

# DarkWater Falls

---

Raine Monday

Copyright © [Year of First Publication] by [Author or Pen Name]

All rights reserved.

No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the publisher or author, except as permitted by U.S. copyright law.

# Contents

1. Welcome to DarkWater	1
2. The ChadWolf in the fold	9
3. It's Mei	19



# Chapter 1

---

## Welcome to DarkWater

I hitchhiked from the middle of the country, midland Texas, all over our great nation. I'd been to small towns and big cities, burgs, and burrows, villes and dales. You name the town; I'd probably been there, or at least passed through, as I Cris-crossed the country searching for...something.

My Dad and I never saw eye-to-eye on anything. I didn't hate the guy, don't get me wrong, he just never *stepped up* in any way. He'd never been a role model and never gave me any sage advice. Never beat me, never lied, never stole from me. He wasn't a bad guy; he just wasn't—

I dunno something. Does that make any sense? Everyone seems to have a story about their dad; the best I could come up with is he was at least there. He fed us, kept us in clothes, and took us to school. We never went hungry, never were on the street, and I always knew he was either at home or at the Store.

He managed a Safelane Grocery store. It kept him busy stocking, hiring, and firing staff, unloading trucks, whatever. He knew every inch of that store from managing it for the past twenty years.

Hell, he'd even given me a job, my first, when I was fifteen. I bagged groceries, took out the trash, and unloaded box after box after box...you can unload a *lot* of boxes in an eight-hour shift, believe me. And you had another eight-hour shift the next day to look forward to, and guess what the day after? That's right, another eight-hour shift.

To say I couldn't wait to graduate and get the hell out of Midland was, to say the least. I didn't know what I wanted to *do* with my life, but working in a Safelane grocery sure wasn't one of them.

Dad died my senior year. I had just turned 18, so luckily, I hadn't been turned over to CPS, so I'd finished school on my own. The house we lived in all those years was a rental that I couldn't keep paying on, so I packed everything into my backpack and camped out in the woods for the next three months while I finished high school.

After I graduated, I decided to hitchhike. I know that seems dangerous, but hell, you could be shot or hit by a bus or have a heart attack too.



*Sean arrives in DarkWater*

That's how I came to be in DarkWater.

I'd found the name on a map and decided that was my next destination. It was up in the mountains and I decided I'd see what the place was like. I had forty bucks in my pocket after the bus ticket, so I'd have to find a job quickly.

I picked up my backpack and shrugged it on. It had seen better days, but it suited me fine, at least for a little longer. The terrain outside of DarkWater was at least pleasant and cool, which was welcome relief

## DARKWATER FALLS

from the stink of the bus. I think all buses share a common smell of sweat, urine, and dreams long lost and never found.



*First View of Dark Water*

I walked past the convenience store to a set of dank portables where I made use. The bathroom on the bus was horrid, and these were slightly less so. Facilities in general when hitchhiking should be taken advantage of. I also pawed through the trash and found a sandwich still in its wrapper that I saved for later. Never knew when the food, money, or facilities might run out in a strange town in a strange place, so I liked to take advantage when I could.



*The "Facilities"*

The town seemed nice, if quiet. A little too quiet, as if something lurked in the back of the dark streets of DarkWater. I had saved up so many jokes over the bus trip and was dying to try them out on someone. As I made my way through the streets, the smell of pizza beckoned me into its cheesy embrace, and I followed. Rounding a corner, I spied a pizza restaurant and decided a little treat was in order for lasting three days on the uncomfortable bench seat of the diesel-belching bus. Maybe there'd be someone there I could lay my DarkWater joke material on.



*Pizza!*

The waitress was dressed as if she dropped from the nineteen fifties with a red rockabilly hairdo and paisley print flouncy dress. She grinned at me as I entered.

“Well, hey there darlin’, and welcome to Mary-Beth’s pizza!”

“Hey,” I said. Pretty girls always made me feel awkward.

“What can I do ya for?”

I glanced up at the menu illuminated on the wall behind her. Basically, they had pizza, pizza and a drink, pizza and a salad (why waste the time), and pizza with Mary-Beth’s special hot wings.”

“Mary-Beth’s special hot wings?” I said.

“Oooh, yeah honey. It’ll put your mouth on fire, I promise you that.”

“I’ll give the pizza and hot wings a shot,” I said.

“Comin’ right up, darlin’!”

I watched as she turned to prepare the food.



*MaryBeth*

“Don’t think I’ve seen you around these parts,” she said. “What brings you to DarkWater?”

I shrugged. “I thought it sounded interesting on a map.”

Her eyes regarded me intently. “Really? That’s all you did? Saw our little town on a map, liked the name of it and you decided to come here?”

I nodded. “Yep. Took me three days on a bus to get here.”

“Order up!” The cook said, from the back and dinged a little bell on the counter.

“Jesus, Earl, I’m right here. You don’t have to ring that damn thing every time an order comes in. Only if I happen to be away from the counter.”

“Yes, Mary-Beth,” the guy said.

She set the slice of pizza and the wings on the counter. “Want anything to drink with that, honey?”

“Cola if you got it.”

“Cola, root beer, lemon-lime, orange, you name it we probably got it.”

“Sounds good to me,” I said as she came around the counter and set it down.

“Any idea what you want to do here?” Mary-Beth said. “Lookin’ for a job, gonna write the Great American Novel, or are you just gonna lurk in the dark shadows of DarkWater?” She giggled.



*MaryBeth gives advice.*

I gave her a smile. “What do you suggest?”

She looked down at my backpack and smiled. “From the looks of that pack, you been camping out a night or two.”

“Might say that,” I said.

“So you’re gonna need a job right?”

I shrugged. “I don’t suppose forty bucks in my pocket will buy even a night at a hotel.”

She giggled. “Depends on the hotel, here in DarkWater, honey.”

I blinked at that. “Really? They have a hotel here that I could pay for a room with forty bucks?”

“Well, you can stay there for free, actually. But the price is usually a lot more than money, honey.”

I frowned at that. “What do you mean?”

“I mean...” she glanced back to the kitchen and lowered her voice. “DarkWater ain’t your normal small town.”

“It isn’t?” I said, feeling a nervous tremor in my stomach.

She shook her head. “Just remember, *nothing* is as it seems in DarkWater.”

“I don’t follow.”

She moved in close and I could smell her perfume. It was very pungent, and for some reason made me feel a little dizzy.”

“Best thing for you to do, honey, unless you want to be snared in DarkWater forever...”

Something came over her at that moment, something dark, and I felt the air grow cold as the feeling of pins and needles swept over me. Her visage changed too, gone was the fire-red hair, shifting to blue-black to match the color of her eyes. I couldn’t help but notice her teeth had extended into fangs.



*MaryBeth's change.*

“Is to go right back where you came from and move along.”

## Chapter 2

---

# The ChadWolf in the fold

Disturbed and a bit frightened, I jumped up from the table. She shook herself and the red hair, normal eyes, and pasted smile were back.

“Want me to wrap that up for you to go, sweetie?” She said.

“Uh, no thank you,” I replied and darted out the door.

I stared into the window and she waved at me, that grin on her face.

And was that just a hint of fang in the corner of her mouth? Also, when had night fallen? The last I remembered it was late afternoon.

I shook my head and kept walking



I tried not to look back again, but now that I was back outside, it felt like other eyes were watching me and I started to run through the streets, feeling like something was right behind me, something that thirsted for blood, that wanted my soul, that I would never escape from.

Then I realized I'd forgotten the one thing I couldn't forget, my backpack! It was still on the floor of the restaurant.

I stopped running, leaning over to catch my breath. This was stupid. Mary-Beth was simply a waitress, nothing was pursuing me, and no ravening beasts were about to catch me.

I looked up at the sky and all the stars. But that still didn't explain the sky and how dark it was. It felt like midnight, how had it gotten so late?

Looking into the window of the store next to me, I saw it was a comic book store and there was someone at the counter. Should I take a chance and hope he could explain what happened? I really didn't want to lose my backpack; not only did it have my sleeping bag and ground cloth, it had my silver pocket watch my dad had given me.



## DARKWATER FALLS

“Uh, hey b.b.bro. Welcome to DarkWater Comics.” The guy had a heavy surfer patois with a stutter that made me smile. “W.w.what can I d.d.do for you?”

“Um, just browsing I guess,” I said, glancing at the racks as if I had all the time in the world.



“I see, I see. Well, I’m C.h.h.ad. If there’s anything you need just holla, my b.b.brotha.”

“Thanks,” I said, moving back toward the window to see if the waitress slash vampire from the diner was following me.



It appeared she'd gone back to the counter. I couldn't see her in the window anymore, waving her creepy wave. I wondered if she'd found my backpack, and wondered if it was safe.

"See anything you l.l.like?" Chad said from right behind me. I gave a jump, I hadn't heard him approach.

"Ack!" I said. "You startled me!"

"S.s.sorry, I have that effect on people."

"No worries," I laughed, a little nervously. "Do you know the waitress from the restaurant across the way?"



“M.M.M.Mary-Beth?” Chad said.

“Yeah, I think that was her name.”

He shrugged. “Yeah, I suppose. I opened this s.s.store a couple of y.y.years ago and I’ve dropped in a f.f.few times.”

The guy looked at me with wide-open eyes, like he was terribly afraid of something. “Say, man, if ya aren’t gonna b.b.buy anything, I g.g.gotta close.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” I said.

“No w.w.worries, it’s usually o.o.okay but t.t.tonight I...” he immediately began itching his skin. “I f.f.forgot it w.w.was a f.f.full moon!”

I blinked. That was an odd thing to say. But as I was going to open the door, he let out a growl, or a rough yowl, and started pushing me.

“You g.g.gotta g.g.go nowwww!” He said, and on the last word, his eyes shifted and his voice grew deeper as if it belonged in a much larger throat.

Transfixed, I watched as his clothing shredded and his face elongated into a rough snout. His eyes faded to burning orange, and his jaws

opened to slaving teeth. He snarled again, and this time I didn't need to be told twice, I dashed out the door!



I could hear him behind me, chasing me. I ran into the square across the street, leaped over the wrought iron low fencing, and tried to put as many barriers between us as I could. I swept around corners, over tables, and into bushes, trying to get away from him, but the Chadwolf was so fast!



I dashed past an older man walking with a cane, and yelled at him to take cover. He looked at me confused, as I sped past, and then I heard a snarling and a shout as the Chadwolf intercepted the man.

I stopped to turn back and see if there was anything I could do to help but—

The scene was out of my worst nightmares. Blood from the older man had splashed across the street in huge swaths as the Chadwolf feasted on flesh. It spied me again and snarled, which was all the motivation I needed to keep running.

Finally, after trying several doors, I found one that was still open. I almost walked back out, because it was a beauty salon, but I was so tired from running, and from my long trip before that, I thought maybe I could take a breather in one of the waiting room chairs.

“Good evening, Sir, and welcome to Curl up and Dye!”

I blinked as my eyes fell on the woman behind the counter. She was beautiful with her hair caught up in a soft updo, and alabaster skin. She wore a lovely white top with a blue skirt.

“Uh, hello...” I said, wondering if she was going to change into a vampire or werewolf too. Was everyone in Dark Water cursed?

“Do you have an appointment?”

“Uh—” I glanced up at the sign. “No. No. I just got into town.”

She gave me a soft smile. “Looks like you’ve met the welcoming committee.”

I nodded. “If you mean the vampire at the pizza place and the werewolf at the comic book store...”



She gave a soft laugh. “Mmmm, indeed, you have had quite the night!”

I sat down in one of the waiting room chairs, panting as I rubbed the sweat from my face and hair.

“I suppose you’re going to turn out to be a demon or something?”

She gave that soft laugh again. A laugh I realized I really liked hearing.

“Now, do I look like I could possibly be a nasty old demon?”



I shook my head. “No, you don’t look like either of those things.”

“Of course not!” She said, smiling softly again. “Can I get you some water? You look very thirsty.”

I glanced at the nearby water cooler. It had cucumbers floating in it, and there was a pink bottle of something next to it. Condensation beaded the glass, and it looked very inviting.

“Um, I...” The water looked really good. I was tired, thirsty, and frightened of just about anything in this town. The woman appeared very nice, and so far, nothing strange.

“It’s okay, Sean,” her voice had a soft quality I really liked.

I nodded, feeling sleepy as she pressed a cold glass of water into my hand. I lifted it to my lips and drank most of it down in one gulp.

“Easy there!” She said, laughing softly.

“Sorry,” I said, blinking. “I was really thirsty.”



“Well, there’s more of that where it came from, Sean.”

I nodded again. Something was off, not right. I stared at the glass. The water within glowed with a soft pink light, similar to the bottle on the counter. I took another drink.

Feeling strange, I looked at her. She was so lovely. I wanted to do anything I could to make her happy, and to give me one of those small smiles again.

## Chapter 3

---

# It's Mei

“Now,” she said, sitting down in my lap. “What can I do for you, Sean?”

I smiled. She felt warm and nice, and I liked how her hair smelled.

“Your hair is so nice,” I said.

“Isn't it?” She turned it from side to side and I could see how lovely it was. She ran her fingers through my shaved pate. “Don't you just wish you had long hair like mine that you could style like this?”

I laughed at that. “No! Why would I want that?”

She smiled as I took another drink of water. “It's so soft and smells so pretty. Don't you think, Sean?”

I nodded, looking at her.



“You are so pretty,” I said.

“Mhmmm.” She stroked my hair gently, tugging it, playing with it.  
“And you like it don’t you?”

I nodded, staring into her eyes.

“So it’s only natural you’d want beautiful hair too, isn’t that right?”

I nodded. “Yess..wait, no!” That’s crazy.”

“Is it, Sean?”

I frowned at her using my name. When had I given it to her?

“I can tell you like it,” she said.

I nodded again. “Yes, I like it but that doesn’t mean—“

“You *do* need a place to stay, don’t you Sean?”

I frowned. She was right. I did need a place to stay. Which reminded me that I needed to go back and try to get my backpack so I could sleep on my sleeping bag—

“Yes, I have to get my sleeping bag.”

“You left it at Mary-Beth’s, right?”

I nodded, staring into her eyes.



“You can’t go back there, Sean. Mary-Beth has closed the restaurant by now. She’s a very dangerous creature; you’re lucky she let you escape.”

“Let me—“

“Mhmmm, drink your water, sweetie.”

I took another drink. It tasted sooo good, and she refilled it for me.

“You could stay here, Sean. I have an apartment above the salon.”

“You do?”

“Mhmm.”

I thought about that. If she had an apartment and I could crash there for the night, maybe I could get my backpack the next day during the daylight hours.

“And you’d let me sleep there?”

She smiled that small smile I was beginning to adore. “Yes, Sean.”

“I only have, like, thirty bucks in my pocket.”

She smiled, tipping the cup to my greedy lips, and I drank more water. “It would be free, Sean.”

I frowned. “Free?”

“Mhmm. In exchange...of course.”

“In exchange for what?”

She smiled. “Well, I need someone to help me here. Sweep up the hair, and work the counter while I cut hair. You know, someone like that.”

I nodded. Something really didn’t feel right. But every time I tried to pull away, to shake my head and get up, the feeling of her in my arms made me want to stay. Her presence, her perfume, and her laughing blue eyes captivated me and held me. I wanted more of her, to kiss her, and more.

“And...a little bit more.”

“More?” I said. It was like she was reading my mind. I also wanted more, but of her. Did she want more of me too?

“Mhmmm.”



“Like what?” I said. I felt dreamy. Floaty. Kinda giggly.

“I need someone to practice on, silly.”

I frowned. “Practice?”

She nodded and smiled. “Hair, makeup, clothes, styling...the works.”

I glanced outside. The werewolf had run off, but I could still hear howling out there and did not want to go outside.

I thought about myself and the way I looked. I'd kept my hair military short; it was easier, neat, and clean. I didn't have to wash, style, or do anything to it. I never considered growing it out, not since before mom died—

“And you'd ‘practice’ on me?”

She nodded.

“But, I'm a man. And I don't have any hair.”



She kissed me softly, her lips felt nice, and her tongue darted between my teeth to dance with mine. I moaned, shifting her a bit; she was making me aroused.

“That can be changed,” she said.

I smiled. “The man part? Or the hair part?”

“First one—” she kissed me again, deeper this time. “Then the other.”

## DARKWATER FALLS

I wanted to say no. Wanted to get up off the chair and get out of this beauty salon. I wanted to go deep into the woods and never return to DarkWater again.

I liked the feeling of her in my arms. I liked holding her, liked when she gave me that small smile. Loved the soft laugh she gave when I said something funny. She had a slight Asian accent that I thought was so cute, so...

“I don’t even know your name,” I said.

She smiled. “It’s Mei.”

I nodded and touched her soft hair, tugging it away from her face and behind her ear.

Would it be so bad? I could always cut it off again.

“Alright, Mei.”

She smiled. “So you’ll let me play with you?”

I shrugged. “I have nothing better to do. Plus I need to get my backpack from the pizza place tomorrow during the day.”

She giggled and stood up. “Okay! Come with me!” She took my hand and led me into the salon

## Chapter 4

---

# Makeover

She led me to a sink and had me sit in the chair. I still felt dizzy, and as I glanced at myself in the mirror, I was a little shocked to see my hair had grown!

“What in the hell?” I said, stopping to stare at myself.

Mei gave a soft laugh. “It was the water. The gift of DarkWater...it has magic in it.”

I touched my hair. It didn’t feel as soft or nice as Mei’s, but it hung almost to my shoulders. I didn’t see how that was possible!



It was also unruly and thick.  
“But hair just doesn’t grow like that!”

## DARKWATER FALLS

“Oh, come on,” she tugged me to the wash basin. “You agreed!”

“Yeah, but...” I allowed her to guide me to the sink, and I turned around and sat down.

She turned on the water and adjusted it carefully. She grabbed a few items off the shelf.

“There, now lean back, Sean.”

I leaned my head back, and she scooted in behind the sink and started to run the water over my now-longer hair.



She hummed softly as she washed it, working her fingers deep into the roots, then massaging it gently. It felt so nice, and the sound of her soft humming voice, and the warm running water, soon had me drifting to sleep.

Wrapping a towel over my head, she had me sit up, and I know she said something about color and style, but I just nodded my head and drifted back to sleep.

She awoke me a short time later and had me move to another station, where she started to work on my fingernails. I frowned at this

## RAINE MONDAY

because I didn't want anything done to them, but she said something in response, and I just shrugged and said okay.

I mean, I could always file them down. They were just fingernails.



I kept drifting in and out of sleep as she worked, humming that Asian song, her voice so light and lovely it felt so relaxing and nice. I don't think I've ever felt so relaxed; my cares and worries just drifted away as she worked on me.

Whenever I opened my eyes, she would say something nice to me, something that made me smile, and I felt that warm glow in my heart.

I knew I should be resisting more, knew she was doing stuff to me, girl stuff, but for some reason, that was okay.

At some point, she took my hand and led me upstairs. We got into a bed together, and she snuggled up to me, still singing softly. We slept together, deep and restfully.

## DARKWATER FALLS



The next morning I awoke, confused. How had I gotten there? And what was up with whatever was on my head? I could feel the curlers.

I saw Mei sleeping quietly, and some of it came back to me. I'd agreed to let her 'play with me' to let her style my hair—

Which I now apparently had quite a bit more of. That's when I spied my hands, tipped with a long lovely nail on each one.



I felt my face and found it surprisingly smooth, which worried me a little. I had given her ‘permission’ to feminize me, but how far did that extend? Especially in a town like DarkWater? Maybe I should extricate myself and head to the pizza restaurant and see if I could get my backpack before things got too out of hand.

I glanced down at her snoozing softly and felt that warmth that had enveloped my chest the night before. She was so lovely and nice. I both wanted and didn’t want to leave her.

As if in answer, her eyes opened, and she gave me a warm smile, happy to see and be with me, filling my heart with joy.

“Good morning,” she said cheerily.

“Morning,” I said, and I couldn’t help but smile in return.

“I thought you might try to leave....”

I shrugged. “I thought about it, to be honest.”

“But you didn’t?”

I smiled, tapped my roller hair, and gathered her into my arms. “Well, I’d have to do something about this, and I’m not sure exactly what needs to be done.”



She laughed softly at that, then leaned in and kissed me softly. “Well, I am happy to see you, Sean.”

“Hey, by the way. How do you know my name?”

She smiled a soft secret smile. “I have my abilities.”

“I can see that.” I got up off the bed and stretched. “Still, I think I slept better last night than I ever have in my life!”

“Wonderful!” She said. “Let’s eat breakfast, and I’ll do something about your hair. Sound good, Sean?”

I nodded and smiled. “Sounds good, Mei.”

After a breakfast of scrambled eggs and yogurt, Mei gave me some coffee. Usually, I liked my coffee black, but today I needed three spoonfuls of sugar.

“Damn, these nails take some getting used to,” I said, holding the cup carefully and trying to drink. “Did they have to be so long?”

“Longer, the better, Sean.” She laughed softly. “I can file them down today if you’d like.”

I shrugged, “In for a penny, in for a pound, I suppose.”

She nodded. “Well, we need to get you into different clothes.”

## RAINE MONDAY

“What’s wrong with these?”

“They stink!” She said. “I think I have some in your size. “

“Okay.”

“And you need a bath!”

“A bath?” I said. “Really?”

She nodded, grinning at me wide. “Come, Sean, let’s get you out of those stinky clothes and into something more appropriate.”

I soaked in the tub a little while later as Mei cleaned things up. I could hear her still humming softly in the next room as she pulled out clothes and other things for me to wear.



As I soaped my body, I noticed it was softer, smoother, and all my body hair had fallen out. My nipples were more sensitive, but little Sean and everything down south still appeared in working order.

I got out of the tub, and Mei handed me some clothes.

“I can’t wear those!” I said.

“Why?”

“Well, they’re made for women, for one. And for two, I don’t think they’re my size.”

## DARKWATER FALLS

“Just try them on.”

I sighed and took the first item. It was a women’s pump, brown with black stripes. “I know for a fact these are not going to—“

At first, when I tried to put them on my feet, they wouldn’t fit, but when I tried again, they suddenly slipped on. “Well, I’ll be damned.”



The pants also were much smaller around the waist than I was. But I shrugged, and...sure enough. As I slipped the pants around my thighs, things *adjusted* somehow, and they fit perfectly. The same for the top, which was a long-sleeved, midriff-bearing brown knit.

“How do I look?”

“Smashing!” She said, grinning. “Let’s go take your hair out.”



I sighed and followed her downstairs back into the salon. She clicked her tongue as she stared into the mirror at me.

“Before we take out your hair, I think we need to clean up these eyebrows.”

I shrugged and nodded, and she took out two pieces of thread and spread them over my brows. Within a few moments, I felt a sting.

“Ow!” I said.

“Oh, don’t be, baby.” She grinned at me as she threaded several more lashes out of the way. I wondered if the army could use this as a torture technique, I sure would have spilled my guts about anything to get the burning, tweezing, painful stings to stop.

After what felt like several hours, but was probably only forty minutes, she was done.

## DARKWATER FALLS



I sighed, staring at my arched brows in the mirror. Those were going to take a lot longer to grow out, and people would definitely know I'd been dressing in women's clothing. I wondered how long it would take.

She began pulling the curlers out one by one, and I saw my hair had grown even longer overnight. She had also lightened it to a dark blonde, and I couldn't believe the look she was creating.

As she started to pin parts of my hair up, I realized she was creating the same style on me that she wore, and I felt a strange little thrill inside me as I saw it unfold.



“How do you like it?” She said after she had pinned the last curl back and smiled.

“It’s...wow,” I said, touching it. “So soft!”

“Yes, you’ll have a different hair care regimen from now on.”

“So, can I get up now?”

She tut-tutted. “Those eyes don’t work with your hair color.”

“What do you mean?”

“Too dark. We need a lighter color.”

“But you can’t change my....”

As I looked into the mirror, somehow, I felt the taste of the water from the night before again.

As I watched, my eyes shifted from dog-shit brown to light gray.

“Oh my God,” I said as they faded into their new color. The world looked a bit different now, lighter, and I could see more colors.

## DARKWATER FALLS



“There,” she said softly, and she sounded tired.

“Are you okay?” I said.

“Yes, almost done. Doing things like that takes energy, but you needed better eyes.”

I nodded as she took out her makeup and started to work.

First, she worked on my eyes, lengthening my lashes and adding eye shadow and eyeliner. Then she worked on my face, smoothing things out with foundation, blush, and concealer and patting it with powder. She dressed my lips carefully and had me blot.



After it was over, I didn't recognize myself in the mirror.

"Jesus, I think I might be in love with myself," I said, staring.

I was so preoccupied with looking at my face that I hadn't noticed that Mei's face and hair had changed, also. She looked older as if she'd aged over the last hour or two she'd been working on me, with her hair almost completely gray and deep lines etched in her face around her eyes and mouth.

"Um, Mei?"

"Hm?" She said in a soft, scratchy voice.

"You've aged."

"Oh!" She glanced up into the mirror. "Yes, well...I was a bit focused on you there for a while. Don't worry, Sean, I will return to normal soon."

"Okay."

"But I think I might lay down for a bit. Can you watch things here while I close my eyes?"

"Uh, sure," I said. "But what if a customer comes in."

## DARKWATER FALLS

She smiled softly. “Well, up to you. If it’s something easy, you might be able to do; then you have my permission. If it’s something more advanced, please let them know the stylist is out of the salon for now and will return in the morning.”

“Sounds good.”



“There’s jewelry over on that counter if you’d like to try some on. And I encourage you to keep experimenting.”

“Uh, I’m afraid I’ll wreck all your hard work!”

She laughed softly. “Yes, well, I had good material to work with. You are a good person, Sean.”

“So are you,” I replied. *I think*. I didn’t say the last part. She did seem to be a genuinely nice person.

She leaned up and gave me a soft kiss. I kissed her back, feeling the sense of warmth again in my heart.

“Sleep well,” I said.

“Have fun with your new outlook!” She said in return and left to walk up the stairs.

RAINE MONDAY



## Chapter 5

---

# The Pizza Palaver

I went to the front counter and looked for something to do. There were a lot of interesting magazines and catalogs of different hair-styles, colors, makeup techniques, and nail patterns. Finding a sudden interest in these, I started reading them and learning what I could.

A few customers came in and I was able to help them purchase beauty items, devices, and other supplies. The point of sale was reasonably easy to use, and I quickly got used to punching in the sale and handing back change. I'd worked many jobs in retail before and this was basically no different.

A few appointments had to be turned away. I definitely didn't feel like I could work with anyone's hair, makeup, or nails, so I told them the stylist would be back tomorrow but could I interest them in the latest shampoo that was 25% off today only?

I briefly wondered if any of the people who visited the salon were supernatural beings like Chad or Mary Beth. I kept glancing across the square to see if Mary Beth ever came out so I could maybe sneak in and get my backpack. At this point, I didn't think I could up and leave Mei without at least a goodbye...but I definitely wanted my backpack.

Morning turned to afternoon, and I considered locking up and going to the pizza parlor. I wondered if Mei would get up soon, but I didn't want to disturb her. Did vampires work during the day, or was it a night shift thing?

I did raid the jewelry counter after reading an article on ear piercing. I found Mei's piercing gun and decided to try it out on myself.

In short order, I had two gold studs in my ears, that looked at least acceptable.

## RAINE MONDAY



After trying on different necklaces and other accessories I settled on a gold necklace that somewhat matched the studs. After looking at myself in the mirror for a bit, I still felt like a dude wearing lipstick and wondered just what the hell I was doing there.

I decided to try to get my backpack. I hadn't seen Mary-Beth go in or out of the Pizza Parlor all day, so I hoped she wasn't working. If she was, would she even recognize me with all the changes I'd been through?

I walked outside and down the sidewalk. I didn't realize how *loud* heels could be when a larger person is wearing them. They clicked dramatically down the city streets as I made my way over. I'd decided even if Mary-Beth was there, I'd still try to get her to give it back to me, and assume I had changed enough she wouldn't truly recognize me.

Walking in heels was a new experience. I had to sway my hips back and forth in order to keep balance. It took some getting used to, but I think I pulled it off without looking too masculine.

## DARKWATER FALLS



Never thought I'd see the day when I was *trying* to walk like a woman. If my former high school friends could see me now, they'd lose their minds.

I made it to the restaurant and didn't see Mary-Beth anywhere inside. The cook, Gus, was working the counter and the grill. I walked in, hoping the backpack would be where I had left it, but no such luck.

I strode up to the counter.

"Well, young lady, what can I get for you?"

## RAINE MONDAY



I felt myself blush at the ‘young lady’ part. “Umm, my ah...friend came in yesterday and left his, ah...backpack.”

“Oh, yes! He ran out of here in such a hurry it was like he’d seen a ghost!”

I cleared my throat. Sure as hell wasn’t a ghost, but I did see something. “Can I get it for him? He’s real worried about some of the items. Do you mind if I take it to him?”

Gus frowned a bit. “Hmm, why can’t he come pick it up himself?”

“He had to leave town in a hurry. Parent thing, I guess.”

The older man nodded. “I see, I see. Well, it’s in the back.”

I waited to see if he was going to get it. When he didn’t I frowned. “Um, can you go get it and bring it to me?”

“Yeah, I don’t think that’s a good idea.” He shook his head. “Might be something valuable inside it. If your friend really wants it, he can come to get it himself.”

I sighed. Best to just tell him and face the consequences.

“Look, I was the guy from yesterday. I’ve come to pick up my backpack.”

## DARKWATER FALLS



Gus's eyes widened. "Oh, my God. You? That can't possibly be, right?"

I nodded. "I, ah..."

"You got caught in the salon, is what you did."

"Yeah, I suppose. But I'm just doing this to help—"

"That's what Mei told you, is it?" He sighed. "Listen, son, you have to get out of this town. Being at that salon...well, it changes a person."

I glanced down. "Hah, yeah, I know what you mean."

"No, son, you don't. That's a powerful reality bender over there. She will have you folded into so many different versions of yourself you won't know your ass from origami."

I nodded. "Can I get my backpack so I can leave this town?"

"Well, well, well," another voice said, one I had hoped never to hear again. "What have we here?"

Through the door came Mary-Beth the vampire. She wore the same outfit from yesterday, a plaid dress with her hair bound up with a bandanna.

"All I want is my backpack," I said.



“You hear that, Gus? She wants her backpack!”

I sighed. “I’m not a she...”

“Hey, looks like a duck, shits like a duck—“ Gus said.

“Right?” Mary-Beth responded.

“If you could please give me my backpack, I’ll be on my way.”

“Oh, darlin’, you should see your face. You’re practically peeing in your panties right now, ain’t ya?”

I was trembling. I don’t think I’d ever been so scared in my life.

“Looks like she got caught over at Curl-Up-And-Dye, doesn’t it Gus?”

“Appears so,” Gus replied.

“Look, are you going to give me my backpack or—“

I paused, not knowing how to finish that sentence. Usually, I’d go to the police, but would the police even show up in this town? A man got eaten on the sidewalk yesterday and no one even lifted a finger. I was starting to suspect DarkWater Falls was *not* the place for law and order.

## DARKWATER FALLS

“Go on and finish that statement, honey,” Mary-Beth said. “Or what, exactly, are you going to do?”

I suddenly started doing the one thing I shouldn't have done, the one thing I've *never* done in such a circumstance...

I burst into tears.



## Chapter 6

---

# Run, Girl, Run!

“Aw,” the vampire said with what sounded like mock sincerity. “Look at the poor thing.”

I shook my head, trying to get ahold of myself. I hadn’t cried since I was a little kid, and even then it was when I busted my arm falling out of a tree. What the hell was wrong with me?

“She got you so fulla girlmones you don’t even know who you are anymore.”

“I just want my stuff b.b.back!” I said. “Please?”

“I love it when they beg. Don’t you, Gus?”

“Music to my ears.”

“How are we on stock?” Mary-Beth said in a serious voice.

“Chock full. That comic book kid been keeping us in business.”

“Plenty of blood too?”

“Twenty-Four packets.”

She sighed. “Still less than 24 hours. Catch and release?”

“Up to you, MB.”

She looked up at me. “Sugar, I’m going to give you back your backpack. But then I want you to run, not walk, your ass out of Dark Water Falls. You hear me now?”

I nodded, wiping my eyes.

“I see you so much as turn around, I’ll send the Chad Wolf after you. You saw the carnage from last night, didn’t ya?”

I nodded, shivering.

“That’s what I thought. I knew you were connected somehow.”

Mary-Beth walked back into the kitchen and disappeared for a bit.

“Them girlmones gonna do a number on you, kid.” Gus started wiping the counter. “You only just started on that transform.”

“What?”

“You don’t even know, do you.”

## DARKWATER FALLS

“Know what?”

“Kid, you’re gonna be needin’ tampons before long.”

“What? It’s just makeup and—“

“Oh, no. What Mei did was change your entire body chemistry. You feel your nutsack lately?”



“What?” I stammered.

“You’re nutsack, kid. Reach down and give it a tug.”

Confused I did as he mentioned, trying to be discreet.

I didn’t feel anything. Little Sean was there, of course, right where it should be but my testicles had pulled up into my body or something. I couldn’t feel them anywhere.

“What the hell?” I said.

“They’re ovaries now.”

“Wait, what? She never said—“

“You starting to get the gist of what can happen to you in this town, kid? You’re lucky Mary-Beth is in a good mood.”

“But I...she was only supposed to play with me, and I was going to go back to how I was!”

## RAINE MONDAY

“Sorry, kid, but you’re really getting off lucky. At least you’re still human.”

“You’re telling me I’m turning into a girl?”

“Here you go!” Mary-Beth said, setting my backpack down with a thump. It was heavy but she’d lifted it with one hand like it was nothing.



“Thank you,” I said, taking it and shrugging it on. It felt *much* heavier than it had the day before.

“Like Gus said, sugar, you caught me in a good mood today. But don’t forget what I told you, I wanna see them heels *running* your way out of town. Do not pass go, do not collect a million dollars, you hear me?”

“But my clothes are at the salon—“

“Babygirl, did I stutter?”

I shook my head, wiping my tears.

“You just chalk your lost manhood up to poor decisions. If you’d listened to me yesterday, you might still have it.”

I nodded.

## DARKWATER FALLS

“You could lose a *lot* more before sundown here in DarkWater Falls. We have it all here; zombies, werewolves, vampires, demons, shifters of every type and flavor.”

“Really?”

“And if you don’t leave you’ll be next on the menu. You’d already *be* there if we weren’t plum full up right now. That don’t mean other restaurants in town don’t need a menu item you might be able to provide, especially since you’re becoming more succulent with every passing minute.”

I nodded and shivered, making my way to the door.

“Now *run!*” she said.

“Run!” Gus said.

I ran.



Running in heels is not fun. I stopped briefly to slip off the things, but I heard a screech from behind me and decided not to risk it. I sped down the sidewalk, trying to keep my balance and make it out of town.

I passed the comic-book store, the salon, and on down the street, I ran. I thought about Mei and wondered if she had risen from her nap and if she missed me. I hated to leave without saying goodbye, but she

## RAINE MONDAY

had to know the kind of town this was and why I needed to make a hasty exit.

I was passing an old church when I felt the cramps hit, like someone had kicked me in the balls.

I fell to my knees, moaning in pain. It radiated up from my groin deep into my pelvis and I felt like I was going to be sick, have to use the restroom or both.



I moaned, writhing, needing to find a restroom but unable to get up off the sidewalk. I felt like everything inside was turning to liquid.

## DARKWATER FALLS



Deep guttural chanting came from within the church, and I could see there was some kind of hole in the floor?

I managed to stagger past the church to the service station next door.

“Can I help you?” The service station attendant said?

“May I use your restroom?” I said, holding my stomach and trying not to lose it all over the cement.

“Customers only,” he said.

I rolled my eyes and grabbed a candy bar from the display.

## RAINE MONDAY

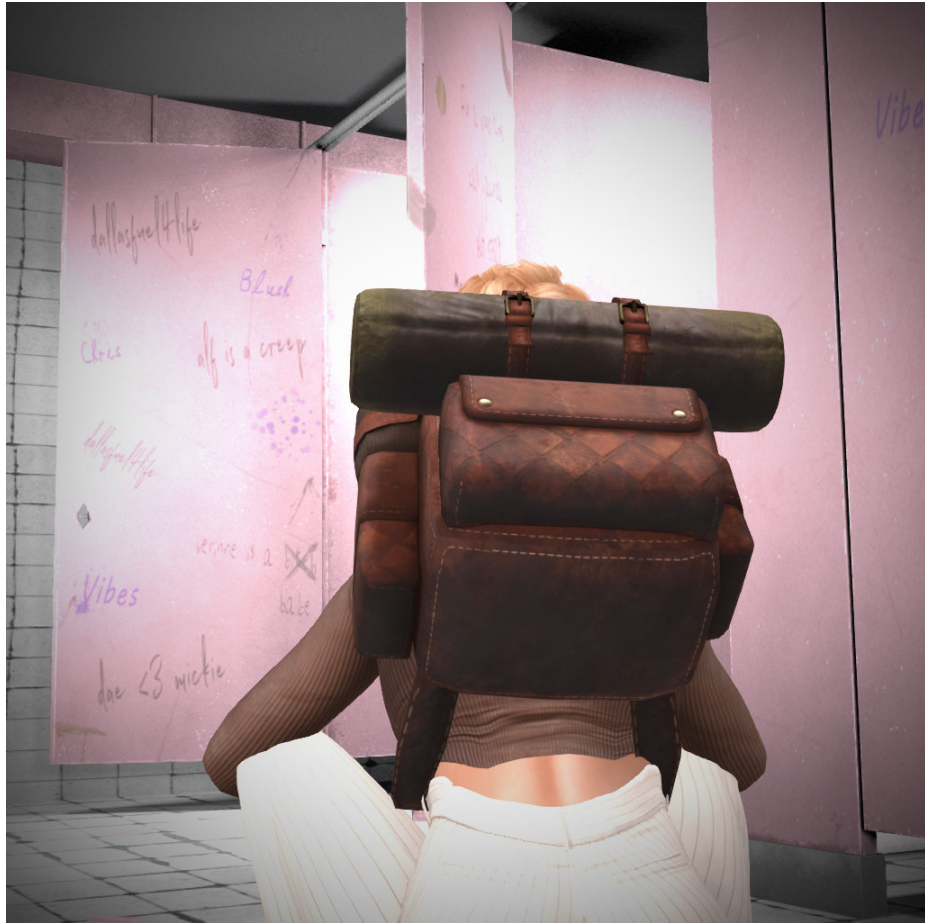


He rang me up on an ancient cash register, then handed me the keys to the ladies' room.

"Men's...ah, never mind," I said, making my way to the rear of the station and opening the ladies' room door.

Halfway into the restroom, I doubled over again and had to stop. I'd never felt such pain in my life, it was an intense burning sensation from deep in my belly. I moaned and crouch-walked into the stall.

## DARKWATER FALLS



After expelling everything in my guts from both ends, I was dizzy and was seeing spots in my vision. The pain radiated from everywhere and I there was nothing else I could do other than hang off the side of the dirty toilet and try to stay conscious.

Sweat rolled off my forehead and I felt pins and needs coming from all parts of my body. Moaning and gasping, I tried to get ahold of myself, but the pain and nausea continued for what felt like hours.

Time and again I had to relieve myself. I heard women coming in and some of them even expressed some concern but I waved them all away, embarrassed to be in the ladies' room in the first place and under such a physical condition.

## RAINE MONDAY



After a long while, I finally started to feel a bit better. I was able to stand and clean myself up a bit. I knew my body had shifted, because when I looked into the mirror, my face had altered under the makeup. The lines were softer, less angular, and my backpack actually felt like it was going to slide off.

## DARKWATER FALLS



When I grabbed my backpack straps, I noticed something else had changed...well, two somethings...

## RAINE MONDAY



They bobbed on my chest with every step, and I kept painfully pinching them in the backpack straps. I also had a strong urge to fix my hair back as it was, but I was so exhausted, I didn't want to fool around with it.

What I needed was a change of clothes. I dug through my backpack and found a cleanish shirt and a pair of pants. I tried them on, but they were huge on me, and I couldn't get them to sit right, so I put the women's clothes back on.

I dropped the key off back at the counter, and continued my way out of town. I felt bad for leaving Mei without saying goodbye, and the farther I walked, the worse I felt.

## Chapter 7

---

# DarkWater Motel

Struggling to stay awake, I staggered down the road toward the city limits.



## RAINE MONDAY

The tunnel that led through the mountain was closed. Sighing, I tried to look through the tunnel, but all I could see was darkness. I flicked on my flashlight, but could only see a few feet. I had no idea why the tunnel was closed, and I wondered what it might mean for a guy alone on the road with night fast approaching near DarkWater Falls.

Backtracking a bit, I decided to pitch a tent, but there wasn't a decent area back from the road I could camp. A neon sign beckoned in the distance, advertising a motel with vacancies if it was to be believed.

I didn't really have enough money for a hotel room, but I remembered what someone had said about motels here. Something about being for free?

Sighing, I made my way to the office. It wouldn't hurt to at least ask what the rates were.



I went into the office and a young woman was slamming her hands down on a computer keyboard.

“Ooh, this damn thing!”

“That’s about how I feel about most technological items,” I said.

## DARKWATER FALLS

“Oh!” She looked up at me. “So sorry. Welcome to DarkWater Falls Motel. How can I help you?”

I smiled. “I’m just inquiring about your rates for tonight.”

She sighed, hitting the side of her monitor. “Well, usually I’d say it was eighty-five dollars...

“But not tonight?”

She banged it again. “Tonight, I can’t get my damn computer to work.”



“Well, I know a thing or two about computers,” I said. “If I made it work, could I get a room comped for tonight?”

“Hell, if you can make this thing work, I’ll comp it for a *week!*”

“Deal!” I said.

She smiled, and opened the office door.

“So what’s it doing?”

“Nothing!” The woman said. “Absolutely nothing at all.”

I tried to move the mouse, which was frozen on the screen. I hit `ctrl>opt>delete` and the option manager window spawned open after a few moments.

## RAINE MONDAY

I saw a few unresponsive programs and exited them, then ran a disk scan from the command line. After that was completed, I rebooted the computer.

After the chime, she logged in.

“It works!” She said, happily. “Oh, my God, you have no idea how frustrated I’ve been!”

“Oh, I have some idea.” I chuckled.



“My name is Joyce, by the way.”

“Sean,” I said and held out my hand.

“Oh my God, are you Trans?”

I smiled softly, my face flushing.

“That’s a horrible thing to say, isn’t it? You don’t have to answer, I apologize.”

“It’s okay. And..well, that’s why I need a room. Apparently, I’m in transition right now.”

“Ahh, you met Mei, then.”

I nodded. “Seems like everyone knows about her.”

“Yeah, she has a thing. We all do.”

“Does that mean you want to feast on my flesh, drink my blood, or consume my soul?”

She grinned at me. “No, nothing like that. But this hotel is cursed.”

“Damn, that’s what I was afraid of.”

“Yeah...ghosts, spirits, you name it, we got it. They’ve been quiet lately, but no one wants to stay here.”

“I’m surprised you’re still managing it.”

“They’re relatively harmless,” she said.

“Relatively?”

She nodded. “Yeah, most of them are just poltergeists, but Wanda...well.”

“Not your friendly neighborhood ghost?”

“Um, no.”

“Gotcha. So if I stay here, I risk running into the ghost named Wanda.”

Joyce nodded. “But she’s not terrible. I mean...”

This time her face flushed a bit.

“What happens?”

“Well, she sorta...*possesses* you for a time. She doesn’t do anything bad, but she likes to...”

“Likes to what?”

“Well, have sex.”

“Ahh...”

“She never possesses male bodies, but I’m not sure what she’d do with a trans person, which is why I got excited.”

“Does she keep the bodies she possesses?”

“No, it’s usually only for twenty-four hours.”

I sighed. “Well, fore-warned is fore-armed.”

“So you’ll take the room?”

I shrugged. “Why not? Beats sleeping in a tent in the woods.”

“Great!” She said, grinning. “This makes me really happy, Sean. I haven’t had someone actually stay here in weeks!”

“Well, thank you for telling me about the curse.”

“Yeah, I usually don’t do that for newcomers. But since you fixed my computer, I thought it only fair.”

I nodded as she handed me the key.

“You know, you could have quite the business here in DarkWater as an IT person.”

“Think so?”

“I *know* so. The last IT guy we had in town got annihilated by a Cthulhuan horror.”

I shivered at that. “Good to know.”

She smiled. “Say, you wanna get cleaned up then head over to the diner—”

“I’ve already had enough of Mary-Beth, too. She told me to get out of town, but the road is closed.”

“Yeah, the tunnel is flooded *again*.”

“I wondered what had happened. Guess I’ll have to try to go over the mountain.”

“Yeah, might not wanna do that either. There’s trolls.”

I rolled my eyes. ‘Dammit!’

“Look, when I said, ‘diner’ I didn’t actually mean Mary-Beth’s. By the way, her bark is worse than her bite, if you know what I mean.”

I sighed. “I wondered that.”

“Anyway, go put your stuff in the room, and meet me at the diner across the parking lot, Asmore’s. I just have to lock up here.”

“Are they going to be putting *me* on the menu?”

She laughed at that. “Not if you’re with me, honey.”

I thought about Mei, and not saying goodbye...but I was also tired, and ravenously hungry. “Sure, we can do that. But I’m exhausted, so may not be good company.”

“Don’t worry, baby,” she said, walking me to the door. “I’m just happy we’ve met.”

I smiled. “Say, do you happen to have any clothes around that I might be able to fit? My um...boy clothes, don’t fit anymore.”

She grinned at me. “We have an entire lost and found section, honey. People tend to leave this place in a hurry and leave everything behind! I’ll bring some stuff over to your room.”

“Sounds good.”

And as I made my way to room 213 in the DarkWater Motel. I sincerely hoped my luck had changed.

## Chapter 8

---

# Asmore's Diner

An hour later, I was dressed in a lovely fur coat, blue tank top, and sexy leather pants with matching black ankle boots.



## RAINE MONDAY

I realized, for the first time, I didn't look like a guy dressing in women's clothes, but an actual woman.

Asmore's was literally across the parking lot, and Joyce sat in one of the booths near the window.

"Wow, don't you look smexy!" she said, as I scooted into the booth.

"Thanks, you were right; those pants did fit."



"Girl, I got all kinda things up in that lost and found. Just let me know if there's anything you want to try on or wear, and we'll likely have it in multiple colors. I've been running a side business sellin' them things online."

I sighed at her use of 'Girl.' It was time to start getting used to it; my identity was changing, whether I liked it or not.

The waitress wore a pink uniform and set our placemats before us.

"Hey, Joyce!" She said, popping a big piece of gum. "Who's your pretty friend?"

"Hey, Rose," Joyce said. "This is Sean. He's our new IT guy at the hotel."

"Welcome to DarkWater Falls, Sean!"

"Uh, thanks, I guess," I said.

## DARKWATER FALLS



“You don’t sound too thrilled,” Rose said.

“Yeah, it’s been a bit of a rollercoaster.”

“It can be like that at first,” she said. “But then you get used to it and realize it’s really just hell on earth!”

“Ha ha, Rose.”

“At least you’re not trying to put me on the menu,” I said. The pizza place—

“Mary-Beth is a bitch,” Rose said. “But her bark is—”

“Worse than her bite!” We all said at the same time, then laughed.

“Exactly.”

“So, I know the hotel is cursed,” I said. “What’s up with this restaurant? Are you a vampire also?”

“Nothing so dramatic,” Rose said. “We’re just a diner like every other diner you’ve ever been to.”

“But—” Joyce said.

Rose glanced at her, and Joyce gave a brief nod.

“But yeah, I take it you drank the water at Curl-Up-and-Dye?”

I glanced down at my budding breasts and shook out my long blonde hair. “Yeah.”

“So, all establishments in DarkWater have special *water*. It kinda goes with the name, ya know?”

I nodded, frowning in confusion.

“So, like you drank the water at the salon. She told you, you’d be her shampoo curl, or stylist or something, right?”

I nodded.

“So we have green water here. What color is the water at the hotel?”

“Blue,” Joyce said.

“Joyce drank the blue water when she first got here. It’s why she’s relegated to the hotel. She can’t work anywhere else, and if she tries to leave DarkWater, she’ll always return to the hotel. She’s stuck there until someone else drinks the water.”

“Wait.” I paused, holding my hands up. “So because I drank the water at the salon....”

“That’s your station.” Rose ran her fingers through her hair. I noticed it was getting split, and she needed a deep conditioning treatment. *How the hell did I know that?*

“You’re starting to catch on.”

“So, I have to return to the salon and work there?”

Both the ladies nodded.

“But I’m leaving DarkWater! The only reason I’m here is because—“

“Because the tunnel is flooded,” they both said in unison, then giggled.

“So I can’t leave?”

They both shook their head sadly. “Believe me, honey; we’ve all tried,” Joyce said.

“But you’re letting me stay at the hotel!” I said. “We even had a deal!”

“You can stay as long as you’d like, baby.” Joyce said. “And if you can figure out a way to get out of DarkWater Falls, let us know, wouldya?”

I felt myself wanting to cry again. Was I really trapped here? The waitress set to water glasses in front of us, and I *almost* took a sip, then glanced up at her.

“Just water, honey. You’ve already received the gift of DarkWater.”

I sighed, and drank some.

“So, I don’t get it,” I said. “You said the curse here at this diner was different.”

She nodded. “Owner is a demon. He’s got a rather large hellgate under the supply room. Same as the church.”

Joyce nodded. “Rose, I want the special.”

“And for you, honey?” The waitress said, looking at me.

“Um...whatever she’s having.”

“Two specials, coming right up!”

I stared at the placemat in front of me. It was all too much. I felt like crying again.

## DARKWATER FALLS

“It’s a lot to take in” Joyce said, putting her hand on mine.

“Yeah.”

“It’s not like you won’t have friends, though.”

I looked up at her, tears brimming in my eyes. “Until Mary-Beth or the Chadwolf make me a blood bag?”

“Listen, I know there’s some scary things in DarkWater, but there’s ways of staying under the radar, you know?”

“How?”

She shrugged. “All the creatures here have to offer you a choice. They won’t just indiscriminately slaughter you, unless you make the wrong choice.”

“Like Mary-Beth telling me to get out of town?”

She nodded. “She could have caught you with the water from the diner and either turned you, fed on you, or added you to their stock. She didn’t do that. She told you to get, while the going was good.”

“If I didn’t have the cramps, I might have made it.”

“Yeah, a tg transition is rough on the body.”

Rose brought us two cheeseburgers and fries. They looked and smelled amazing.



## RAINE MONDAY

I suddenly found I was ravenous, and began eating quickly, wolfing down the burger and fries in almost no time.

“I’m going through a similar transformation that’s equally disturbing,” Diana said.

“Oh?” I said, munching on a French fry.

“Dominic from DWF General is turning me.”

“Turning you into what?” I said.

She smiled. “I’ll be part of the vampire faction.”

I sighed. “Aww, and we were having such fun.”

She took a small bite of her burger, then winced. “We can still be friends, but dead meat no longer appeals to me.

“How much...” I stopped myself. It didn’t seem polite to continue.



“I’m almost complete. He’ll finish me tomorrow night.” She replied to my unspoken comment.

I nodded, watching her carefully.

“Don’t be afraid; like I said, I’m still partly human.”

“You seem kind of excited.”

She nodded, rubbing her neck. “Dominic is a powerful man. To have him as my liege will be so yummy!”

## DARKWATER FALLS

I nodded again, wishing for the umpteenth time I could leave this crazy place.

“So what’s it like?” I said.

She shrugged. “Well, I’ve received two treatments so far—only one more to go.”

I nodded, listening.

“I can hear better; my vision has cleared up. I have zero aches and pains, and my strength has increased tenfold. I can lift *both* trashcans behind the hotel, and they’re full! I love the feeling of the power, the strength, and the clarity it’s giving me.”

“All at the price of your soul,” I said, munching some fries.

“Who hasn’t bargained their soul, though?” She tried to eat a fry but stuck out her tongue and set it back on the plate. “We work for a business, a government, an agency. In many ways, they own us just as deeply.”

“Won’t you miss the sun?” I said.

She shrugged. “Yeah, that’s about the worst part. I thought the worst would be drinking blood, but...”

“But now you don’t mind?”

Her eyes lit up briefly with an inner fire. “God, no. I crave it now, but I’m trying to be civil about it and only drink what I can get at the hospital. Until tonight, I could still eat human food, but apparently, I’ve even crossed that boundary.”

“I guess I don’t see the attraction. Won’t you be sad to become a monster?”

“I’ll only be feral for a couple of days. After that, I should have some control. It won’t be too bad.”

“I see.”

“There are five factions in Darkwater, Sean. Vampires, Werewolves, Witches, Demons, and Ghouls.”

“And I guess I’m what, food?”

She shrugged. “You don’t have to be.”

“Is Mei considered a witch?”

She nodded. “Potent reality blender. There are different types of witches, just as there are different kinds of vampires, demons, and werewolves.”

“Oh my,” I said.

She chuckled at that.

“So, what kind of vampire will you be?”

“There’s Asps, Adders, Rattlesnakes, and Cobras. I’ll be part of the Cobra colony. Dominic is the leader.”

“I see.”

“Do you think you’ll be a witch like Mei?”

I sighed and shrugged, feeling very tired. “I don’t know. I want just to be me.”

RAINE MONDAY

“You’ll need to align yourself soon, Sean. Otherwise, you’ll be aligned, or ingested, against your will.”

“Will there be anything else?” Rose said, returning.

“No,” Joyce handed her some bills. “Keep the change, gorgeous.”

“Aww, thanks!”

Joyce and I walked back to the hotel. Night had fallen, and I could hear soft moaning from one of the rooms surrounding us.

“Guess one of the ghosts is active.”

Joyce nodded.

“Think Wanda will be around?”

She patted me on the arm. “Oh, I’m sure of it, baby.”

I sighed, not liking her tone of voice.

As I returned to the room, past the doorway of the moaning ghost, I realized I didn’t like it at all.

## Chapter 9

---

# Wanda and The Demon

**B**y the time I got in bed, with the covers over me, I was so tired, I just didn't care about ghosts, goblins, ghouls, gnomes, or who the heck cared what else.

I fell asleep, and before I knew it, I was awake again, and it was morning.

Apparently, the ghosts had let me be. I rubbed my face, and walked into the bathroom.

Staring into my changed visage, I was happy to see there hadn't been any more progress. In fact, I needed a shave. My hair had grown a bit and looked like it was from a beach commercial, and my eyes were the color of the sky on a cloudless day at that same beach, but the rest of me looked about the same as the night before. My breasts hadn't developed any more, my little Sean was where it was supposed to be and I hadn't lost any more height.



Maybe this magic thing, whatever they'd been talking about, perhaps I could get away from it? I decided to shower and see if I could find a way over the mountain. The water felt amazing on my sensitive skin. I soaped myself from head to toe, then used the complimentary razor the hotel provided and shaved my legs, arms, and face.

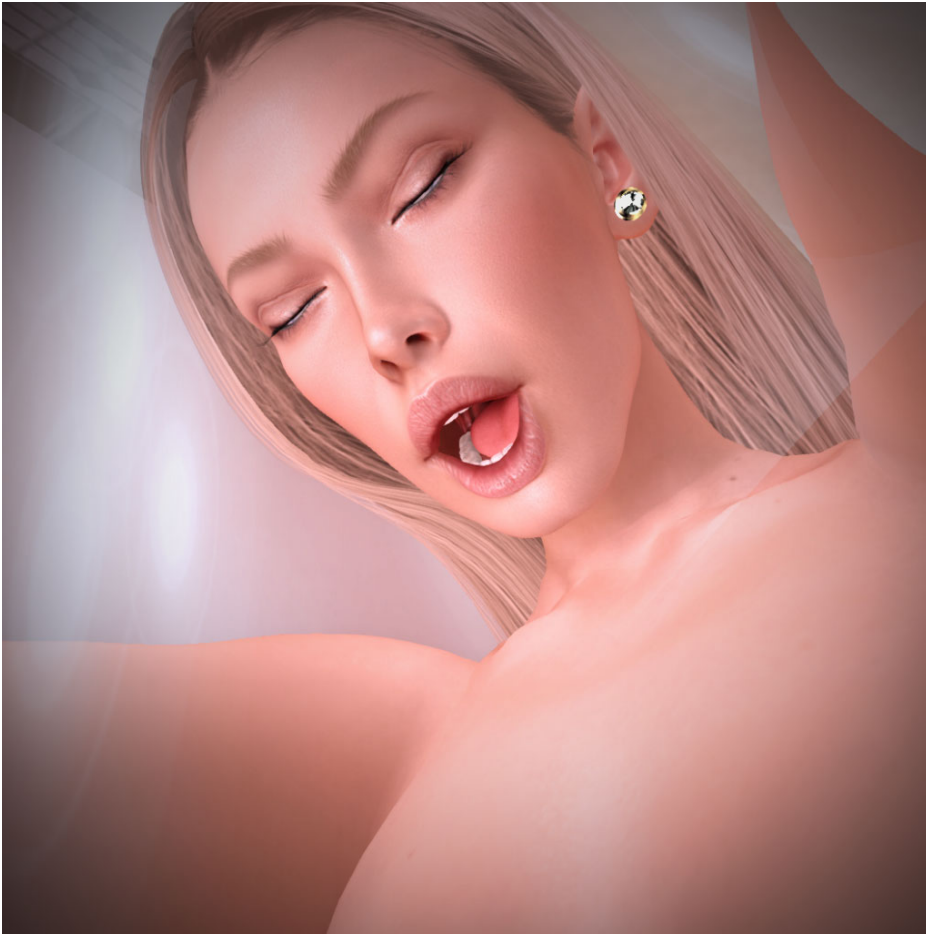
Sliding my fingers under my breasts was a new experience, and I quickly found how sensitive they were. I pinched each nipple gently, moaning at the sensations, then massaged each one until little Sean needed attention.

## DARKWATER FALLS



I found between my breasts and my little Sean, I was quickly writhing with all the sensations...everything felt sensual, soft, and supple. I closed my eyes and could feel my hands caress the beautiful woman I was becoming. Every touch sent waves of sensation through. My body, like electrical impulses traveling along a copper wire directly into my brain. It was far different from than sessions I'd had in my past, it was like my entire body was sensitized.

## RAINE MONDAY



Afterwards, I felt very sleepy again. I really didn't want to nap, but felt the pull of the bed as I walked into the main living space of the motel room. I pulled the darkening curtains, then slid under the cool sheets and was asleep within a few moments.

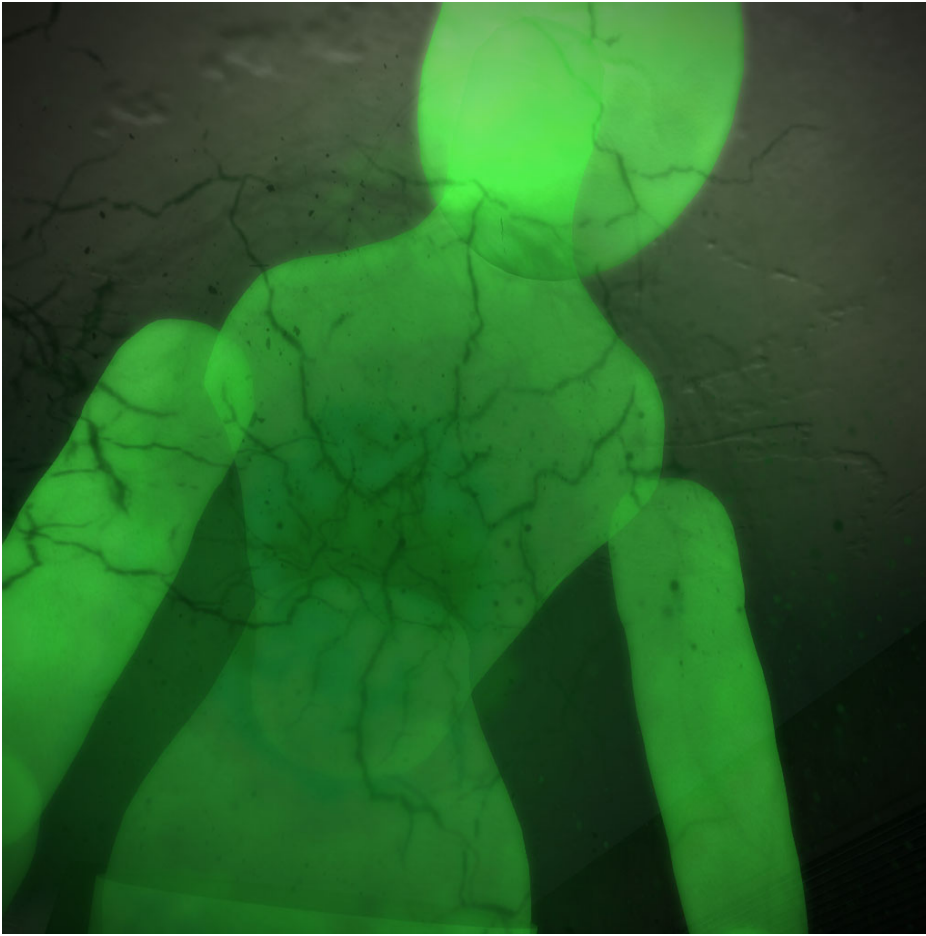
## DARKWATER FALLS



I'm not sure how long I slept, but I awoke to a cold draft on my face. Opening my eyes, I saw my first apparition floating above me. It appeared to be studying me, and made a soft hissing. I lay motionless, fear gripping me, but remembering what Joyce said, that they were all mostly harmless, I hoped it would pass on by and leave me alone.

The 'head' drew closer to me, with the sound of the hissing increasing, and I held my breath, not knowing if I should run, or move at all.

RAINE MONDAY



The ghost settled down *over* me!

## DARKWATER FALLS



I could smell dead rose petals.

The feeling faded, and I rose from the bed. The problem was, I hadn't intended to move, it was like my body had a mind of its own! I remembered what Joyce had said, that one of the ghosts...Wanda...liked to possess people, and I realized I was possessed!

Fighting internally, I struggled to control my body, but it was like trying to swim in molasses. My body did not respond.

A short time later, darkness descended over my awareness. I was still awake but pushed into a deep corner of my mind. I struggled against the force that had captured me to no avail.

I knew she dressed and walked me somewhere. It was so strange to feel myself a passenger in my own body. I heard voices, but distantly, and couldn't make out what they were saying. I knew someone spoke with my voice, making sing-song sounds, as if teasing or cajoling. I felt myself in a vehicle at one point, and then the smell of smoke.

I felt sensations from different parts of my body. Someone kissed my neck, and I could feel the rough stubble of beard. I felt strong hands gripping my forearms...and then all feeling, sounds, and other sensations faded into the background.

RAINE MONDAY

I railed against the ghost. Sometime later, I came to my senses.

Confused, I looked around. My body was panting, and I felt like I'd just...well. Then someone *squirmed* underneath me, and I realized what had happened.

"Did you enjoy that, Wanda?" He said, in a gruff voice in my ear.

"Uh..."

He chuckled. "Ahh, she's gone."

I nodded. "Uh, yah."

"Damn, I didn't get to say goodbye."



He hugged me tightly. "Well, thank you for letting her use your body."

"I didn't exactly let her."

"Hehe, yeah. Wanda can be abrupt like that. She's so hot.

I stood up. The guy was muscled and hairy, and *had we just had...*

"Oh my god," I said, trying not to panic. "Who are you?"

"Slade," he said. "Take it easy; you'll be okay. Just breathe."

"Where am I?"

"Wanda likes to slum it when she takes over a body. You're on the west side, near the railroad tracks."

## DARKWATER FALLS

I had no idea where that was. He handed me a beer, and I drank. My body was thirsty from all the exertions, apparently.

“Take your time,” Slade said, sucking back a beer of his own. “It takes a minute for the confusion to go away.”

“Did we...”

He grinned at me and slapped my ass. “Yep.”

I winced, wanting to get away from him. Another part of my mind though, a growing part, wondered what it had been like.

“You’re curious,” he said.

“No!” I blushed. “No.”

“I’m definitely up for round two,” he said, wrapping his arms around me, and kissing my neck.

I couldn’t help but arch my neck and close my eyes. It felt so....

“And how do I get back to the hotel?” I said, pulling away from him.

“Aww,” he said. “You’re wearing my favorite perfume.”

“Look, no offense, but—“

“None taken.” He stood. “I’ll give you a lift on my bike. Follow me.”

We walked into his garage. I was very sore in places I didn’t want to be sore and winced.

“Sorry about that. It always excites me when she comes to me in a new body.”

I was wearing some flimsy lingerie and pink heels. She’d obviously gone to some trouble to get my body ready. My skin felt like oil had been rubbed on it.

He got onto a large Harley, and I slid in behind him.



“Hold tight,” he said, drawing my hands around his waist. “Wouldn’t want to lose you.”

He smelled of smoke and fire, and his body was warmer than I’d expected.

The bike started up, and I gave a soft gasp at how loud it was. The vibration sent every part of my body into sensory overload. I grasped him tightly as he tore out of the garage and out into the night. Could it really be night?

The chill wind blew through the tendrils of hair along my face. I couldn’t help but embrace him tighter, drawing from his warmth. I lay my head against his back, shielding my face from the brunt of the wind.

The streets were largely empty, but I did see a few shapes darting in the night. Misshapen, wolflike shapes, and I wondered if the Chad-Wolf was hunting tonight and if he could pull over a Harley.

Along one street, the Harley’s headlights illuminated a pack that had just made a fresh kill. They skittered off into the darkness, yipping and howling at our approach. Slide roared at the departing wolves, laughing as they slunk from the roar of the bike.

## DARKWATER FALLS

We finally got to the hotel and he pulled into the parking lot. “Here we are, safe and sound.”

“Yeah, until Wanda wants to steal my body again.”



“She’ll be quiet for a while now. She likes to sew her oats occasionally, especially with someone new.”

“That’s what I was told,” I said, getting up off the bike. I was sore from the ride and Wanda’s ‘excursion.’

He put a finger under my chin, and tipped my head up. “I usually don’t go for dudes, but I gotta say, that was one helluva good time. You’ll have to show me your body when you get an innie.”

I rolled my eyes, pulling away. “I was hoping to get out of here today before that happened.”

“Hah! Fat chance.”

“Well, thanks for the lift,” I said.

“Don’t mention it!”

“So what’s your...”

“My faction?” He grinned at me as his eyes turned red and brimstone leaked from his nostrils. “Demon. Level III.”

I gulped.

## RAINE MONDAY

“You know if you ever want to join, I can—“  
“Uh, no thanks!” I squeaked, backing away. “Thanks again!”  
He chuckled softly, gunned the throttle, and roared away.



## Chapter 10

---

# The Bat

I staggered back to the room, sore and strangely exhausted. My body had been put through paces I didn't want to think about without the benefit of my mind operating it. I had been both asleep and awake and I didn't like that feeling.

Packing my backpack again, I decided to get out of the motel first thing in the morning before Wanda got any more bright ideas. I was *not* going to be out on the streets at night without some kind of protection.

I shuddered at the image of the werewolf pack around the kill. That could easily have been me.

A knock came at the door, and I was surprised to see Joyce standing there. "You okay, honey?"

"Uh, yeah."

She grinned. "I saw Slade drop you off for your walk of shame."

I shivered at his name, and had a momentary feeling of the heat of his body. It had felt so—

I blushed.

"Ahh, yeah. Demons have that effect on humans."

"You've been with him before?"

She sighed. "Yeah. When Wanda has no one to take and feels randy, she takes me."

"Will she do that once you're—"

"Guess we'll find out, won't we?"

I nodded.

"I was wondering—"

I looked up at her. "Hmm?"

"Well, Dominic is on his way over. I'm going to drink from him tonight and—"

I waited.

RAINE MONDAY

“Well, I’ll be feral afterward. He’ll drop me off in the morning, but I don’t have anyone to watch over me as I sleep.”

“Ahh.”

“Would you mind?”

“Won’t you be craving blood?”

“Yes, but Dominic will leave some blood bags. When I get hungry, you can toss me one.”

I nodded. “Sure, I guess I can do that.”



“Good!” She hugged me fiercely.

“You going to be okay?” I said.

“Nerves,” she said. “It’s not every day you give up the last of your humanity.”

“Well, at least you’ll still be sexy,” I said, holding her tight.

“What?” She looked at me. “Oh...hah. No, I won’t baby.”

“I dunno, Mary-Beth still looks pretty to me. Even with the fangs and all.”

“It’s a facade, though. Underneath you’ll still be able to tell I’m a monster.”

I nodded.

DARKWATER FALLS

“But,” she looked up at me. “Can I ask a favor?”

“Sure.”

“Can you...hold me? Just until Dominic comes?”

I smiled, and took her in my arms.

She snuggled back into me. “I just don’t know how much of *this* I’m going to be able to do once I change.”

“Doesn’t Dominic snuggle with you?”

“Oh...no. He will be my liege and I’ll literally owe my existence to him, but there’s not much in the way of human...or vampire...contact.”



“Are you sure you want to go through with it?”

She nodded, but I heard her sniff. “It’s really too late for anything else.”

“You said Mae was a powerful reality shifter. Maybe she could...”

“Her power only extends to natural creatures and humanity. Not the supernatural.”

“Ahh,” I said.

“Anyway, thank you. I really need this.”

RAINE MONDAY

“I like snuggling. And if there’s any way we can snuggle after your change, I’m all for that too.”

“You probably won’t want to touch me,” she said. “It’ll be okay if you don’t.”

I nodded and held her for a time.

She leaned up and stared into my eyes. “And how is your change progressing?”



“Nothing new today, so that’s good. Other than my breasts are a bit swollen from...”

She giggled. “Slade can be a bit rough.”

“I don’t wanna know,” I said.

“At least Wanda spared you all the details.”

“At least,” I grumbled.

“So you prefer women?”

I nodded, brushing her hair back. “Yes.”

She leaned up and kissed me softly. As if on cue, we heard a horn honk outside.

“Darn,” she said. “Just when things were about to get interesting.”

“True.”

## DARKWATER FALLS

She gave me a hard tight hug. “You’ll be here when I get back?”  
I nodded. “I promise.”

“Just...be careful of me, okay? Don’t get too close.”

“Aww,” I said, smiling. “But I like being close with you.”

“Me too,” She smiled. “Who knows, maybe we can find a way to—“

“Maybe,” I said.

“Okay, gotta run!” She gave me a swift kiss on the lips and then was gone.

After she left, I watched some TV, then turned off the light and fell asleep.

I didn’t even hear the moaning coming from the ghosts in the surrounding rooms.

##

I was awakened by someone banging hard on my door. Confused, I got up and opened the door. As it opened, I heard someone gun the engine of a large vehicle and pull out of the parking lot in a smoky burnout. I caught a glimpse of a long black vehicle, but it was gone before I could identify it.

Something emitted a loud *screee* and I glanced down to see a rather large bat standing in the doorway.

Startled, I drew back...



## RAINE MONDAY

“What in the—“ the bat was easily the largest I’d ever seen with glowing red eyes, and twin vampire fangs extending down from its...

“Oh my god! Joyce?” I said.

It screeched and nodded, opening its wings to reveal its furry bat body.

It didn’t appear to be attacking me, or feral in any way. It tried to take a step forward, but something held it back as if it was hitting a wall or something...

“Come in!” I said, remembering vampire lore. “Come in!”

It took a few steps into the room, and made another screech.



“Can you understand me?”

It nodded its head, then screeched again.

“Is this...are you a cobra vampire, like you wanted to be?”

It shook its head, violently, screeching loudly and raking its claws into the carpet.

“Okay, okay.”

I remembered the lore of vampires and how some could transform into bats. One version transformed into a cloud of bats.

## DARKWATER FALLS

“So, all you have to do is transform back into your vampire form, right?”

The bat shook its head and screeched again.

“You don’t know how to do that?”

It shook its head again, screeching and clawing.

“Damn, it sucks that you’re totally non-verbal.”

It nodded its head.

“Are you in any pain?”

It shook its head, then flapped its wings and jumped up onto the bed.

“Still learning to fly, I see.”

Again it nodded its head.

“Are you hungry? Did Dominic leave any blood for you?”

Using one clawed talon on the tip of its wings it pointed to the door.

I opened it and saw a small ice chest sitting on the railing. I brought it in. Inside were ten blood IV bags.

“Did you want one of these?”

It nodded, and I set one out on the bed. Opening its mouth, the bat sank its fangs into the bag, and I heard it sucking deeply. In a few minutes it was drained.

“Well, I guess we just have to wait until you transform into your vampire form.”

It shook its head, appearing sad.

“Wait, you do have a vampire form, right?”

Again, it shook its head and gave a small screech.

“That can’t be right, can it? You mean you’re stuck like this?”

It nodded and scratched at the floor with a talon.

“I don’t believe that,” I said. “Where’s Dominic?”

The bat gave a vague shrug of its wings.

“Well, I’m going to go over to the hospital and give him a piece of my mind!”

The bat screeched and flapped its wings, shaking its head wildly.

“It’s daylight, I know, I’ll have to be careful, but this is when he’s at his weakest, right?”

The bat nodded.

I got dressed in an outfit I’d found in the lost and found. I left the ice chest slightly open, so the bat could slide the top with its clawed feet.

“I’m going over there and getting some answers. You try to rest, and if you need blood, it’s here in the chest.”

It nodded, hopping and flapping.

“Don’t worry, honey, we’ll get this fixed.

It hopped and flapped as I left the room.

Dominic had some explaining to do.

# Chapter 11

---

## Dominic

**D**ark Water falls General Hospital was a small place near the center of town. It only took fifteen minutes to walk there and I enjoyed the sunshine.

I asked about Dominic, and was told Dr. Malice was downstairs in the basement. I chuckled at the name, a bit obvious.

It took me a bit to find it, but finally I found him. He was in a room full of corpses, probably a smorgasbord to a creature like him. Surprisingly, he looked normal, if a bit overweight.

“You Dominic?” I said, approaching him.

He wore dark sunglasses, even though the lights of the lab were pretty subdued. “Who’s asking.”

“My name is Sean, and I’m a friend of Joyce’s.”

He nodded. “Yeah, sad what happened to her.”



“That’s it? That’s all you got to say?”

“It’s rare, and I hate that it happens, but the process of inception into the Cobra Colony can result in unexpected events like that.”

“You can teach her how to return to her human form, can’t you?”

He shook his head and walked over to the wash basin. “All vampires have a bit of *Desmodus Rotundus* or vampire bat. It’s what allows us to be hematophages, and survive from the blood of others.”

“Okay...” I said, struggling to follow.

“But the treatment she’s received should have combined the DNA from *Desmodus* with *Homeo-sapiens*, to create the *Home-Vampiricus* we vampires truly are.”

“And that didn’t work?”

“Sadly, no. Her cells took on all the features of *Desmodus Rotunda*, and instead of bonding with the *homeo sapiens* DNA, it *replaced* the DNA strands. It happened so fast, there was literally nothing I could do except keep her alive. She almost expired.”

“Can’t you just...reverse it?”

“No.” He began walking around, coming closer to me. “Funny thing is, if it had gone truly bat, I could actually transform it back, but

that's a supernatural bat because it has some of my essence inside. So it's stuck like that, a supernatural bat. It's incredibly strong, should be able to fly in extreme weather conditions, and will live a very long time, just like we do."

"But what will it eat?"

He shrugged, moving in closer to me. "Unlike vampires, the bat should be able to live off any living creature."

He had moved to within a few feet of me, and I suddenly realized what he was doing.

"Hey, back off, would ya?" I said, holding up my hands.

He shook his head and grinned. "It's been a long night, and I'm hungry."

I bolted for the door, but he chased after me. He was supernaturally fast and quickly had me pinned up against a wall. He proceeded to smell me, and licked the side of my neck.

"Damn," he said, releasing me.

I rubbed my wrists. "What?"

"You're Mei's handiwork. If I consumed you, I'd risk her wrath. I can smell her wards on you."

I nodded, rubbing my neck. It had been very close.

"So there's nothing you can do for Joyce?"

"Nope." He walked back to one of the corpses and bared his fangs, biting deep into the neck and began to feast.

"What about Mei? Can she change her back?"

After slurping and sucking, he pulled away. "Supernatural bat. Mei can only make changes to the natural world, like you."

I sighed.

"Hey, if it's any consolation, Joyce won't ever turn feral, so you got nothing to worry about with it sucking your blood."

"There's that," I said.

Defeated, I walked out of the morgue.

Back at the motel, I opened the door. The pungent smell of blood and animal filled my nose, and I gagged against the stench.

Turning on the light, I saw Joyce hanging from the ceiling.

## DARKWATER FALLS



It gave a soft screech and scratched its head with one of its clawed feet. A pile of fecal matter mixed with a couple of the blood bags lay strewn under it.

“Can you come down from there? It’s weirding me out.”

The bat screeched and fluttered its wings before dropping from the ceiling and righting itself on the floor.

“So good news and bad news,” I said.

The bat nodded.

“Good news is, you’re a supernatural bat. You can drink from any live animal, not just humans like a vampire.”

It nodded its head, giving a soft screech. I could see snot dripping from the thing’s nose.

“He said you’re super strong, and can survive extremes of cold and heat even while flying. He said you’ll have a very long life, like a vampire, and be super strong and healthy.”

“Bad news is, you’re a bat, and going to stay that way unless we can find someone that can transform supernatural creatures.”

It nodded and screeched a mournful sound again.

## RAINE MONDAY

“Why don’t we get you in the shower and cleaned up, and then I can hold you on the bed again?”

It nodded, then hopped toward the bathroom.

###

A few hours later, it fell asleep peacefully, hanging from the ceiling again.

I had given it a shower. It hated the feeling of the water, like any animal, I suppose, and screeched and clawed quite a bit before settling down and letting me wash it. Then we’d snuggled awhile on the bed, but it was pretty restless and got back up and jumped around trying to fly.

We went outside, and we made good progress. It could fly short distances and was up to about a hundred feet before we came back inside.

I fed it more of the blood, and it snuggled up on the bed again as I dozed. When I awoke, it was hanging from the ceiling, and fast asleep.

Sighing, I cleaned up the mess on the floor under it, then placed some towels to catch any falling excrement. Supernatural ex-human bats could not control bladder and bowel functions, apparently.

I went into the bathroom and started washing my hands.

## DARKWATER FALLS



Staring in the mirror, I looked for any more changes. I was still tall, over six feet, and other than my breasts filling out slightly, I was the same.

I thought about poor Joyce having her humanity ripped away and forced to live as a bat. Things could definitely be worse.

I wondered if Mei was okay. I felt a strong urge to return to her, and I fixed my hair absently as I thought about it.

Of the five factions, I supposed the witches offered the least offending. If I could learn to be a witch as powerful as Mei was reported to be, maybe I could survive DarkWater after all.

I still wanted to attempt to get away. I'd been examining the cliff face while Joyce tried to fly and thought I had a way scouted out. If I could get up to the saddle without falling, the rest of the ascent would be cake.

As I replaced the towel on the rack, my head started to hurt.

## RAINE MONDAY



Wincing, I wondered if I had any ibuprofen. I went through my backpack, found a bottle of acetaminophen, and took a couple, dry swallowing them.

The pounding in my head did not abate. My vision swam as it worsened; feeling like my head was being squeezed in a vice.

I fell onto the bed, moaning, holding my head with both hands. The squeezing sensation got much worse, and oblivion intruded.

## Chapter 12

---

# Flights of Futility

The following day I awoke to something screeching at me and licking my face with a sticky tongue. Opening my eyes, I saw Joyce lying beside me, its long tongue lapping at my face. It was long and sticky and...hairy?

“Ewww, no!” I said, sitting upright and wiping the slime away.

It chittered strangely at me, army-crawled over with its wings, then snuggled in.

“I’m sorry,” I said. “It was just unexpected.”

The bat chittered again at me, and I pet its furry head.

RAINE MONDAY



“Guess I should see the damage,” I said.



I stared into the mirror at my changed visage. Gone was the vaguely masculine face, with stark lines and chiseled edges. In its place was pure beauty.

My voice had risen to a light alto. While I still possessed little Sean, there wasn't much left.

I sighed and walked back out into the main room. "Guess there was no getting around it," I said to the bat.

It chittered at me again, followed by a squeak. While I'd been asleep, it had finished the last of the blood.

"Yeah, I know." I picked up the blood packets and dropped them in the trash. It had been hopping around the room, and bat guano was everywhere, including the bed.

"Why can't you at least control your bowels," I snapped to the bat. "You've made a mess of everything!"

The bat screeched at me, flew across the room, and butted its head into the door.

"Ah, so you've figured out flying!" I said. "Are you sure you can go outside during the sunlight hours?"

## RAINE MONDAY

It screeched again at me, bumping into the door.



“Alright,” I said and opened it. With a lick to my cheek, it streaked out the door, then into the air in an erratic pattern, zipping and zagging to and fro, before flying off vaguely northeast.

Deciding that was my cue to leave the hotel, I packed my backpack and headed out.

It was much heavier than it had been. Or I was much weaker. I decided it was heavier.

It was now or never. If I ever had a chance to leave DarkWater, now was the time.

Walking back down the road, I passed the tunnel closed sign, then up the incline to the east. The scree and rocks threatened to send me tumbling back down, but I was able to make my way around to the forest carefully.

I shrugged; it seemed easy enough. I got out my compass and took note of my bearings. Getting lost in a forest without a solid sense of direction was easy.

## DARKWATER FALLS

In the distance, I could see where the mountains formed a “V” shaped saddle where I could continue my journey. I made a note of the time, the position of the sun, and the bearings that I wanted on my compass.

Snapping it shut, I took a drink from my water bottle and headed toward the saddle.



\*\*\*

Hours later, I had enough.

DarkWater Falls was blocked on all sides by invisible barriers. Each time I crossed the ‘boundary’ about half a mile from town, I was immediately transported back to the entrance where I’d been dropped off by the bus.

## RAINE MONDAY



I started hiking back toward the hotel, upset that my efforts had been for nothing. I was tired, hungry, and cold.

Night was falling as I entered the hotel parking lot. I heard a chittering above me and spied Joyce the Bat flying.

“Did you have a good day?” I called up to it.

## DARKWATER FALLS



It screeched and fluttered in for a landing next to me. Blood streaked down from its mouth and stained its teeth with red tendrils.

“You’re a mess,” I said. It gave another screech in return.

I opened the door, and it hopped inside.

“You know, if you’re going to be in here, you’ll have to control your output. Can you do that?”

It screeched and nodded.

“Let’s get you cleaned up,” I said, lifting it into my arms to take into the bathroom.

It immediately began licking my face with its long sticky tongue. “Eww, stop it!” I giggled, and it squealed as it licked me some more.

I got the shower going and held the curtain for it.

“Well?” I said. “Get in.”

It gave me a small squeak and hid behind me.

“Look, we can’t snuggle if you’re covered in blood. Get in there and take a shower!”

## RAINE MONDAY

It squeaked, then flew up into my arms, climbing me. Its nails were sharp.

“Ow! Okay, okay, we’ll take one together.”

I got undressed, lifted it, and entered the shower. “There, are you happy now?”



It gave a little squeak.

I soaped up its furry little body, then rinsed it off. I cleaned its nose and between its talons, where it had been tearing animal flesh to drink the blood.

Then I soaped up my hair, showered as it flapped, and hopped inside, playing in the water like a child, pelting me with droplets.

After one splash, I gave a small scream. “Stop that!” And it chittered back at me. I realized it was laughing.

Exiting the shower, I took out the hairdryer attached to the wall in the bathroom and blow-dried its fur, then my hair. It loved the feeling of the warm air, closing its feral red eyes and arching its back.

I stroked the pelt on its scalp. “How different your life will be now, huh?”

## DARKWATER FALLS

It gave a small squeak.

“At least you’re a super-bat, not just an ordinary one.”

It shrugged thin shoulders, then lifted its leathery wings, staring at each of them.

“Yeah, that must be tricky to navigate without hands anymore.”

It nodded but then flapped and took flight, zooming around the room effortlessly.

“I am glad you’ve mastered flying, though. That must be fun.

It landed in front of me and looked up, nodding. It chittered and squeaked for a while. I wish I knew what it was saying.

“Want to go with me to get some food?”

It shrugged and nodded.

I grabbed my jacket and headed for the door.



\*\*\*

“I’m sorry, hon, we don’t allow pets here.” Rose set a placemat down in front of me. I’d pulled down a booster seat for Joyce, who sorta stood, squatted on top of it. It had a hard time sitting still, and

## RAINE MONDAY

I wondered if the bat body needed the nearly constant motion or if Joyce's brain was shifting to be more batlike.

"Um, not a pet...this is Joyce."

In return, Joyce gave a little screech and waved a wing.



Rose's eyes grew wide. "Oh, she's in bat form! How long before she changes back?"

I sighed. "she can't change back."

"What?"

I nodded. "Whatever 'conversion' Dominic did to her completely caused her to transform into a supernatural bat."

"She's trapped like that?"

Joyce nodded and gave a mournful little whistle-squeak I hadn't heard before.

Rose's eyes opened wide. "Oh, by the Dark Gods! How horrible!"

"Yeah, it makes my transition seem tame in response."

She glanced at me. "You're turning out gorgeous."

I smiled and blushed. "Thanks, honey."

"I take it you've given up trying to leave DarkWater falls?"

## DARKWATER FALLS

I nodded. "I hiked around as much as possible and haven't found a way out."

Rose sat down in the booth next to a squirmy Joyce. "Many have tried, hon."

"I was just hoping, ya know?" I wiped a tear before it could smudge my mascara.

"We all do."

"So, what faction will you join?"

I shrugged. "I suppose, the witches, but I haven't returned to see Mei yet."

"My Master would take you in if you're interested."

"Who might that be?"

"Dark Lord Russel. He owns this place."

"Demon, I take it?"

She nodded, raising her fingers. Dark talons had replaced her fingernails.

"Ahh, so you're being transformed also."

She shrugged but nodded. "Just thought it was time, and Russel kept mentioning how edible I looked."

I remembered Slade and shivered.

"Well, what can I get you tonight?"

"The special," I said.

"Anything for Joyce?"

The bat squeaked and shook its head.

"It doesn't eat food anymore. I think it sucks the blood from live animals around town."

"You shouldn't refer to her as 'it,' honey."

"Yeah...I looked at the small furry form. "I guess I owe you an apology, Joyce."

It squeaked and shrugged.

"We have some blood in the back for our vamp customers if you'd like."

Joyce squeaked and nodded.

"Good. It always makes me happy when we have something."

Rose got up and went into the kitchen.

I stared at Joyce. It...she kept raising a foot and scratching at her chin, or the top of her head, or somewhere else. Her head continually darted from left to right as if seeking or assessing.

I felt terrible for her.

"Listen," I said. "I know you probably have new urges and instincts."

She nodded, flapping her wings.

"But you can stay with me as long as you'd like. I don't know what will happen to the hotel now that you're gone, but obviously, you won't be able to take care of it anymore."

She shook her head and let out that little whistle again.

## RAINE MONDAY

“Is there someone I should notify? Who owns the hotel?”

She scabbled and chittered...she fluttered up on the table and then scratched at the placemat.

“Probably needs a pen,” Rose said, putting our food down. She set my burger and fries in front of me and a glass of red liquid in a shallow cup in front of Joyce. Then she handed Joyce her pen.

Joyce grasped the pen with her finger-like claws. It took her a minute to control; then she wrote: Banner Corp.

“Ahh, okay. And the number is in the office somewhere?”

She nodded.

“Great, we’ll do that tomorrow.”

She wrote something else on the placemat. “Thank you for this.”

“Aww, you’re welcome, honey. I’m glad we can at least have some form of communication now.”

It chittered, then set the pen down.



It skipped over to the cup of blood, and its long tongue extended downward into the bowl. She sucked it into her mouth, with some blood leaking from her jaw onto the placemat.

## DARKWATER FALLS

\*\*\*

After eating, we went back to the room. Sitting on the bed, she snuggled up under my arm, and we watched tv for a while.

I gave her a notebook and pen, so she could write.

“How are you feeling, hon?”

She took the pen and wrote in the notebook in disjointed letters.

“Sad,” she wrote.

I stroked the fur behind her ears. “Maybe we can find a way to undo this.”

“How”

“I don’t know. I was thinking of talking to Mei tomorrow.”

“Only natural things”

“Yes, I know, but maybe she might know of a way to reverse it.”

Joyce chittered a long time at me. Then she took the pen. “Each day, I forget more.”

“I get it. The bat instincts must be strong.”

“Words hard.”

I looked her in the eyes, with both hands on her furry cheeks. “We’ll figure something out, okay? I don’t know what, but we will.”

“It okay, I bat.”

I nodded and held her until she fell asleep.