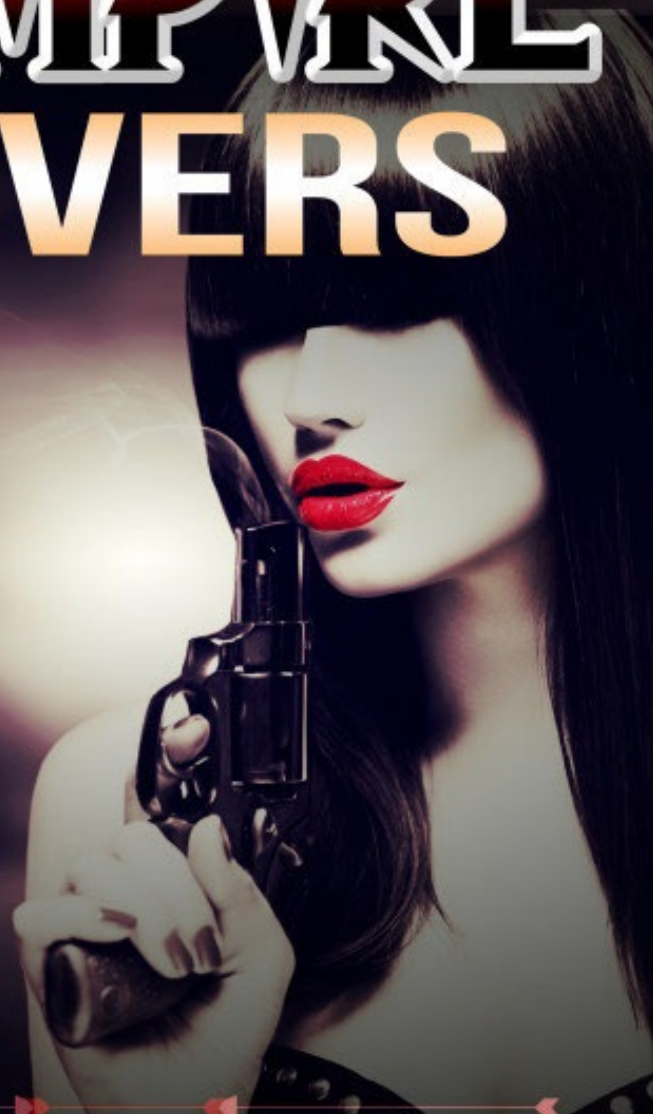


A MODERN VAMPIRE ROMANCE

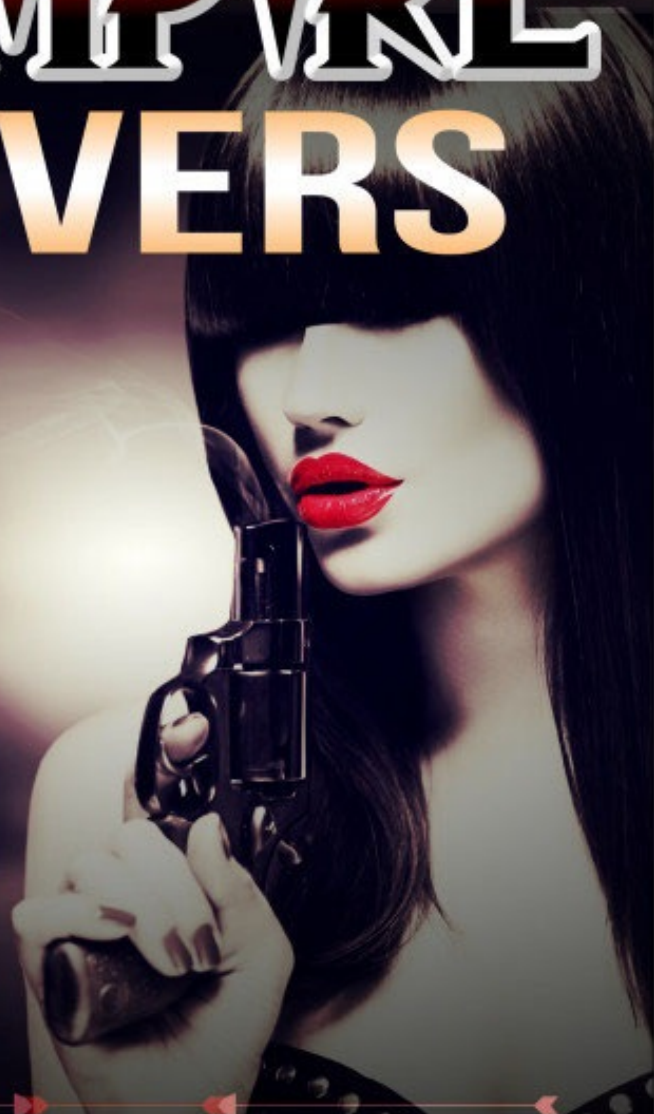
MY TWO
VAMPIRE
LOVERS



LARAN MITHRAS

A MODERN VAMPIRE ROMANCE

MY TWO
VAMPIRE
LOVERS



LARAN MITHRAS

My Two Vampire Lovers

Laran Mithras

My Two Vampire Lovers is a work of fiction. Names, locations and incidents either are a product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

Copyright © 2013 - All Rights Reserved

There is a generation, whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men.

~ **Proverbs 30:14**

CHAPTER 1

Kate heard the scream – a woman's scream, full of fear - as she came out of Starbucks holding her mid-morning coffee. A chill washed over her for a moment, freezing her into place.

“Gimme your money, bitch!” A voice echoed out from the alley beside the building.

“No, please,” the woman said. “Don't shoot me!”

The coffee dropped to the cement as Kate lunged toward the alley. She was licensed to carry a concealed weapon and precisely for times like these.

Maybe I can scare the mugger off. The world didn't need another female victim. What happened next was a confusion of images that would forever change her life.

A common street thug was brandishing a cheap pistol in the face of a woman. Kate had seen her on the sidewalk earlier. The woman was trying to untangle her purse from her hair as she was backed directly up against the brick wall of the next building.

Kate reached under her sweater for her holstered gun just as the thug pulled back the hammer on the cheap automatic. He did it for effect as most handguns in that style did not need the hammer pulled back. But the threat was clear and the threat was made. She realized this had gone from just a purse-snatch to a possible shooting.

At that moment, things started to go wrong.

Kate remembered her training about what constituted the right time to use her gun. The woman's life was in danger. She was being threatened with deadly force. If Kate didn't shoot the man, the woman would die. Pulling her four inch barrel .357 from her concealed belt holster, Kate squatted for stability, aimed and began to squeeze off a shot.

But then she began to doubt her sanity.

Leaping from somewhere was a man who was launching himself at the thug just as she shot. The woman being assaulted looked toward Kate with surprise, but then frustration.

Her shot rang loud, echoing forever in the sudden puzzle of what she faced. The bullet hit the turning thug who was trying to face the new threat. The shot spun him further, into a circle before being taken down by the leaping man.

Kate lifted her gun barrel up so as not to have any accidents involving the woman or the leaping savior. Reality for her began to disintegrate. As she strode forward to insure the woman's safety, the woman had vanished.

Confused, she holstered her gun and walked forward. She would talk to the leaping savior and wait for the police.

In place of the woman stood a man a few inches taller than her. He wore a brown leather jacket. His black hair was slicked back and slightly receded. He scowled at her.

The woman was nowhere to be seen.

The leaping savior was also scowling at Kate. He held the thug by his shirt collar but the thug looked either unconscious or dead. Her bullet had taken him clean in the spot where his arm met his chest.

“She saw us!” leather jacket growled.

“Ja, take her,” the other said. He was a taller man with long, wavy blonde hair. “We’ll deal with her later. Skedaddle! Someone surely heard the shot.”

The blonde man started to lean over the thug. Then her breath was instantly knocked out of her and she wondered if she had been hit by a truck. She realized she had been launched toward the parking lot but that she was being held.

“Silence,” leather jacket said. He bundled her into the backseat of a huge black Continental from the 1970s.

Kate began weeping. This man had a hold of her in a way she had never

expected. She carried a gun and had a license for it to protect against exactly this kind of event. But here she was being shoved into the backseat of a car with an unknown man who handled her as easily as if she were a small sack of groceries.

She could see her own car through the window.

Was this the end of her life? Was this man who smelled of soap and leather the harbinger of her demise? Wasn't he supposed to smell like death?

His hand cupped the back of her head and pushed her below the window.

She squealed in outrage and fear. She lashed out with her left elbow and pushed against the side of the car door with her right leg. She felt her elbow make solid connection with the man's head. With a jerk and shove, her head was forced down between the man's knees.

Why did he smell so good? Bad guys are supposed to smell... bad.

Panicked and fractured thoughts fluttered through her.

Kate Anson had less than three days to live.

CHAPTER 2

The blonde man clambered into the car a few seconds later.

“You were able to feed?” leather jacket said.

“Ja,” Short. To the point.

“Good, then not a total loss.” Leather jacket shoved her head further down between his knees. “This has all manner of fire in her. Maybe she will be a good feed for me.”

“Ja, maybe.” Blondie sounded unsure.

“Well, why not? She saw us. She saw me shift back into man-form. We can't let her go. Might as well feed on her. Or maybe even keep her as a feeder.”

Blondie drove, silently. She felt the car moving, speeding, going far faster than should have been possible. They had to be doing ninety or more.

With an effort, she lunged back against leather-jacket. Her right arm reached over and up to his eyes. Stabbing in, she tried to dig her fingers into one of his eye sockets.

With a sudden twist, he turned her face to his. A supreme look of irritation was on his face. A sharp focus of his eyes resulted in a feeling of drifting.

Kate felt herself slipping away.

“Lady has a dose of spunk in her,” leather jacket muttered.

But that was all her mind could grasp before it let go and floated with the high speed of the black Continental.

She could feel herself sitting, still and unmoving. Her head swam but her body

stayed still.

Please stop moving!

Her hands were tied behind her and she was sitting. Her heart began thumping and adrenaline flooded her limbs. She opened her eyes and saw a room that looked so depressingly average.

Brown wallpaper met brown molding and a wooden floor. A radiator clicked and hissed by the window. Her chair was wooden and severe – something often seen in a church or courthouse.

In front of her was a small door to a bathroom. To her left was a wall with a window covered by drapes.

Tears streaked down her cheeks.

How could it come to this? How could all my precautions have led to this horrible end?

But as she thought that, the side of her arm registered the comforting weight of her .357 still holstered under her sweater.

She blinked. And then she blinked some more.

They didn't bother to search her? Were they stupid?

Suddenly she felt in control. Armed and capable, with a touch of luck she could overcome this and prevail.

I must!

She would not fall victim to a couple of murderers and be just another statistic.

But something tickled her brain.

Hadn't they stopped the thug with just as much effort as she had employed? Hadn't the blonde man tackled the thug to the ground just as Kate shot him? Then why had they taken her? What happened to the woman who was being robbed?

She let her mind wander. Thinking about this all right now after being unconscious surely would not be productive.

She began to register a few things about her surroundings.

The first thing was the smells. She smelled leather, but not the same as leather-jacket man. She smelled fabric, like velvet. She smelled something bland like books. She smelled cleanser in the bathroom. She smelled a faint hint of garlic and bacon.

This was very odd. Normally a place smelled like a mix of both good and bad odors. But she did not smell sweat, or mildew, or flatulence, or burnt food, or anything stale.

She strained her concentration to see if she could pick up sounds. Yes, there were occasional voices in the other room. Leather jacket and Blondie, she was sure.

She felt something brush her mind – an odd sensation of déjà vu mixed with a mental double-vision.

With an effort, she started to hop her chair over to the window.

Jonathan, the man in the brown leather jacket, sat back on the couch, eating peanuts. Occasionally he threw one at his longtime friend, Henrick. “You know she's awake and likely that racket is her chair-hopping over to the window.”

The taller Henrick caught another peanut launched at him. “Why do I have to be the one that kills the pretty woman? I don't want to kill her.”

“Henry, she saw us...”

“She doesn't know what she saw,” Henry said. “Besides, I thought you were going to feed on her.”

The woman started yelling in the other room.

John rolled his eyes and got up. “Fine.”

There was an odd thump from the guest bedroom and then a muffled “Ow...”

Henry launched a kick to John's shin as he passed. “Be nice to her, you jerk.”

Kate had maneuvered the chair over to the window but the chair had tipped too far forward, smashing her cheek against it. Her lips were smeared open and one eye stretched wide as they pressed against the glass.

She must look like a total fool if anyone looked up to see her at the window. But no one was down there – the street was dark and empty.

She heard the door open and tried to turn her mashed face to see who it was.

With a thump, leather-jacket settled her chair back and with one hand dragged it easily back into place.

How can he be so strong?

He squatted in front of her, resting easily and balanced on the balls of his feet. Several facial twitches quirked here and there on his face. He appeared to be trying to say something, but Kate couldn't figure out from his expression what it might be.

He was handsome enough for an abductor, she guessed. His dark hair reached down to his shoulders, combed straight back. It was slightly receded. A few strands of white silvered his hair, but not many. Fine wrinkles accented his eyes and a slight shade of five-o'clock shadow dusted his features.

“What's your name, ma'am?” His voice was irritated.

“Kate. That's all you'll get out of me. I don't know what you want, but I don't have it.” The words came out in a rush.

“Jonathan,” he said. “But I go by John.”

“Well, John, I'm thirsty. Would it be too much to ask for some water while you're playing abductor?” She jerked and heaved at the chair.

John's face started to quirk into a smile, maybe, but then his brows drew down and a second later his face went blank.

Without a word, he stood and left the room.

She immediately began hopping back over to the window.

John kicked Henry's shin on his way to the kitchen.

Henry snorted. "She's hopping again."

John came back and thrust a glass of water at his friend. "Take this to her."

"Why don't you?"

"I don't want to see her."

"I thought you were going to feed?"

John sighed. "Well, I don't want to feed on her. It's not like she's the wife of some Union general, right?"

Henry looked down, remembering something distant. He grunted and got up, carrying the glass into the bedroom.

He was in time to see the chair tip and her face hit the window. Her mouth and nose pulled up comically.

He shook his head and settled her back down. With one hand he pulled the chair back to its position.

"What in hell do you both eat that makes you so strong?" Her hair was in disarray and Henry could see tiny swaths of gray mixing in with the luxuriant brown.

"You don't want to know, Mrs. Anson."

"Kate," she said through clenched teeth. "And you get no more out of me."

“I went through your purse; I know who you are.”

“Great. Did my two hundred dollars satisfy your drug habit for an hour?” She squirmed in the chair.

“No.” Henry's face went blank. “We do not partake in narcotics.”

Taken aback, Kate stopped struggling.

He raised the water glass. “You think you can sip your water if I let your hands free?”

Her eyes lit up with hope and Henry could see she thought it would help her.

“Yes, of course...?”

“Henry.” He untied her hands and handed her the glass.

She gulped it down. So she had indeed been thirsty.

Kate eyed the handsome man before her. His blonde hair flared out down to his shoulders in dark golden waves. The color was slightly dull from age, but still an impressive mane of hair. Two handsome men together. She figured they must be gay.

But Henry's eyes held a twinkle and an openness that told her he liked her.

This could be the time.

“What happened to the woman I saved in the alley?”

Henry burst out in laughter. He squatted down almost exactly where John had. He rested his elbows on his thighs and looked at her with a big, toothy grin. “I'm sure John will get a laugh out of that one.”

She handed back the glass and settled her hands primly in her lap. She could feel against her elbow the comforting weight of the revolver still in its holster. “Did you do something to that woman?”

“No,” Henry shook his head and gestured with his free hand. “John was the woman. In disguise.”

John sat out in the living room, rubbing his forehead as if suffering from an excruciating headache.

Henry was in there and he could feel the easiness about his friend and knew he was talking to the likable woman.

Henry was less likely to take care of her – as in settle the fact she was a witness - than he was. His hand smacked his forehead and he drew his hand down across his face.

He heard laughter from the other room and groaned.

Great.

He plopped back against the back of the couch and stared at the ceiling. His kind were known to those that ruled the land. But the average public person thought him a myth. He was a creature that used blood for sustenance. He could eat other foods, too, but nothing hit the spot like human blood.

The rulers of the peoples of the world were of a different sort. While they knew he and his kind existed, they also competed for blood. The rulers of the world were steeped deep in blood rituals to their god the devil and still the common man didn't see.

There was, however, an agreement between the rulers and the vampires that witnesses must be destroyed. In many governments, the vampires were agents of devil-worshiping men. It didn't need to be covered up because it was so ridiculous to the common man that only direct witnesses to an act of vampirism or shifting required a more drastic silencing.

Kate had seen him shift. It wasn't his fault, really. The gunshot had startled him and he had reverted. But she had seen and witnesses were not allowed to live.

The only problem was, neither he nor Henry had the heart in them to kill her for what amounted to bad timing on an otherwise good deed.

Kate looked longingly at the bathroom. “Henry, is it possible I could use the bathroom? This is starting to get painful.”

His eyes opened in surprise and anguish. She could see he really cared.

Good. Just as long as I can use it to get away.

He nodded, moved forward and untied her feet.

She stood gingerly and shook out her legs before walking to the bathroom. She shut the door behind her and used the toilet. She really did have to go. Her eyes measured the bathroom window higher up. She figured she could get through it.

Finishing, she washed her hands and her face. She climbed up on the tub edge and reached for the sliding window. Just a little off-balance, she tilted precariously and her shoulder knocked the shelf over the tub. A container of scrubbing powder dumped over and hit the side of her upturned head. An enormous white cloud of powder covered her face and she fell off the tub backward in surprise.

I blew it!

She drew her gun as the door to the bathroom opened. She fired from a sitting position but couldn't focus well with the cleanser stinging her eyes.

She heard a yelp from Henry just before she heard the blast from her gun.

CHAPTER 3

John rolled his eyes when the gun went off. He slapped his forehead again and got up.

Henry, you fool.

But he did not linger. He moved to the bedroom quickly, and entered.

The situation was about as he expected.

The bathroom door was open. Kate was getting to her feet swinging the gun around aimlessly because there was a huge dump of cleanser in her hair and eyes. Some must have gotten in her mouth because she was choking.

She looked almost like a caricature of a ghost.

Henry had leaped when he saw her aiming at him. He was clawed into the corner of the ceiling and wall by the bathroom door out of her aim. There was a smoking hole in the seat of his pants.

John snorted. He shook his head. “Henry, get down from there!”

He saw Kate swing the gun in the direction of his voice. She stepped squarely down on the tipped cleanser container and her foot shot out from under her. With a short scream, she went down. The container went rolling off spewing cleanser everywhere.

With a deep sigh, John shook his head.

Henry looked down at him. “She shot my ass!”

“Shuddap, Henry.”

“But I've got a hole in my ass!”

“It can make friends with the other one then. Get down; you've ruined the

wallpaper with your clumsy fingers.”

Kate got enough of the cleanser away from her eyes that she could see, but the stuff burned! Her eyes watered out of irritation and she could only make out watery images.

John stood there with his hands on his hips facing her but looking up at Henry. She could just see Henry attached to the ceiling as if he were a cat clawed onto something to save its life.

Huh?

She brought her gun up to aim at John, but as fast as she swung the gun up, he had already stepped and reached across the distance to snatch the gun from her hand.

“Gimme that,” he said with a fed-up tone.

He had disarmed her faster than she could think to react to his reach.

What was going on here?

“Henry, get down. I have the gun. She won't shoot any more unnecessary holes in your ass, I promise.”

Henry dropped to the floor to stand beside John in front of her. “But I have a hole in my ass. Look!”

John rolled his eyes. “Henry, I don't care. I don't want to look at any of the holes in your ass, okay?”

Henry stopped pointing at the new hole and broke out into a laugh. “Ja, ja, okay.”

No longer in control and no longer with any hope of control, Kate started to cry. She dropped her white-cleansered head into her hands and wept. She was going to die even after all the opportunities for escape had slipped by.

But I tried!

Her head shook and the tears came hotter and wetter. In her grief, the two men fell silent.

Then she heard from Henry, who she had shot, “Aw, now look what you did, you jerk.”

She heard a smack of skin hitting skin. “I didn't do anything. You were the one who went and got your ass all shot full of holes.”

A hand touched her, stroking the cleanser-dusted hair back out of her eyes.

“You always were the brute, John.”

John sighed. “Let's get her over to the bed and calm her down.”

“What?” Henry said. “So you can feed on her?”

Another skin to skin smack. “You know Henry, when she shot you, you got it right where you deserved.”

“Me?” Henry spluttered.

“Yeah, you. She didn't shoot me when I was alone with her.”

“That's because you were too scared to untie her hands for water. You wanted her to die of thirst.”

John grunted and Kate felt herself thrown effortlessly onto the bed. A smaller thump landed beside her and with another realization of hope, she realized it was her .357. She grabbed it and stuffed it back into her holster – right in front of the other two.

John was wagging his finger at Henry. “This is all your fault.”

“I hope she shoots you next time,” Henry said. He crossed his arms and looked down at Kate. He did not appear to be in any pain.

“I--” she said. But whatever it was she wanted to say fled from her. Her mind was not making sense. “But--”

Henry and John shared a look.

“If you hadn't--” said Henry.

“Don't start with me—” said John.

“Stop!” Kate realized the shout was hers. “What exactly is going on here?”

Henry folded his arms. The pretty woman looked so pitiful all covered with cleanser dust and tear-streaks creating a sad contrast on her cheeks.

John looked at Henry.

Henry looked at John.

Both shrugged.

Henry cocked his head at Kate. “What do you want to know, Kate?”

“Why am I here?” the poor woman sobbed.

John cleared his throat and kicked his feet. “We're vampires and you saw us at work.”

“Whuh— Vampires?” Kate was shaking her head.

Henry shook his head. “No, we're not delusional, we're not hopped out on pot, we're not flying on coke, we're not stoned on pills, we're not drunk and we're not crazy.”

“Vampires, right. Sure. Any moment you are going to start twinkling.” Kate rolled her eyes.

John frowned and his mouth broke into a sneer. “We don't twinkle.”

“You want me to believe you are all-powerful vampires right off the television--”

Henry peeled his lips back from his teeth and showed his canines.

Kate rolled her own eyes. “Oh, come on. It's all the rage in the younger culture to have their teeth sharpened so they look all vampire and shit. Well, I am not scared.”

With a dual shrug to each other, John and Henry turned and started to walk out.

When they reached the door, Kate growled in frustration. “Oh fine. You had your teeth filed down and you're cooler than shit. No one will question your nerdness and your small penis complex is safe with me.”

They both turned back to her.

“Yes, yes,” she waved them back. “Your secret is safe with me. So what's the deal here?”

Again they shared a look and both shrugged,

Henry approached the bed and leaned his hands down on the mattress. His face was less than three feet from hers. With a slight closing of his eyes, his features shifted. Suddenly, she found herself looking back at her own face.

Her eyes widened and Henry reverted just as fast.

“What are these mind tricks you're playing?” she said in a panic.

Not only did John's face take on a disgusted look, but also that of Henry. They both made dismissive gestures with their hands and turned their backs on her.

What?

Sulking, she fell into a deep sleep faster than she had ever before experienced.

Henry sat on the couch, listening to Kate's snores in the other room. “She has made me use up almost all that I gained from feeding.”

“Women are trouble, right as the day,” John said.

“You sure seem to be taking your time feeding from her.”

John launched a leather couch pillow at Henry.

“Hey, it's not me that's stalling here,” he said, catching the pillow.

“Oh come on--”

“Don't start with me, eh?” Henry threw the pillow back. “She was supposed to be your feed and we're not supposed to leave witnesses.”

“It happened on your feed, Mister Brilliance, you are--”

Henry scowled at John. “You were the one that shifted in front of her.”

John ran his hand through his receding hair. “What are we going to do, Henry?”

“I dunno,” Henry said. He shook his head. “I can't get her smell out of my nose, it's filthy.”

“You want to flip a coin for it?” John said.

He shook his head. “No, there's too much chance I would be responsible for her.”

John stood up abruptly and threw the pillow down on the couch. “One of us has to kill her.”

The tall man looked up at his friend. “Do we really have to?”

John threw up his hands. “You've turned soft after all this time. You faced at least a dozen bayonet charges and fought them all, teeth bared. Now you wet your breeches over something so simple?”

Henry shot to his feet. “It isn't simple. It's a lady and she isn't a man, a union soldier or an inanimate object!”

John stopped and looked back, saying softly, “Stand at ease, corporal. I am on your side.”

Henry sat back down with a heavy sigh. He ran both hands into his wavy hair. “I just don't want to kill her, John. We've never been common murderers.”

John was of a mind to go feed with his eyes shut and be done with it. But his friend had his face buried in his hands – the sight caused John pause. “Aw, Henry.”

“Why are we here? Year after year...” Henry's face was still hidden in his hands.

John heard the heavier breathing. He stood dumbfounded. Henry was crying!

“I don't know that I want to go on. At first I was all caught up in the power, but now?”

John could say nothing. He couldn't argue, counter, or play devil's advocate. Of a truth, he had felt the same way for years. How many more decades of feeding? How many more decades of hiding? How many more decades of just his friend Henry for companionship?

Henry hadn't looked up, but he said, “You feel it, too.”

Was there a reason vampires rarely lasted three hundred years?

“Maybe we should have died at Vicksburg,” Henry said.

John nodded. Their capture at Vicksburg had led to all of this. “I'm with you, brother.”

He left Henry to think and went into the bedroom.

She lay there, sleeping, her face and hair still covered in cleanser. She looked so carefree.

With a sigh, John grabbed the chair and sat down on it, his elbows resting on the back of the chair as modern men sometimes did. He gazed at her and wondered who she was.

Would he be able to kill her? Feed on her? The thoughts sickened him. He and Henry had been captured in the war and used as feeders for a Union Major. Vampires had seemed as ridiculous to them back then as it did to Kate now. How could he have known that vampires not only existed, but were encouraged to

wage war and sow fear by the very leaders of the countries in which they existed?

Although in times of peace vampires were expected only to cull the homeless or criminals, the Federal and Confederate governments had both employed vampires behind enemy lines.

Having been captured and used as feeders for the Union vampire, a Confederate operative had rescued them inadvertently. That operative had been a vampire, too. Instead of feeding on them or killing them for their knowledge, Thomas Russel, Vampire Operative and Confederate, had turned them.

“Don't be a makin' more suckers, y'hear? Guvmint suffers us in the best a times,” Thomas had said. “Git your selves in too deep and they'll be a huntin' ya down.”

John had seen Thomas once a few years after the war when the northern forces were raping and looting the former Confederacy. Thomas had winked in passing and John knew then some of the carpetbagger disappearances were the result of this old Confederate vampire still fighting for his lost cause.

John never saw him again - but then again, he wasn't looking.

Kate shifted on the bed and John rose up. He was about to go but lingered for a moment. His eyes wandered over her jeans. She had a decidedly feminine flare to her hips that disqualified her from ever being on a fashion runway where the women were expected to look like emaciated boys.

Kate knew what to eat and what not to eat. He could not see any visible signs of fat on the woman.

Curse her!

Did she have to look so good? His gaze lingered on her crotch. The jeans pressed delicately into the folds of her vagina in the fashion of the times that left little to the imagination.

John rubbed his hair back and left the room.

Henry took John's place in the bedroom. He sat in the chair, exactly like John had. He rested his arms on the back of the chair and his chin on his arms. He gazed at the woman he could not bring himself to kill.

Kate shifted and began opening her eyes. A few rubs and some stretching time later, her face clouded over as she remembered her situation.

He saw her press her arm against her right side to check on her pistol and then she visibly relaxed.

“Your sidearm won't help you against us.”

Her face clouded again. “Because you are vampires, right?”

“Mm hmm.”

“Sure,” she said. “Whatever.”

Henry rose and unbuckled his belt. Pulling down his pants.

She gasped and scrambled back on the bed away from him.

But he had turned to show her his butt cheeks. He pointed. “See that pink mark there? That's where you shot me yesterday. Almost all healed now.”

He eyed her from over his shoulder. Her mouth gaped and she reached out to gently touch the pink spot. She blinked several times.

He moved away and secured his jeans.

“Vampires?”

Henry shrugged.

“But--”

“We are what we are. What is so difficult about it?”

“Well, you don't run around in a cape--”

“I could if you wanted.”

“So you do have a cape?”

“No, ma'am, I do not. I would need to go buy one.” Henry grinned.

“Do you sleep in a coffin?”

“No. I sleep in a bed, if I feel like sleeping. But I can go for days without sleep.”

“When you abducted me, it was daylight. Everyone knows vampires burn in the sun.”

Henry shook his head. “I can walk in the sun all I want.”

“But--” she sputtered.

“First you don't want to believe in vampires but then you want to tell me what it is to be one? I think you need to watch less TV” Henry scratched his head and peered at Kate from under his eyebrows.

She did a good imitation of a fish out of water for a couple of seconds. Then, “Tell me how you two became vampires.”

Henry smiled. “It's not very glamorous, I'm afraid. John and I served under Pemberton at Vicksburg. We were captured by Union soldiers in one of their bayonet charges. Unfortunately, their commanding officer was a vampire and decided to use us as his personal feeders--”

“What? Feeders?” she said.

“He fed off of us a little each day. John talked about making you a feeder in the car. It is a slow death though. The body can't produce enough blood to replace what is taken.” Henry made a face.

“Me?” Her face, already streaked white with cleanser, went even paler.

He shook his head. “We can't. No matter how much we talk about it, we can't.”

She blinked.

“We're honorable men, ma'am. That has never changed.”

“Honorable? But-but you fought for slavery.”

“No ma'am, although that is the popular historical view. Slavery didn't become an issue until Lincoln's Address, halfway through the war.”

“Everyone knows you fought to keep slavery--”

“Everyone knows wrong,” he said. “The federal structure's tax revenues were threatened. Over sixty percent of every single federal dollar in revenue was taxed from the South. When we declared the opening of New Orleans as a duty-free port, that cinched it for the North.”

She shook her head.

He nodded. “The war began over money. Sure, we claimed the rights of the sovereign states to secede, but only because the federal structure did not want to see a change in the revenues. It was fought over money.”

“And slavery? What of it then?”

“Slavery was a good political issue. Lincoln wanted help, but he ended up not needing it. Did you know he claimed blacks and whites could not live together and he wanted to send all of them back to Africa?” Henry grinned.

“What? Nonsense.” She shook her head.

He shrugged. “Many people don't know that but what does it matter anyway?”

She blinked and shook her head. “I can't buy any of that.”

He shrugged again. “I ain't selling. But what about you, Kate? Who are you?”

She moved her hair back with her fingers. “Well, I'm not a confederate vampire who thinks the Civil War was fought over money.”

He laughed. “Really. Who are you?”

“Katherine Anson. I am a thirty-five year old secretary for the CEO of an importing company. I am divorced--”

“Tell me about your ex-husband.”

She blew her breath out through pursed lips and her cheeks bubbled. “I was married to some guy everyone thought was a hunk. His name was Lance Garret and he was a gym instructor. He thought his biceps were so impressive that he should decide if he was going to be monogamous or not. Turns out he was pumping a lot more than just iron.”

“What a shame,” he said.

Kate blinked. He kept surprising her. This man looked at her from under shaggy blonde hair. Kate wanted to run her hands through it. She wanted to hear more of his soothing tones. She wanted to feel the skin of his buttocks again--

Henry grinned.

I hope vampires can't read minds!

She suddenly felt grimy and with it embarrassed at her condition. “Is it possible I could shower and brush my teeth?”

He gazed at her with those liquid blue eyes and she started to tremble. “Ja, but I will have to supervise. It would probably be best if I cleaned you off so you don't try to escape or shoot me again.”

She felt her face flush. She didn't want to be any more revealing than she had, and certainly not with her body.

“Come,” he said, rising from his chair.

She got up slowly. If vampires can't have sex, then what is the danger?

He kept an eye on her but started the shower in the bathroom. He rummaged in the cabinet and produced a packaged toothbrush. He plopped down a small box of baking soda.

She went to the sink to brush. “No toothpaste?”

“No, but baking soda is better for your teeth,” he said. “Cleaner smile, whiter teeth. No bad chemicals.”

“You worry about bad chemicals?”

He nodded. “No point in taxing our recuperative powers. Takes more blood if we allow ourselves to be injured.”

“Hmm. Okay.” She brushed with the baking soda. Her mouth did not feel sticky afterward.

“Give me your sidearm and I will turn my back for the toilet.” He held out his hand.

She hesitated, but then reluctantly drew her gun and handed it over. He stuck it in his waistband. When her business was finished, and her face fully red under the cleanser, she started to undress for the shower.

He turned and began helping her. Stripped down naked, she huddled with her arms crossed over her small breasts.

Henry smiled and then began undressing.

“Uh... But--” She panicked.

“I'm going to wash you. That way I can keep an eye on you.”

Kate trembled. She didn't know what to say. It wasn't everyday a handsome man told you he was going to help you wash in the shower.

He dropped his shirt down and tossed her gun down on it. Then his pants came off.

She eyed him up and down. She was five foot four and Henry was about six inches taller. His physique was good. She had seen enough rippling muscles, six-pack abs, bulging biceps, taut this and tight that on her ex-husband and she hoped to never see the like again. But where most men tended now toward a heavy gut, Henry's was flat. His chest was lightly haired and defined. He had no love handles.

Then her eyes dropped down to... “Oh my,” she said.

He smiled – a boyish grin, but his eyes still peered at her like two blue

gemstones.

His penis hung down, limp. But Kate had never seen the likes. It hung down about five inches, and it was fat and fleshy-looking. Its color was a very soft shade of pink added to his light skin color.

He reached out, turning her by the shoulder, and directed her into the shower.

“I'm sorry! I wasn't trying to stare, but it looked funny--”

He grunted. “Ja, it changed over time. It is softer, more sensitive. The blood did weird things to it. I can alter its size and width--”

She laughed. “Get out.”

“Huh?” He appeared confused. “Oh, I thought you meant the shower.”

“No, I mean man's never-ending quest for a bigger penis. Or at least a penis they can see over their expanding gut.”

He pushed her under the water and soaked her down. His hands felt firm on her, turning her this way and that, and then moving her head gently under the hot spray. He ran his fingers slowly through her hair as she faced him. The cleanser began washing away.

“You have beautiful hair,” he said.

Her eyes closed as his fingers gently brushed through her hair and against her scalp. She could hear him breathing and she felt her nipples harden. Something brushed her clitoral hood and both his hands were occupied.

She squeaked and stumbled back against the shower wall. His penis was half erect. She gaped at it.

“Sorry, ma'am,” he said. “I don't get to stand so close to a naked lady every day.”

Kate's eyes were glued to his erection. As she watched, it thickened more, not growing too much lengthwise, but in girth. It also pulsed to his heartbeat.

He pulled her back toward him and put a small amount of shampoo in his hand.

With it, he began washing her hair.

She could feel her vagina start squirming inside. “That's okay, I guess. It's not every day I get washed by a naked man as handsome as you.”

His smile was genuine and cheerful.

She let him wash her hair and she allowed herself to sway, shift and move so that his penis once again brushed the front of her yearning vagina.

“Lean back a little so I can rinse the shampoo out,” he said.

As she did, her vagina arched out a little and she felt the most wonderful sensation of this man's penis rubbing directly on her clit. But she didn't want to move. She didn't want the rinsing to end either. But her body betrayed her. She began squirming, rubbing herself on the surprisingly soft erection. Not soft like a dysfunction, but spongy soft.

She let out a gasp.

He leaned forward at the gasp. “I'm sorry, did I hurt you?”

Now she let out a moan. As he had leaned forward, his shaft slid along her labia and between her legs – like she was riding a broomstick. Her head swam with the delightful pleasures and all she could mumble was, “No, no, fine.”

She clamped her legs on this man's shaft and felt it slightly pliable. “So has it been since the Civil War?”

He extricated himself from her gripping thighs. “Hmm?”

She moaned again at the move. “Since you last had sex?”

Henry turned her and started soaping her back. He moved forward just a little so his penis teased the back of her thighs. “Naw, not that long.”

She froze. “But I thought vampires couldn't have sex.” She felt his penis behind her.

He laughed. “Now what gave you that idea?”

“Oh my,” she said. Her body would not stop squirming. Had it been that long since she even played with herself? A sudden motion and she realized she had moved back a little so she was riding his cock like a broomstick again. She clamped her legs on it and squirmed.

Henry did not seem bothered; he just pushed her forward so her back was under the water for rinsing.

This angle is definitely better, she thought. Her hips began grinding. The wet feel of his shaft up against her labia had her panting. With a gasp, she started sliding herself back and forth along his erection. A deep hollow ache developed inside her.

He pulled her up so that her back was against his chest. She leaned her head back as he soaped up her arms and breasts from behind. Jolts of pleasure ripped through her as his soapy hands passed over her straining nipples. She ground her hips onto his thick broomstick and felt the waves of pleasure radiate from her sopping vagina.

Too good! Can't stop!

He soaped her flat belly and down to her trimmed vagina. His fingers brushed through her pubic hair and she jerked.

“Oh! Unghh!” She spread her legs for his fingers. Her left hand wandered down and touched his penis as the head poked out in front of her thighs. It felt spongy, but fat and hot. She had never felt anything like it. She toyed with the head and heard his breathing grow ragged.

She felt him rinsing off her chest. His fingers made delicious passes over her nipples. She noted though that through it all, he had not moved a hair in response to her grinding and squirming. When she felt his hand whisking water down her belly to her pubic mound, she moaned.

“What is it, Kate?” he asked.

“Take me,” she said fiercely. “Take me now, please!”

He disengaged from her and turned her. She leaned back against the shower wall as the hot water hit them from the side. She tilted her hips to him and wrapped

her hands behind his neck, pulling. He gripped his penis and brushed it against her clit.

She moaned and shuddered with lust and pleasure. "Yes!"

He leaned forward and pushed his cock into her lips, finding her opening.

Kate growled like a cat as his cock found her opening. He had almost made her cum with the single brush against her clit. Panting with need and moaning with pleasure, she groaned long and loud as his erection parted her lips, pushed inside and began filling her. His cock felt so good, so pliable, but hard. It was fat and stretched her pussy lips open obscenely.

He wasn't so long that he hurt, but he was thick. When he pushed all the way in, his pubic bone ground against her clit, sending waves of pleasure through her. With delight, Kate found he knew what tipped her off.

He pulled almost out and then rammed back home. The slapping sounds in the shower competed with her groans and pants. Each connection with her clit increased her dizziness. She was being manhandled by a real man. She was being drilled and the constant sudden refilling of her aching pussy with this thick cock shoved her over the edge. Exploding from her vagina and radiating out to all her limbs was an eruption of lights, pleasure and satisfaction. It felt so good - the contractions and spasms - that it hurt. She didn't know if she would survive the pleasure. But she did, and her senses began to come back to her.

Henry pulled out slowly, still erect. She was too delirious to ask why. She watched him turn to the shower and stroke his fat cock with his hand. She felt cheated that he didn't finish in her, but at the same time turned on by this man stroking himself in front of her. She wanted to feel it in her hands, but watching him was fun, too. Hot and nasty.

After a few seconds, all his muscles tensed and he shot several huge ropes of sperm into the shower water. She had never seen a man cum so much.

Spent, he turned off the shower and stepped out. When she looked, he was waiting for her with a towel. A small grin of satisfaction was on his face.

"If you wait here, I will bring you a shirt to wear while we launder your clothes."

“Okay,” she said. She closed her eyes, wrapped in the towel as she was and stood there patting to dry herself. She still tingled and she felt alive with pleasure.

He dressed and left her gun on the toilet lid. But he gathered up her clothes and left with them.

Whistling, Henry walked out into the living room with her clothes.

“You are such a pig,” said John.

“Why?”

“You only whistle Dixie when you get sex.”

Henry laughed.

Kate sat on the couch, finally let out of the bedroom. She sat in one of Henry's shirts, her legs drawn up beneath her. Henry was in the kitchen cooking for her while she talked with John.

“Were you in the same unit?”

“Mm, yep. We were both part of Van Dorn's cavalry troop, but some husband took a dislike to him and we fell under Pemberton's command at Vicksburg. Captured there, and now you know the story.”

She gave him the eye and raised an eyebrow in disdain.

John threw up his hands. “What?”

“Told you she was difficult...” Henry said from the kitchen.

She mimicked John. “I am Kate – I was born thirty-five years ago and I am here on this couch. Now you know the story.”

John made a mouth and said, “Come on.”

She threw up in her hands in further imitation. “Well?”

John leaned forward, his dark, brooding eyes boring into hers. “It was a long time ago and means nothing now.”

“Oh come on now,” she said. “It means nothing now? It is who you are!”

He shook his head. “There is no more Confederacy. We no longer fight for freedom. I don't even know if the vampire who created us is still alive! And forget that our cause to create dissension behind Union lines was nullified by their victory. There is nothing!”

“You've survived almost two hundred years and think none of it matters? It shaped who you are.”

He smirked. “If I say anything now about the confederacy in any fashion, it is considered racist – even though blacks fought for the South!”

She shrugged.

“The truth no longer matters or is even relevant,” he said. “That is my point. Relevance. Who cares about all that now? None of it matters.”

“What do you think of how far we have advanced?” she said.

“Boring,” John said without hesitation. “Maybe it appears exciting looking back. Maybe it appears fast and breathtaking. But having lived through it, I would have to say the process was long, drawn out, and makes me want to face another bayonet charge.”

“Ja,” from the kitchen.

She squinted and motioned to the kitchen, but directed the question to John, “He German?”

“Dutch.”

“Ah,” she nodded.

They were silent a moment and she said, “This is all so hard to believe.”

John gestured, drawing her gaze. He pointed up at the wall over the doorway behind her head.

Hung there on display were two old rifles.

“Yours?”

Henry settled a plate in front of her. “Ja. We went back for them after we turned. Didn't want our weapons soiled by Union hands.”

“Sharps Carbines,” John said and settled back. “The guns of today are far more efficient.”

She looked at her food. It was a stir-fry with brown rice, broccoli and bits of beef. She frowned, nodded and sampled. The seasoning was delicate and not overdone. She was impressed. “Mmm, very nice, Henry.”

“It is nothing,” he said. He sat next to her. “Many decades of cooking. John can't even boil water.”

John shrugged, but he nodded and flashed a big grin.

She swallowed a mouth of food and said, “Are you two, erm...”

John blinked at her, waiting for her to finish her question.

Henry tilted his head to look at her, also waiting.

“You know,” she said. She waved her hand indicating the two of them.

“Oh...” John said.

“Most certainly not!” Henry said at the same time.

“Not that there's anything wrong with--” she started.

“Of course there is,” Henry said. “But we grew up in a different, simpler time. Morals were stronger. Today, any perversion is considered all well and good.”

“Hmm well,” she said with an air of dismissal.

“Quite a shock meeting real old-fashioned men, huh?” John asked.

“Well, moral dinosaurs--”

“I reckon you much prefer the softer and more feminine men of modern times,” John said.

She blinked. Did she really? He certainly had a point. She was uncomfortable with men who had strong opinions. She was far more comfortable around feminized men who apologized for everything and had timid beliefs. But what did that say about her? Was she fearful of surrendering control to a strong man?

She went back to eating while pondering this mental puzzle.

“I think I have struck on something unpleasant?” John said. “We can certainly leave that discussion for another time, then.”

“Ja.”

“Where are the female vampires? I wonder if they share such strong beliefs with you,” she said.

“We've met three in our time,” Henry said.

“But you never got together with them...?”

“Well, we can look at that two different ways,” he said. “One way is that we didn't make them, so we had no reason to interact. The second way is they weren't ours to breed.”

“Breed?” She blinked.

“Ja, male vampires can breed a female vampire and produce offspring.”

“You're kidding?”

“No,” Henry said.

John leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees. “It can be done but is avoided. There is a sect of vampires here who hunt down those who breed. Or violate their code of vampire conduct.”

“Tell me about this sect?” She shifted around and then realized from John's smile that she had just flashed him more than her inner thigh.

“The sect is new. Some younger vampire by the name of Franklin decided that the key to surviving was to force all the rest of us to live by his code. He feels the government will view us favorably if we do not produce offspring.”

“When a vampire has a baby, what is it like?” Kate was intrigued.

“Don't know, rightly,” he said. “But we understand that it is difficult and requires extra care and love. The child can quickly become outcast by others if its raising is neglectful.”

She let John fall silent and finished her food.

She had less than two days to live.

CHAPTER 4

“She didn't appear in any pain,” John said after she went back to the bathroom.

“No, I pulled out and finished in the shower.”

“Ah, good. I would hate to have to listen to her cries of pain otherwise.”

“We aren't going to kill her?” Henry said.

“Neither of us can bring ourselves to do it. I don't know what to do.”

“Maybe she would like to breed, ja?” Henry grinned lasciviously.

“That's mighty dangerous thinking--”

“Pah!” Henry tossed his head. “Why should we be listening to a vampire who isn't even a hundred years old?”

“He has quite a following.”

“Rookies.”

“If he finds out we are letting a human witness live, he will come here himself and kill Kate.”

“Ja, I know.” Henry clasped his hands and looked down. “His followers watch all the time. He probably knows we have her here already.”

John nodded. “Her life is in grave danger.”

“So, what do we do about it? Turn her?”

“If she doesn't want to be turned, Franklin will kill all three of us.”

“That lick-spittle can try...” Henry bristled.

“Henry, Franklin's code makes a certain sense--”

“Bah. We never had any kind of convening with those in government about this code.”

“Still, he not only has the will to enforce his code, but the means.”

Kate came out of the bedroom still wearing nothing but a shirt. Walking around two men dressed like this had been awkward at first, but she grew to enjoy the naughty feeling. With just a pose, she could flash enough to cause either one to choke up with lust.

Of course, they weren't really men, were they? But both had shown themselves to be more men than any she had ever known.

She saw John looking out through the curtains. Henry was not in the building that she could tell.

“Where's Henry?”

John looked back briefly. “He went to purchase some more food and spices. Said you would need a finer touch than what we are used to.”

“So you do eat?”

“Yes, but blood provides more. Especially human blood.”

She nodded. “You could get by eating rice if you wanted?”

“Yes,” he said. He turned away from the window and frowned.

“What is the matter?” she said.

“We're being watched already. There will be a confrontation soon and they will try to kill you. Maybe all of us.”

“The sect?” Her eyes were big.

He nodded. “Henry wants to stand up to them, but there are a dozen or more of

them. We can't fight odds like that.”

“Maybe they will go away.”

“They never do,” he said. “It is a matter of pride with Franklin.”

“You could always let me go?” She tried not to sound hopeful. She had a life, a career, and obligations. Rent, car payment, insurance--

“They would hunt you down and kill you themselves and they wouldn't be nice about it. I won't turn you out knowing a pack of vampires will make sport with you.”

“You care about a human that much?”

“No, Kate, I really don't. But you are a woman, a good woman and a beautiful woman,” he said. “You are smart, sharp as a knife and have completely flummoxed me and Henry.”

“You?” she said. “I thought you hated me.”

“What under the stars of heaven gave you that silly idea?” He looked into her eyes.

“Well, Henry had said you were supposed to feed on me--”

“I am shamed to ever think of hurting you. It isn't in my bones.” He reached to her and brushed back her hair from the side of her face.

He was a couple inches taller than her and his proximity with his scent of oiled leather and a touch of sandalwood had her head swimming. His eyes were deep-set, but she saw no duplicity there. He meant what he said.

Why couldn't she find men like this? Where had they all gone? Where was the desire to protect, shelter and love a woman? Men today wanted to watch television. Why couldn't there be a man or two like Henrik and Jonathan? Where were the men who cared about more than her breast size?

He must have seen the sadness there on her face and he pulled her in for a comforting hug. He patted her head as she laid her head against his. He was

gentle, but clutched her protectively.

“It's okay, Kate.” He whispered to her. “We're here. We will endeavor to be your shield.”

She clung to him and melted to the stroking of her hair and back. His voice was even and sincere. The whispers sent chills down her spine and she snuggled closer. She could feel his body with hers and realized that if she could feel him, then he felt her. Did John also have an unusual penis? It sure felt thick against her crotch.

Occurring to her that her snuggling was making him hard, she eased back with embarrassment. Still in his arms, she gazed up into his eyes. His mouth was slightly open, as if he was panting.

At that moment, the door opened and Henry stepped in with two plastic bags of groceries.

John looked back over his shoulder, not letting her go.

Henry said, “Ah! I see.” His smile was big and he wagged his eyebrows at them both. “Good, good!”

John's face clouded though and he released her. “Did you see him out there?” he said.

Henry shot a glance at Kate, but nodded. His smile disappeared.

“Won't be long – maybe a few days before they make a move,” John said.

“Ja. I expect.”

“Is there somewhere we could go to get away from them?” she said.

“Surely,” said John. “But they will follow. If we ran far enough they would stop but they would eventually hunt you down once you returned home.”

She hugged her arms to herself and tried to dispel the bewilderment overcoming her. She was smart, wasn't she? Tough? Couldn't she find a way out of this?

Her solution, when she finally worked one through her mind, would affect far more than just the three of them.

CHAPTER 5

After another fine meal that night, she retired to the bedroom.

She had asked earlier where the two got their money. Part of the answer surprised her. While she expected the answer “from our victims,” she was unprepared for the next part. The national government insured that any tax defaulted properties went to vampires first, if any were needing.

That whole angle had confused her. But confusing her even more was their response that the rulers of the governments were often blood-suckers themselves. Not vampires like them, but those who found occult power in the drinking of blood.

Kate had read some articles about drained bodies found near government buildings or royal houses, but the news consistently dismissed the events as evidence of ritualistic wackos. Apparently the public failed to notice that all of these corpses kept turning up in the same spots – near government or royal buildings. The whispers of dark deeds by rulers were waved off as conspiracy.

The governments allowed vampires their pick of properties almost like a Homestead Program. Henry had said the governments sometimes cooperated with certain vampires for the procuring of victims for their weird rituals. Those vampires were sometimes directly supported by the government.

If they could get far enough from Franklin and his sect, they could conceivably move on and away from what would be certain death. At least, so she assumed. John told her if the government decides a vampire is doing something it doesn't like, it just sends in the death squads. There is no warning.

She undressed and laid her gun under her pillow. She didn't feel as if she needed it now, not here against John or Henry, but kept it near as a matter of habit. A burglary here didn't necessarily mean vampires breaking and entering.

Her door opened and Henry stuck his head in. “Hello, pretty one.”

She smiled and beckoned him.

He padded over to the bed and sat down on it.

Was there a man like this out there for her? Or even like John? Would she ever find them?

He stroked her cheek and she trembled.

Pulling his head down, she brought him down for a kiss. Their tongues met and hers grazed against one of his fangs. It surprised her for a second and then she remembered that Henry wasn't supposed to be human. She explored this tongue and the texture of his lips. They felt... different. Somewhat softer, but fleshier. As if the blood engorged them in a different way. He certainly looked normal.

Except for his penis.

She giggled and threw back the cover. Just the thought of his thick erection made her squirm.

He undressed and slid in beside her. Their lips met again as their hands began exploring. She gripped his shaggy blonde head and kissed him while his hand found her labia. His slow stroking of her lips and clit sent waves of pleasure tingling up her spine. Could she find a man that did this to her?

He's right here in my arms.

But the thought wasn't right. Something deep inside rebelled and said no.

Her hand found his erection and stroked the wonderful sponginess. It was warm, throbbing and fully erect. After just a few seconds of stroking, he growled and moved over her. Feeling him push at her entrance, she opened her legs wider and closed her eyes. His magnificent penis slid into her with ease.

She was frightened by a long moan in the room until she realized it was hers. His hips slowly rotated and moved against and away from hers, driving his erection straight into her.

He stopped for a second and shut his eyes. Suddenly, she felt his penis shift and move in her. It grew and stretched a little so that it filled her perfectly. It felt so

soft, hard, and filling all at once – as if his erection was perfectly molded inside of her sex.

As he drew out and thrust back in, her entire vaginal canal was stroked and massaged. Her eyes rolled back in her head and she panted with the sensation of complete fulfillment. Gasps, babbles and grunts came from her and she was only vaguely aware that she was the one making the noise.

Opening her eyes as the waves of pleasure reached higher, she saw someone sitting a few feet from her. It was John, sitting naked on the chair. Her eyes glazed over. He was stroking his cock, watching them. His organ was also odd and magnificent. He was stroking to Henry's thrusting.

She watched his hand slide up and down on his shaft and the sexy sight and Henry's thrusting sent her falling far over the edge. Her breathing became panting. Her heart raced. Her vision swam. And then she was falling and clenching and releasing as a thousand pleasures ripped through her.

But she was shaken by a shout from John.

“Henry, no!”

Her eyes looked up to where Henry was leaning as he drove his erection into her. His mouth was open in a rictus of fangs. His eyes blazed as if lit from within with a brilliant yellow iris surrounding a black pupil.

Kate screamed and began kicking to try to get away from the look of horror above her. Henry was dislodged and then he was off her in an instant, faster than she could see him move.

John shoved him toward the door.

Kate pulled the blankets up to her chin as she huddled on the bed.

John, after getting Henry out of the room, turned to her. “It's alright. Just an accident.”

She whimpered, wondering what she had seen.

He knelt by the bed and stroked her hair. “It's okay, really. Don't worry, he could

never hurt you.”

She stared at him, wondering if she was really seeing him for the first time. As a man? As a thing?

John gathered up his and Henry's clothing and left the room.

CHAPTER 6

Kate slept fitfully until she finally dropped off into a deep sleep at about three in the morning. She awoke to noise and the smell of bacon. She opened her eyes and smiled.

But then she remembered the events of last night, the excitement of seeing John with them, and also the horror of Henry.

What had happened? Had she done something wrong? Had she said something? John had assured her everything was okay, but this whole vampire existence was something totally new for her. Had she done something during her and Henry's act of coupling that had caused him to exhibit something not good?

She had no answers.

The smell of bacon was a powerful lure and she found herself showering and dressing to venture out and enjoy breakfast.

Coming out into the living room of the brick building in which she was being kept, she rubbed her eyes and grinned at the two suddenly very solicitous men – no, vampires.

Henry smiled. “I will put the eggs on now, scrambled with olive oil and butter.”

Kate nodded, not sure if she should be angry or scared from last night. She had been frightened, surely, but aren't vampires supposed to be frightening?

She sat at the unused dining table and waited with a smile. She wasn't sure whether she should be worried or not, but both of the men – or vampires – seemed solicitous of her this morning.

John sat next to her. “We're sorry if we frightened you last night, Kate.”

“So... what did I see last night?” A direct question gets the direct answer, no?

John and Henry shared a look.

Henry waved a spatula and John shrugged.

“Well, Henry got all caught up in the moment and was going to turn you.”

“Turn me?”

He nodded. “He was going to bite you, suck some blood, and then turn you into a vampire.”

“He can do that?” She had never really put much thought into it.

“It is painful, but easily done. Just not very often.”

“He drinks my blood and then I drink his?” she said.

“Yes.”

“I see. He was going to do this to me last night? Without asking?” She frowned.

John nodded and Henry looked ashamed in the kitchen.

“I’m sorry, Kate,” Henry said. “I never want to be someone who has hurt you.”

She nodded and shrugged; she did not know what else to do.

Should she be flattered? Comforted? Mollified? Afraid? Other than a fright last night, she couldn't say she felt much different. These two men - or whatever they were - wanted to make her happy.

She heard the spatula scrape with finality and her stomach growled in hunger. Henry handled three plates over to the table and placed them down. Two strips of bacon and scrambled eggs were offered on her plate.

Perfect, she thought. With a dip of her head in silent prayer, she picked up a strip of bacon and bit.

“You say grace?” Henry asked.

She stopped chewing and shrugged. Then she nodded.

“It has been so long for us. But we often wondered if God had forsaken us.”

She stopped chewing. She had offered thanks silently; were they going to harangue her? It wasn't like she had forced them to say grace with her.

“Yes, forsaken,” John said. “That is, until you came along.”

Suddenly, she wasn't sure she could eat anything without choking – or shedding tears.

As one, both Henry and John reached out and touched her hand and forearm. Then they both turned to their plates.

Her lip quivered and her vision swam with tears. No one had ever said such a nice thing about her before. She turned to her breakfast to

keep from blubbing.

John touched her hand briefly again. Just a reassuring squeeze.

The bacon was perfect – slow cooked. Her eggs were fluffy and creamy. Henry could have been a chef at a fine restaurant. “What did you do before the war, Henry?”

“Ah, well,” he said. “That was a long time ago, but I was a dairy-hand.”

“Dairy hand?”

“Yes, he milked cows,” John said. His grin told her what he thought of such a job.

“Oh, I see. And you, John?”

“I worked for a distiller in Meridian, Mississippi. We made whiskey,” he said. A rogue's grin and a wink accompanied his declaration.

Whiskey was better than milk to John. Kate laughed inwardly, but the smile showed despite her efforts.

“What?” John said. His tone was indignant.

She snorted. “Both are fine jobs. I found it funny that you thought milking cows was somehow demeaning.”

Henry thrust out his chin to John in an I-told-you-so look that left her chuckling.

“Milk is for kids. Whiskey is for adults,” John said.

“Well, I can't argue that!” she said. She smiled with pleasure. Her conversations with her ex-husband Lance were never as good and here were two men willing to talk her up.

Could she ever go back to her life as some secretary? Could she even if she wanted? Would the other vampires hunt her down and feed off her for days as they tortured her? Would she be forgotten as just another statistic among the missing?

Later, she sat on the couch next to Henry. She put her hand on his thigh and said, “You still haven't told me what you both intend to do with me.”

“Ach... well.” He appeared discomfited.

“Am I to be killed to satisfy your vampire friends?” she said. She feared it, but didn't think it likely. She knew they couldn't do it.

“No, no,” he said. He shook his head emphatically.

“Are you going to turn me over to them?”

“Never!”

“What about John? What does he think?”

John had been cleaning up in the kitchen, putting dishes into the dishwasher. He toweled off his hands and came to sit next to her. “We aren't giving you to those beasts. Have no fears in that regard, my dear lady.”

“Are you going to let me go?” she said, but her heart was no longer there. She had to admit to herself that she didn't want to go back. She didn't want to resume her life of slaving for people to whom she owed money. She wanted to be free. She wanted to be free of her former life and useless obligations. She wanted to love and be loved. She wanted to contribute to something more than being just

another nameless consumer.

She hated being just a consumer. She found she hated it with vehemence. Existing just to buy the newest gadget thrown before her by those with the real wealth angered her.

“If we let you go, you will be killed,” Henry said. “They will come for you and kill you.”

She laid her head on his shoulder. Her life was in turmoil. Would she ever settle it? Ever?

Henry placed his hand on her face and caressed her cheek. He kissed the top of her head and inhaled the scent of her hair. John gently grasped her hand in one of his and stroked it with his other.

Slowly, she felt her cares slipping away. Receding. Shrinking.

Henry guided her face to his and their lips met in a light kiss. His lips moved against hers and his tongue ventured out to tease her lips. She pushed her tongue out against his and they slid together - moving, exploring.

She felt John's lips against her neck, pressing lightly - grazing along her vulnerable flesh. She could feel his breath against her skin and relished the luxuriant feel of his lips on her skin and Henry's lips on her own.

Her heart thudded in her chest and she drew in deeper breaths.

John began to lift at her sweater and soon Henry was helping him. Her head swam with delight, pleasure and satisfaction. If two men wanted to please her, how could she argue? Could she refuse? Did she want to refuse?

Her sweater came off and John easily unhooked her bra. In seconds, she was bare to these two attentive men. They didn't treat her like some cheap date. They caressed her, kissed her and showed her she meant more than a momentary thrill.

She turned her head to John and shared a deep, probing kiss.

His hand circled and teased her nipples causing her to tremble and quiver. Henry leaned in and nuzzled the other side of her neck. His hand started unbuttoning

her jeans.

She did not stop him.

She had less than twenty-four hours to live.

CHAPTER 7

She sat naked between the two naked vampires. They had removed their clothes. But as they had sat back down, she had become slightly insecure. She hugged her arms to herself, unsure as to what they expected, how they would feel about her after, and what that meant for later.

She wasn't some cheap woman to be used and then discarded without thought like a torn condom package. But she knew she was developing feelings for Henry and she suspected the odd feelings and attraction to John was the same. She cared about them. She felt for them – sympathized with them, and yearned to please them both.

Was this wrong? Was it wrong to love if she loved two men? Was it wrong when both men knew it and accepted it? Would she have to choose?

It was that thought – of choosing – that caused her to withdraw a little. She didn't want to choose. Henry was lovable, but John was endearing. They both showed their affection in different ways. Was it wrong to accept affection? Was it wrong to accept the love? Was it good to spurn one when both men knew each other's feelings and sat here naked with her willing to share?

Was their friendship, their manly love for each other so deep that they could love her together? Could she handle the attention? Could she survive it? And what of her humanity? Not only was her human life in danger, but their vampire lives as well, and she was the cause.

Yet, still they sat here with her, their kisses covering her skin and causing her to relax. Her questions floated away on the answers of their nakedness and their affection.

She swooned and opened her eyes for balance. Both men caressed and stroked her with one hand each. Henry sat on her left, stroking his erection while he toyed with her neck. John sat on her right, sliding his hand up and down his shaft while he circled a finger on her nipple.

She became instantly flushed at the sight. A heat spread through her and her breathing quickened. Her vagina flooded with heat and moisture. She parted her legs to give it some air and to make it available.

It was Henry's hand that wandered to her sex first. She was glad; she wasn't sure she was ready for John to be so intimate. She groaned as his finger played with her folds.

Before she knew she was doing it, her hands snaked out and gripped their erections. Both men allowed her to take over. With slow strokes, she felt the two wonderful cocks in her hands throbbing to her touch. She reveled in the power she had at that moment. She controlled their desire. She controlled their lust. She felt them respond to her stroking, both penises becoming longer and thicker.

When Henry's finger dipped inside her and curled up, she gasped. Her hips squirmed and she moaned with need.

He pulled her head over to his and they shared another, deeper kiss – one of passion and lust. She squeezed both cocks as Henry made love to her mouth with his tongue. The itch inside her deepened. The hollow ache caused her hips to buck on the couch as fingers dipped in and out of her.

She broke the kiss and gasped for air. She saw then that Henry's hand had been replaced by John's. Her labia and hole were being explored by John's gentle fingers.

She shuddered suddenly as if her body was going to shake apart and the heat flooding her made her squirm even harder. “Oh my goodness! Oh yes!”

Henry moved and began tugging on her shoulders and hips. He wanted her to lie down on the couch. She let him maneuver her and he laid her face up on the couch, her legs open toward him and her head nestled in John's lap.

Henry scooted down and slowly, agonizingly, placed one long lick from her labia up to her clitoris. The ascent of his tongue up her sex was nasty and delicious. A long moan oozed from her. Her eyes looked up to John who had gone back to stroking his shaft.

She almost laughed; his cock was so close to her eyes she was trying to cross them to see it. He smiled down at her. Twisting, she gripped his shaft again and

rubbed his erection while Henry's tongue began licking and exploring her aching pussy.

The need spiraled higher and higher. Henry inserted two fingers in her and pleasure radiated from where he touched her. John wandered a hand to her breasts and toyed softly with them. Each tease tingled and the hardening nipples were more erect and hard than she had ever experienced.

John's cock was beautiful and her hand on it added to the lust driving through her from her breasts and vagina. With a groan, she pulled it down and moved her head forward to take him into her mouth.

John let his head fall back and a desire-filled sigh escaped his lips. She moved her head back and forth on his shaft while stroking the length that wasn't in her mouth. She felt so dirty and wanton.

She felt Henry manhandling her again, lifting her hips. She glanced and he was half-standing – one foot on the floor and the other kneeling on the couch. He held her hips in the air for the thrust that speared her hole with his thick cock. The ache in her welcomed the smooth thrust and even more pleasure swept up her to escape her mouth as a moan around John's erection.

She sucked harder, her head dizzy with lust. Henry felt so good as he held her hips up and drove into her. Moans and grunts came out with every thrust and she had to take John's cock out of her mouth to catch her breath. But as soon as she did, she went back to sucking him.

She had never done this before. It felt so wrong. It felt so right. It felt so nasty. It felt so good!

When Henry reached his thumb over to her clit, she saw lights. Darkness and light swam over her vision and she knew she was close. The waves were getting higher, but then Henry pulled out.

She groaned with disappointment, her hips trying to find the remedy to her ache. She whimpered, “Why?”

Henry chuckled. “I'm not trying to torture you, though it is fun. But I can't finish in you.”

“Why not?” she said. She gripped John's erection and stroked while she tried to pull Henry back into her with her feet.

“Because vampire seed would hurt you. An interior burning and agony that I cannot put you through,” Henry said.

“Kate,” said John. “I haven't felt a woman in a very long time. Could you sit on my lap and maybe let me feel you rubbing yourself on me?”

He asked so sweetly that she almost laughed. “Well, I guess so. But I don't think I can handle sex yet, if ever.”

He grinned. “That's fine. I think I can sit still.”

Henry nodded to her and she lifted herself over to John's lap where she still held his shaft. She sat down on his thighs and then scooted up so her pubic mound made contact with the underside of his penis as it stood straight up. A shiver went through her.

Henry sat beside them and began stroking himself again.

She gripped John's shoulders and leaned back. Her vagina rotated toward his shaft and her labia parted around it, wet and hot with need. She stroked that way while he trembled and let out a contented sigh. He used a finger on each hand to circle her nipples. This sent electric jolts through her and she gritted her teeth in pleasure.

“Ah, that is wonderful,” he said. A big smile lit his face as he watched her massage her pussy along his shaft.

She gripped the head of his penis. It was engorged and hot in her hand.

“Kate?”

“Mmm?” She ground her wet lips against his warm tool.

“Maybe I could feel what it is like to be inside once again? If I don't move and let you do it?” His breath was shaky.

“I dunno...” she said.

“If I don't try to make love to you or move?”

“Go ahead,” said Henry. “It's okay, love.”

“Okay, I guess. If you're okay with it.”

He nodded and stroked her leg while his other hand was on his erection.

She needed to feel full again anyway. The ache was so bad, she thought she was going to start crying. At least it will feel good and he said he wouldn't move or make love to me.

She leaned up and moved the head of John's cock to her dripping hole. Squirming with it at her entrance, she settled down and felt her pussy being filled as she sat down on his pole.

John dropped his head back and groaned. “Ahhh, it feels wonderful!”

She felt her muscles clamp onto him and she moved her hips in circles on his shaft. It felt very nice and that itch was being scratched. Her heart thumped and she felt alive with pleasure.

Henry slid his hand up and down his cock while he watched and the sight sent spasms of lust through her.

She pushed herself down harder on John's cock and then sat still. She felt him in spots that were pleasurable and tickly. She couldn't keep still. Her hips squirmed and began to rotate.

“That's okay,” he said. “I'll sit still. You do what you need to. I won't move.”

She ground down on his erection and started lifting up and down on it. The feel of his thick shaft sliding in and out of her lips as she lifted herself up and down on it made her start shaking. Waves of pleasure rippled through her and her muscles began that familiar tensing.

“Does this feel good?” she asked. She went faster and harder.

“Yes, yes!” he said. He stayed still, though. “Do you like the feel of my cock in there?”

“Unnh... yes.” She forced her hips down onto him faster and harder. Her butt slapped against his thighs and she relished the feel of his pole hitting all those sensuous spots deep inside her. She abandoned all control.

Each time she dropped down on his shaft, a pulse of pleasure swept her, harder. The pulses became more insistent and suddenly she was clenched up, gasping and panting through an intense orgasm. Her hips made desperate circles as she came on John's cock. Her muscles clamped and released on it over and over.

Gasping for breath, she collapsed onto his shoulder. His head was back, and he was gasping, too.

“Ahh,” he said. “I think I can die happy now.”

Henry chuckled and Kate hugged John and giggled into his neck.

She lifted off his still erect cock and pouted. Twisting over, she scrunched in between the two vampires. John lazily scratched along his tool, pleasuring it more.

“I uh...” she said. “I'm...”

“What the matter?” Henry asked.

“Well, I...” she said. Then in a rush, “I just don't know who to choose.”

John smiled. “You don't have to. Henry and I have been around too long to feel jealousy over this.”

Henry nodded. “Ja, too old for games.”

She turned to look Henry in the eyes. “You weren't jealous? Or hurt?”

“Oh, heavens no!” he said. “I was very happy that he got a taste of what I was getting and that you were the one to do it.”

Kate blinked. Could she have them both? Could she dare love them both even if they were different? Could she give everything up and be theirs?

Henry looked down at a flushed and satisfied Kate. He felt so overwhelmed by this woman. Her delicate wrinkles and the strands of gray in her dark hair were lovely. Never had he thought since becoming a vampire that he would ever love again. He had tried, but watching a woman grow old and die did not appeal to him. Neither did it to John, he knew.

But Kate was here. She had captured both of their hearts. She had captured their minds. They wanted her and they knew that they would give her whatever she wanted. If it was her freedom, so be it.

She was everything he wanted. She was everything John wanted. Oh, John was stubborn and brooding – less affable than Henry for sure, but he knew his friend desired, adored, and loved Kate.

Amazing! All this in just two days, he thought. What quality of woman was it that elicited such results? What value was the woman who could not only masterfully capture one vampire heart, but two?

What were the odds? Less than his chances on a Mississippi river gambling boat against a stacked deck, that was for sure.

Both John and he were entirely flummoxed by what she said next.

With a deep breath, she said, “Turn me.”

Neither John nor Henry spoke. But their eyebrows climbed their foreheads.

“But,” she said. “I want to know that you are as committed to me as I am to you. I want you to teach me all you know. I want to know so that I can join you as an equal.”

John gaped.

Henry sat stunned. He couldn't move. He was hearing all that he had ever wanted to hear since he laid eyes on the woman in the backseat of the Continental as he drove them away from Starbucks.

“Are you sure about this?” he asked.

“Only if I am to become a part of you both. Only if this partnership does not end

in ruins. Only if you agree to never develop jealousy between you. Is this something you can do?"

"There is no jealousy between me and Henry. Never has while we have been vampires. Never will. On that you have my word. There is no ruin in that equation," said John.

Henry nodded and he could feel tears welling up in his eyes.

She went still. "Your eyes are bleeding, are you okay?"

Henry chuckled. "Ach, I am sorry, love. Just tears of joy." He wiped away bloody tears.

"There is one more condition," she said.

"Kate," John said, "we would do anything for you."

She nodded, once - a curt acknowledgment of his answer. But her next two words were a bombshell to their tightly packed ranks of rebel hearts.

She saw the sincerity in their eyes. She saw their honesty and honor. She would want to cement all of them and the promises together with something lasting. With a breath, she gave her last condition.

"Breed me."

CHAPTER 8

John looked at Henry and Henry looked at John. Could she really have said it?

“But Franklin--”

“Is some Johnny-come-lately who has ideas,” she said. “Whoop de doo.”

“Dismissing him isn't so easy,” John said.

“If you aren't willing to abide my conditions and face the consequences, then forget it.”

The vampires shared a look. No words passed and no gestures were made.

“We agree,” John said. “Come what may. We will face the consequences together.”

Henry nodded.

“Then turn me,” she said.

She wanted to get through this before she lost her nerve.

“We're sorry, Kate, but this is going to hurt,” Henry said.

Steel entered her voice. “Do it!”

And then the two men leaned into her, faster than she could register. Teeth were on her neck, and then a paralyzing pain on both sides.

She screamed.

The pain shot from each bite, she felt her body trying to get away. She struggled against them and tears exploded from her eyes. She felt her blood draining. This

was nothing like she had ever read in the vampire novels she had bought. There was no swooning pleasure. There was no sudden bliss. Only enormous pain from both sides of her neck.

Her nerves felt as if they were being pulled out of her, ripped from her, drawn painfully bit by bit.

Suddenly it stopped and she felt the crushing numbing pain of severe injury at her neck. Her mind tried to shut off the pain but only succeeded partially. She whimpered and tried to move – tried to exert her will to living by the simple act of motion, but she couldn't. There was only the massive pain.

She was not aware of either vampire. But within a second or an hour, she didn't know, she saw two gashed wrists coming to her mouth. First one forced its way to her mouth. Blood flooded her tongue and she was revolted by the salty taste. But still the wrist pressed to her mouth and tears flowed down her face from the pain of the wounds on her neck.

A buzzing filled her head and the pain receded slightly. But the buzzing threatened to overwhelm her. She felt that if she gave in to the buzzing, she would die. She clung to the wrist and focused on the blood.

Too soon, the wrist was withdrawn and another took its place. She sucked on the taste of blood and gagged it down. It was something that staved off the buzzing. It staved off the pain. It staved off that dark cliff of death that loomed nearby.

But the blood hit her stomach and caused a pain more excruciating than she had ever known. Vaguely, she thought hands might be touching her, stroking her head and hair. But the pain was more insistent. Several screams rent the air. She had never known cramps and agony such as this. She felt as if she were going to explode from the inside – as if her guts would erupt from her stomach like some cheesy Hollywood alien movie, splashing the ceiling with blood and gore.

Then the darkness came, washing over and consuming her - and brought final relief from the pain.

Kate Anson died, and none of her family or friends would ever know.

CHAPTER 9

John laid her sweaty body on the bed. She was no longer breathing. Her body had given up.

Henry wept beside him.

John rubbed bloody tears from his own eyes and stood over her corpse.

Kate fell. She knew she was dying. All of this, all her hopes and dreams dashed against the brutal reality of her blood sucked from her body.

She fell farther and knew for each second she fell, she reached unrecoverable distances from life. And still she fell. She was dead. She could see her body somewhere up there, now a lifeless husk.

Wasn't I supposed to survive?

Her falling never ceased. She finally could no longer see her body, as it were, to know that she had ever been a part of it.

A pulsing sounded, distant.

She felt a pounding in her ears. It was a mix of suffocation, a straining heart, and desperation. Even her out-of-body self was dying.

As her descent accelerated, the pounding increased in her ears. Painfully, she became focused on only the pounding as all else receded. The pounding took over.

Waves of agony accompanied each pounding throb. After several throbs, she was gripping her head to try keeping her brains from exploding out her ears.

She whimpered as she gave up. Let it explode. Anything would be better than this existence.

But it increased. Ripping and shredding her nerves was pulse after pulse of agony. Her body exploded into millions of individual screaming cells of pure pain. She shrieked, and then shrieked even louder. Her screams filled her ears.

With a wrenching wail of torment, she burst open her eyes to see the bedroom where she had been kept hostage.

Snarling, she leaped at the figure by the bed. Claws extended, she dug in and her maddened eyes sought out the vulnerable flesh. With a shriek of anger and crazed bloodlust, she clawed at the man's back and sunk her teeth into his neck.

Strangely, he let her bite into him, flinching only slightly.

Growling, she drew his blood as quickly as she could. Strength flooded into her. But too soon, hands struggled her back down to the bed and the strength fled her to be replaced by a deep exhaustion.

At that point, her brain caught up with her circumstances.

“Henry?” she said, frowning at the cruel gashes in his neck. Her words had an odd echo to them. His movements seemed captured in a double-vision exposure. At once he seemed slow as she processed his words and actions. But at the same time, things progressed in a normal fashion.

Her world spun and she fell into a deep, painful sleep punctuated by her own constant growling.

“Good morning, Kate.”

She struggled to open her eyes. The light was so bright – so different. John's face was there above her, smiling. But it spun sickeningly. She fought back a heaving stomach and tried to sit up.

He touched her shoulder. “The nausea will pass.”

She felt his hand through her sweater. She could feel the warmth of each finger. She could feel the texture of his skin despite the intervening material. His voice resonated with inflections she had never before heard – almost as if she had just

discovered stereo sound having never before heard it.

“Unngh...”

“Henry is heating some homemade chicken soup. A small bowl will help settle your stomach and give you energy for what we need to do today.”

“Unngh?” How come she couldn't talk?

“We'll want to start instructing you right away on what you need to know and do. Your first feed will be tonight.”

“Unngh?” Dammit!

“Yes, more blood. But it won't hurt this time,” he said. “All that is behind you now.”

“Unngh!” Great.

His face lit into a smile. “You need help in the shower?”

“Umm...” Well, that was progress.

Freshly showered, Kate felt much better. Following John out into the living room, she was greeted by a grinning Henry bearing a small bowl of steaming chicken soup.

Sitting at the table, she spooned while they talked.

“Your body has died, but been changed – reborn,” Henry said. “Your recuperative powers will be dependent on how much you feed, but you could eat normal food the rest of your days and still heal wounds that might have otherwise killed you.”

“Slashing is worse than puncture wounds,” said John. “More area tissue damage, I guess.”

“The more you feed on human blood, the faster you become – the more you can do. But there is blood better than human,” Henry said. “Vampire blood.”

John nodded. "Vampire blood lasts longer and is far more powerful. However, we don't feed on other vampires. Not just because of Franklin's code, but a simple code of self-preservation."

"You can shift your features to look different. Male, female, size and shape," said Henry. "The more you feed, the longer you can hold those forms. Feed enough and you can shift into animal form. The more you feed, the more drastic you can change."

"A bat?" she said. Wouldn't that be a riot?

Henry nodded. "Though I have never seen it, I am sure with enough blood it can be done. The smallest I have ever shifted was a large dog."

John said, "You can also focus inward and move around people with little notice. They won't be able to focus on you very well. Since the human mind tends to laziness, they won't try to make sense that they can't focus on you and will just look elsewhere."

Henry tapped his finger to the table. "It is possible that with enough feeding, we could achieve invisibility for a period of time, but we have never explored it."

She blinked. "You were never taught?"

"Not really, no," said John. "We fairly taught ourselves."

Henry shrugged. "Trial and error."

She shook her head. "I find that outrageous. You think you would have been turned loose on the world with more--"

"Turned loose on the Yankees as they burned and raped their way down the Mississippi," Henry said. His face had darkened. "We slaughtered hundreds..."

"And we're still alive today," said John. "So we knew and learned enough."

"Two hundred years and you don't even know what you are capable of?"

"I think we know enough to be here--" John said.

“I am thirty-five and took several years of martial arts,” she said. “I can drill a hole in a two inch bulls-eye at fifteen yards with a .357 magnum. I have pursued my improvement in all that I do. You should be doing the same.”

“Well, maybe,” John said, “that is something we can all work on together. We can teach each other and explore our abilities as vampires.”

Henry shrugged, but nodded. “Never really gave it much thought.”

“If we're going to have vampire offspring,” Kate said, “I am going to want them learning and growing as soon as they are able.”

Henry and John grinned like bashful men.

Downstairs in the underground parking sat the black Connie. It was alone as only John and Henry lived in the building.

John faced her, gripping her shoulders. “Focus inward as if you are pulling yourself inside your own skin.”

She concentrated.

“No, you don't need to cross your eyes.”

Frowning, she slowed her breathing and tried to imagine herself withdrawing inside. Certain meditative forms she had studied were like that.

“Yes!” he said. Delight colored his voice. “Excellent, but deeper... or imagine leaving emptiness outside.”

She shifted her thinking. His grip tightened on her shoulders.

“Is she okay?” Henry called from the driver's seat. “I can't--”

He leaned out and saw her. He gaped. “I reckon she's going to be a real fast learner. I couldn't feel her anymore.”

John's grin made her flush with pride.

She frowned. "I'm not sure how long I can focus like that... it seems like it requires--"

"More blood allows you less effort," John said. "But you'll need to hold this while we drive out. At least until we are clear of the building. I will hold, too, so if Franklin's man sees the car, he'll think it's just Henry off to the store again."

She nodded. She found that she didn't have to think about holding the inwardness, but she was aware of it.

"Does it work on the car?" she said.

John nodded. "Henry drives and handles concentrating. I'm not very good at the car."

"Can't we all concentrate on doing this for the car? Wouldn't we be totally unnoticed?" She peered at the car, wondering how that worked.

"Well, uh... Henry!"

"Ja,"

"Kate wants to know why we can't all just concentrate for the car."

"Oh. Well, uh..."

"Have you two ever tried?" she said with exasperation.

"No..." John said.

She pushed his shoulder. "Then we're trying it now. I'll still concentrate for my own inwardness, but let's give the car a shot."

Pulling out from the roll-up bay door, she huddled with John low in the backseat. She could feel the other two concentrating on the car, pulling, as it were. She did the same but also maintained her inwardness, or whatever it was. John had assured her she was practically invisible to thought, though not sight. But she could feel the strain. Handling two things at once like this was requiring effort that was causing her to pant.

The car swung out and accelerated smoothly, the huge iron and steel beast floating along the pavement with an almost boat-like feeling.

Henry emitted a long, broken-up howl. “He's not even seeing the car!”

John laughed. “Henry still uses the rebel yell from time to time. Draws me back some.”

They rose up to sit. Both looked back. There was a man standing – no, a vampire stood – on the corner, watching the building. He didn't even look their way.

“She's not a day old and taught us something already,” Henry said.

“Hit the slums and let's get her initiated,” John said.

Kate began to get an idea.

“Remember, slashes. Always best if it looks like the man died in a knife fight,” John said. “Coroners will write off deaths of the poor to whatever makes the most sense with the evidence they have. If you leave teeth marks on the neck, it don't look good.”

She nodded.

“Just shift your hand to grow razor-like nails and it's all good.”

She nodded again. She imagined her hand with razor-nails and within a second, they were very sharp-looking.

“We'll pick out a lone target. Maybe a drug pusher,” he said. “We don't feed on innocents if we can help it. But there is no law that says we can't.”

“John,” she said. “Let's all feed. Find us at least three and let's do it.”

“I really think we should start slow--” Henry said.

“At least three. I have an idea and we all need to feed.”

Henry hit the brakes and pulled over. “No, if we're going to live and work

together, then we need to know what this idea is. No secrets.”

John squinted at her. “No secrets,” he added.

“Okay then,” she said, “here is my plan.”

John and Henry listened, their eyes becoming bigger and their jaws dropping open the more she talked.

Sharing a look, they realized what she was planning might just work.

“But--” John said.

“No buts!” She wagged her finger. “We either trust each other or I go my own way.”

Henry raised his eyebrows. “We didn't mean it that way, Kate. We just want to make sure we all come out safe. We love you.”

She smiled, and tears welled in her eyes. Bloody ones, she was sure.

Their future was plotted in the black leather interior of a forty-year old car.

CHAPTER 10

Their targets were drug dealers.

“Will we be able to feed off people with drugs in their system?” She had asked.

“Yes,” John had said, “Our ability to heal will filter that out. We lose a little bit of power that way, but very little compared to what we get.”

They had watched the two thugs dealing drugs to their contacts – even kids.

Kate wanted to kill them just for pushing drugs. When she saw the children already initiated into a dead-end lifestyle, she was enraged. Their future is already wasted.

But they waited until the two pushers had another adult with them transacting cash for drugs.

“This is as good a time as any,” John said.

She nodded. She got out of the car and approached the two gesticulating drug pushers. They splayed out their fingers and motioned them toward the buyer as if they were stabbing their fingers into flesh – as if their hands in the faces of the buyer would convince him of their anger, or whatever.

Kate walked slowly up to the dealers and the buyer. Her hips swayed and she sneered at the two pushers as they turned to her.

One pursed out his lips and said, “Yo, she be mine.”

The other said, “C

hill, motha-fuckah, she gonna taste mah big dick.”

The buyer looked ready to bolt.

Smiling, Kate stopped just in front of the two pushers. They grinned and

displayed plated teeth in what was known as a 'grill' as if to impress or scare her. With an effort, she shifted her hands, her fingers lengthening into claws, and stepped in close.

With a single slash, blood spurted from two throats. She leapt on one as John stopped the buyer and Henry grabbed the other one she had cut.

Her teeth sank into the slashed throat of the thug and she drank deeply. His blood was tainted. He had AIDS and herpes. Not much to be gained from this one after she filtered out the impurities.

She dropped him before she was even finished.

“Poisoned,” she said to their questioning looks.

On the second trio of drug-users, she conserved her abilities and simply approached as a scared, stupid female.

The feeding on the second batch was much better.

“Are we sure about this?” John said.

Henry nodded. “It's a good plan.”

Pulling up around the block from their building, Kate got out and walked to the corner. She kept her inward-thought in place, masking her from vampires and humans nearby.

She could tell as she approached the vampire watching the building that this one was older than her by decades. Not too many, but he was either unschooled or careless. Using her inward-trick and concentrating hard on withdrawing, she walked all the way up to the vampire from behind.

Only at the last instant did he realize something or someone was close. As he started to turn, she bit down onto his neck and drew as hard as she could.

Pain gripped the vampire and he sank to his knees in agony. He might have been older, but he offered no resistance once bitten.

Interesting, she thought.

Blood and power flooded her. She kept drinking until she felt that point described by Henry and John as a throbbing that vibrated her skull. Sucking deep, she disengaged and then with one hand gripping his neck, heaved the vampire into the alley across from their building.

Henry had said a vampire dissolved into a gelatinous goo pretty quickly – something about the sustaining blood leaving something completely unsupported. She needn't worry about a body being discovered later.

She fished out a couple rounds of ammo from her purse and replaced the expended cases in her revolver. She then carefully snapped shut the cylinder and twisted it gently with her fingers to make sure it was locked into place.

“Do you have enough blood to hold the form,” she asked them.

Henry and John shared a look and both nodded.

But she saw the worry in their eyes. “Guys, this makes sense and he won't be expecting it.”

Neither John nor Henry spoke.

“With one blow, we erase his threat and we can start our future without having to look over our shoulders.”

“It really is our best shot, John,” Henry said.

John nodded. But he hung his head.

“If we don't do this,” she said, “we will be killed. If we run, we will be hunted down. If we hide, they will find us. No matter what we do, we are dead – unless we get him first.”

John nodded.

“Then let's do this,” she said.

Exiting the car, John and Henry trotted off up the alley into the night. They had a block to run and then they would need to be careful of being detected.

As for her, she had released all her newly-learned defenses. She was going to drive in bare. Franklin's lair was a club of sorts. Pool tables, card tables and gaming straight out of the roaring twenties. He had been turned then and retained all the appearances and affectations. Her two lovers had assured her she couldn't miss him.

His club sat on a street that used to be busier in times decades ago. The street widened in front of his place and there was an island in the middle the street curved around. At one time it might have held a fountain, but now it was just a round brick planter.

Only two streetlights lit the area near his club. A lone vampire stood on the island watching the street.

The first part of the plan was the most critical. She had to appear scared and she could not use anything that told them she knew how to use the little she learned.

Pulling up to the vampire, she rolled down the window. She had seen him freeze as soon as her car pulled around the corner and entered the block. She had parked so the island was between her and the club door.

“You know me?” she said.

The vampire nodded slowly. “You have violated the code--”

“I know!” her voice quavered. “They turned me and I know it broke the code. But I have something to offer Franklin – maybe a bargain we can strike.”

The vampire shook his head no. “Franklin will cut no deals, but I will go tell him you mean to bargain. He might be interested in hearing what you have to offer. Wait here.”

It worked!

She knew that the vampire thought he was going to tell Franklin she was outside and they would come out to witness one of Franklin's vampires deliver the predetermined verdict of death. She was already dead in their minds and how convenient she had come to them instead of trying to run.

She got out of the car and stood by the planter. No cars drove on this street in the dark. Coming out of the doors and ascending the steps of the sub-street club were five vampires. She immediately recognized the dapper looking vampire in the back as Franklin. His black hair was slicked back and oiled. His white collar stood tall above his vest and pinstripe suit jacket. His white shoes flashed with his collar and cuffs. He looked like he was straight out of 1920 America.

Flanking him were two vampires – his bodyguards. The street vampire led them out and another vampire tagged along.

Silent, silent, silent, she could hear silence approaching, fast. But she couldn't feel them.

Franklin stepped up to her from between his two guards and looked at her down his nose. He sniffed as if he smelled something bad.

Kate had been right; he was all arrogance, pride, and over-confidence. Everything banked on this.

At that instant, a long, tawny wolf appeared mid-leap coming from the right. A long black and silver wolf appeared mid-leap coming from the left. They were perfect in their cover and approach. Kate had only a split second to wonder that wolves were so long.

A grimace marred the dapper Franklin's smug face as both of his bodyguards went down to the wolves, their throats ripped open. His hands flexed and shifted into claws with razor-sharp nails. Almost faster than Kate could see, he swung at her throat to end her existence.

He was so fast!

She used her new abilities to step back just enough that his swing wouldn't connect.

Franklin snarled at her speed and his miss. Twirling and swinging out his arms,

as vampires do when they fight, he looked to Kate almost like a ballet dancer. But his claws would be deadly. A spinning slash would probably take her head from her shoulders. But his move was what she had hoped for.

She noted a vampire head go sailing through the air over the planter as one of her vampires finished off a bodyguard. Back she moved, one step, two, and then three – as fast as he advanced. She had his timing figured then and suddenly dropped to a squat, her gun coming up and aiming just as his head turned to face her from his spin.

She noted with satisfaction his surprise at seeing a gun. Perhaps he had lived so long trusting his claws and teeth rather than worrying about a gunshot that rapidly healed. But that instant of surprise and slight hesitation was all she needed. The .357 put an ugly round hole in the middle of his forehead. But she knew the forehead wound was nothing to the wound the bullet made when it exited. The entire back of Franklin's head disappeared.

He sunk to his knees and his mouth worked as if trying to curse. She could already see the wound trying to close. But before she could put a second shot into his head, her gun was kicked from her hand by one of his vampires.

Figures.

Before the vampire could finish his back-handed swipe into her throat, the black and silver wolf bit into his neck and bowled him over.

Without her gun, her plan fell apart. Desperate to remove Franklin before he could recover, she lunged forward, shifting her hand into a claw. Her slash ripped open Franklin's throat. Just as she latched onto his neck, she felt a heavy weight crash into her. A hand gripped her head to rip her off the throat, but the hand released her amidst a flurry of growls, pants and fleshy rips.

She drew everything she could from Franklin. But she didn't need to be quick. Her single shot to the head was good enough, after all. He was too far gone already. His struggles were futile and brief. Draining him to death, she released the dead vampire to drop unceremoniously to the ground. Still kneeling, she watched the skin begin to run and dissolve. Without any blood, the tissues that were so special simply dissolved. The battle behind her had ceased.

Whines and pants greeted her. The two wolves nudged her and sniffed her all

over. A tongue licked her neck and another straight up her nose.

“I'm okay!” She tried to get away from the tongues.

The two wolves sat back on their haunches and began changing – shifting into something else. And then sitting, chests heaving from exhaustion, were Henry and John. Both trembled from the exertion of shape-shifting and remaining hidden while Kate had lured out Franklin.

“Are you two okay?” Her eyes roved over them both. She could see a slash on Henry that was healing. A small bite was healing on John's neck that looked like it could have been more serious if the two wolves hadn't been watching out for each other.

They nodded.

John got up and walked over to the only remaining vampire still alive. He was wounded, horribly, his throat ripped out. But such a wound could heal given time.

“Your Franklin is dead,” John said. “Your code is not only rejected, but ended.”

The vampire tried to scramble backward away from John, but he was too weak.

“Tell whoever of you that are left that vampires will not be bound by Franklin's code any longer.”

The vampire stopped trying to get away.

“We will leave your turf and the city. Where we go is our business. If you follow, we will kill you. If you come after us, we will kill you. If you try to enforce the code on us, we will return and kill all of you. Do I make myself clear?”

The vampire nodded, slowly, but without hesitation.

Kate retrieved her gun. Franklin would have killed her in a straight fight, even with her martial arts training. But maybe she could alter and adapt it later.

Only one bullet had been needed to put to rest an arrogance that had threatened them all.

CHAPTER 11

The day after their freedom, Kate sat on the couch looking over a map of the United States. She traced the states with a finger while judging the sizes of towns and cities.

“Cincinnati?” she said.

Gently removing the map from her hands, John sat down beside her. Henry sat on the other side.

“What?” she said.

“We think it would be nice to be able to consummate with you,” Henry said.

“Oh. Now?”

John spread his hands. “Well, why not?”

“We should be showing appreciation for your success in freeing us from Franklin,” Henry said.

“I just hope that dog don't come back to bite us--” John said.

“Shush, you.”

“Alright, alright,” she said.

Before she could say anything else, they were pulling off her shirt. Four man-hands deftly removed every stitch of clothing and then began stroking and caressing her skin. She luxuriated in the feel and then cleared her throat. “Am I the only one naked here?”

“Ja, do you have a problem with that?”

She slapped him playfully on the arm.

The men stood and removed their clothing. Sitting back down, they resumed their manual exploration of her sensitive spots, her sensuous spots and her exciting spots.

She snaked her hands between their moving arms and gripped both of their growing erections. She squeezed and felt her insides melting in thrill and trembling. The feel, the passion, and the lust all had a new and different quality than what she remembered before she was turned. She felt more alive, more in tune with her feelings, and more in love.

Stroking her men, she felt their fingers explore her new vampire sex. Ripples of pleasure traveled along her limbs until she realized her toes were curling.

With a heave, Henry lifted her and placed her high onto his lap. His erection jutted up between her thighs. Her back was to him. He lifted her again and dropped her down onto his cock. It split her sex open and slid in with a delicious ease. Her vagina was ablaze with feeling and sensations she had never before felt.

“Ahhh...” she said. Her breath came heavy and she leaned her head back onto his shoulder. Comfort, passion and love flooded her. But then she felt John come near. Opening her eyes, she saw him kneel down between her legs and maneuver his shaft to her already filled hole.

Her sharp intake of breath before he even touched his head to her stretched labia showed her concern. Gently, he pushed the head of his erection above Henry's already embedded shaft. Her pussy began to admit John's cock. Slowly, and with a care, he pushed his hard penis all the way into her vagina. Two cocks were in her, stretching her, filling her, and causing a cascade of colors across her vision.

Sparks, flashes and swathes of color danced across her eyes. Her pussy felt stretched, filled, and stuffed. Her hips squirmed and ground against them as their heat permeated her core. She felt perfect there, sandwiched in between. She felt loved, cared for, and desired. Her ache was filled. Her itch was scratched. Her pussy wept moisture as two cocks began pumping in and out.

She realized that the moans and gasps were hers. The pants and groans escaping from her mouth spoke of pleasure, satisfaction, and fulfillment. She felt like a ragdoll in their hands as they worked their male symbols into her femininity.

Pulses of ecstasy rolled through her, each a little faster and harder than the last until she was panting with the sensation. She could almost hear her nerves pulsing with an electric lust. Her body hovered there, tottering but already falling. She felt suspended for a moment as her body began preparing for orgasmic contractions. The feeling of balance between pleasure and exquisite release was delicious.

The orgasm shocked her, ripping a yell from her throat. Her body was wracked with convulsions as her muscles tensed and released rhythmically in satisfaction. She felt them swell in her and thrust deep. Deep in her, deep in that ache and need, two cocks spurted white-hot seed into her womb. Each spurt sent even more jolts of pleasure and passion through her soul. They continued sliding in and out, pumping seed.

She gave up. Her body went into sensory overload and her head flopped over in a swoon.

“We love you, Kate,” one of them whispered.

A smile touched her slack face and tears of blood and joy trickled down her cheeks.

Their future was theirs. They faced the task of raising and training their offspring together. Even when the Vampire Wars erupted, they remained true to their love and passion.