in San Jose long, then I can head back fast, they will soon forget about me and I won’t make a spectacle of myself I don’t want to be remembered by these damned creatures. Besides there were only maybe two or three dozen of them. Yeah sure that’s quite a lot but maybe they won’t all show up. Maybe there’ll be three show up and shoot the shit I give them some sort of chinese cookie wisdom and I’m gone.

Five, then ten, fucking fty, then fty times fty. The cemetary is crawling with black court. I had no idea there were this many black court in all the planet. They were packed in the cemetary and poured out into the street throwing any nearby mortals into catatonia to ensure they will have no memory of the event. Many of the catatonic were drawn out like a prepared feast and the gore was profound. The smell of putre ed esh was over-whelming. It was like that loaves and shes story in the bible they just kept coming. Verily verily i say unto thee the neighbourhood 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-

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slaved, to lose honour even to the point of being t 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 vam-pire. 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 o fend the dignity of the prey, they are free we are not to bind them this is an o fence to dignity. Protect the prey, just as the Sheppard would lay down his life for his sheep we must also for our own ock 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, “You 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

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honour they have on pain of death. we will be houses, the bloodline families or adopted kin. Clans, organised for each town or mu-nicipality 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 un-der 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 appear-ing like a domino e fect, “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 human rst-born 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 can’t see. I could hear the quiet tele-pathic chatter they were making. I just stood there a few minutes in awe of what i hope to be accomplishing from

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within this vampire society to help people. Help them from within the ranks of the oppressor. My mind started wandering through my ght 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 nally 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 some-thing only to have triggered the catalyst to my own inner transformation into their true mother without my warn-ing. 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 hor-rible acts. I want them to be free to choose how they live and how they hunt. I see them and they have become beautiful to me. Oh fuck me gently that is just so wrong on so many levels.

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As I was about to turn away three gures appeared from out of the cemetary. A thick mist came and one by one they emerged. The rst 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 rst had a cloak and cowl that made him look like the grim reaper minus the scythe. The cloak 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 a long owing robe and his hands were folded together in front of him covered completely by the loose and ample sleeves.

Eurynomous said, “This seemed to be a good oppor-tunity to introduce ourselves. I believe you have already met our brother Leviathan. He is dæmon of water, as I am dæmon of death. My brother Balberith is the dæ-mon of dying and Babeal is dæmon of graves. Our being has intimacy with yours so I found it imperative that we meet.”

I went into a panic. I was able to keep my composure despite feeling like I was having a heart attack. I am not in pleasant company.

I said, “So I met death today. Literally. A person just can’t make that stu f up without having their sanity ques-tioned.”

He said, “Ha! Agreed. We owe you a lot Susan, you ended so much pain and bloodshed.”

I said, “So says dæmon of death? I thought you would

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desire as much death as you could.”

He said, “No. I desire a good death at the appointed time. I desire a balance of the cycle of life and bear sorrow for what took place. I bear sorrow deep in my heart for those who have died. I am part of the life cycle. I try to comfort both the living and the dead upon the death of a being. I help with the transition along with Balberith. Balberith is a companion of the dying and counsel to those who love them. He and I take them gently into the nal journey. Babeal watches over the resting place of those who have taken that road. As he says watching over the vehicle of earthly gods from when they roamed this earth. It means a lot to him, the greatest honour one could have. I certainly am humbled over his reverent dedication. Sadly we are the anthropomorphic personi - cation of what we represent, we need to act through the gods who tap our power or mortals that meditate on us humbly”

I said, “Interesting. I never really looked at it that way.” He said, “It’s the cycle of life, as they say to all things there is a season. We are going to part from you now. I just want to tell you that we are staying close to you as you learn and grow in your new powers. We will help keep you from danger, for as you will soon nd out there is not any right of dæmon to be manifest in the physical world. It’s far too dangerous. Remember it’s your destiny to be manifest here Susan, it is prophesy ful lled, try not to be afraid.”

They turned and reentered the mist at the cemetary gate. I think although I don’t entirely understand what they

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said that it will become important to know I have dæmon brothers looking out for me, and that I’m doing what I’m destined to in being here. How is it dangerous to be in the physical world? I was born here and have not known any other.

One small thing he said, which may be nothing. He said there is no place for dæmon to be manifest in the physical world. Then he tells me it’s my destiny to be manifest here. He seems to be insinuating I am dæmon as well. Coupled with what spook has told me and what they have said it would mean I am the anthropomorphic personi cation of something. I dismissed it though, there is no way. I’m sure it was just a mistake in the wording of what he said. I think somehow he feels close to me and responsible for what I am going through right now. He is a very powerful being so maybe it has to do either with my death or the death of others. I’m thinking if others know the power I seem to possess someone is going to take me down. Maybe someone who seen me here tonight at the cemetary. I think that’s it. This is my life though and I control my destiny, I’ll be careful about using my powers from now on. I’ll stay out of trouble and o f the radar of dangerous power hungry beings who might feel threatened and attempt to take my life. OK so I’m going back to the rectory real quiet like. Every sense of mine was tuned all around me. I didn’t know where or when danger is going to nd me. Vampires can’t be trusted. I just threatened someones plans to have power over this black court. I’m as good as dead now.

I arrive back at the rectory to see a complete skeleton

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standing beside the door. I think I must have jumped 10 feet. My talons were out and I was ready for battle. The skeleton said, “Hello, I am He Who Dances With Wind. Have mercy on your humble servant my queen” He prostrates. I bid him rise again. I’m still not feeling safe.

That shit is so embarrassing. “Are you a skeleton?” “I am a black court vampire”

Suddenly I had trouble breathing. I clacked my talons. “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 civi-lization 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.”

I had unfurled my wings ready to take to the air but then I realized anyone that would intend me harm wouldn’t show up looking this way and certainly wouldn’t speak of himself as being so ancient. These creatures are quite smart, until tonight I thought few of them were left from the slaughter many years ago. Speaking and appearing as he did he would know it would put me ready for battle. I unfurled my wings and retracted my talons, although I am not going to be completely at ease with this creature. I said, “So you are what would be called an ancient vam-pire then.”

I look at the door, then back to him, what the hell. Fa-ther 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?”

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“Susan I’ll be ne.”

“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 at 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. 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 stu f. In particular the mes-sages to and from the main o ce. If they actually used gpg for their con dential email I wouldn’t have been able

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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 gov-

erned by Rome.

The native americans of new york state, the highest el-ders speci cally, 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.

I see a vision of Jane. The man from before that red a shotgun into her is threatening her saying he knows what she is. I feel the hunger she has, and at that moment the fear that assaults her from being discovered caused her to lose control. She moved on the man and took him down hard and fast. Blood was everywhere. The body was badly torn. I felt the familiar ecstatic pain of nal transformation begin in her. She runs as fast as she can into the forest and she is torn apart from the inside by the nal change. Fear has changed into sheer terror because like any of us she has seen this before in other people. They were not themselves anymore. They were, something, else.

I need to get to her now before it’s too late.

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More to come...

If you liked the book so far stay tuned, more chapters will be written and these will be revised.

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