

*a vampire romance*

# TWO VAMPIRES FOR LEAH



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**By**

**Laran Mithras**

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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

2014

Leah Parini did not know she was about to fall into the pool she was cleaning and drown. Neither could she have known that her dumb pool cleaning job was going to bring her into direct contact with the paranormal.

“I hate this work,” she said. But no one was around to hear her. She had taken up pool cleaning after her abusive ex-husband, Joel Roth, had cost her a fine career as a grocery store manager.

*At least it pays the bills and maybe the jerk won't find me this time.*

She looked around the yard of her newest account. Whoever had just bought the place had a lot of yard work to do. The hedges and trees surrounding the yard blocked all view in or out. Private, but the hedges were very overgrown. Gardening wasn't her job though, and the prune-faced old lady that hired her fifteen minutes ago had said the owners wanted their privacy.

The sun was at that odd angle where she couldn't see if she was getting the leaves with the pool net. She leaned over and caught her reflection. She stood for a moment and wondered if a nose-job would really help her.

“That's a bold nose, Missy,” her father had said to her on many occasions. He still said it.

It was bold alright. The problem was, she was very slightly cross-eyed and she figured everyone thought she was trying to look at her own nose.

*As if I need to make sure I remembered to attach it this morning.*

She swished the long-handled net with an irritated flick of both wrists without thinking. The resistance on the long handle acted like an anchor. She felt herself

toppling over.

“Oh, crap--”

*Not again. Why do I end up falling into the pools I clean?*

Water and bubbles surrounded her as she flailed to the edge. Heaving herself out of the cold water, she hastened to her feet.

*Maybe no one saw me. This time.*

She turned back to the pool to locate the net. It was on the bottom of the shallow end. She could get it with the pool hook.

“Do you have injury?” The deep voice behind her shouldn't have been there. She spun around, her heart pounding. A dark-haired man was there who could not have possibly approached the pool in the time she had turned to look for the net. She looked up into his dark eyes and recoiled in shock.

In her sudden fright, her foot slipped in the puddle she made on the slick tiles of the edging. Her foot shot forward and she flipped backward, arms trying to grasp at the air.

*Wow, he was handsome.*

She re-entered the pool upside down.

“Crap,” she said again. Unfortunately she was underwater. Water entered and she gagged. Neither could she figure out which way was up. She remembered hearing about following the bubbles when underwater. But the chemicals in the pool were burning and blurring her eyes.

Then she caught a distorted glimpse of the handsome man swimming toward her, his eyes glowing an unnatural red.

No one had eyes like that.

She opened her mouth to scream. Water flowed into her lungs. Her panic was her undoing.

Nicolo grimaced in frustration as the pretty woman toppled backward into the pool. He hadn't meant to scare her. He had only wanted to make sure she wasn't hurt. He had watched her from the second story window as she began the job of cleaning the pool.

She had appeared to be in her late thirties. Her curly brown hair framed creamy skin and defined feminine features. She was short, and had rounded hips and thicker thighs. Most of the contemporary women tried to starve themselves. Legs that looked like sticks struck him as morosely morbid.

He cocked his head, considering the floundering woman in the pool. She should have broken the surface by now. She must be having trouble finding which way was up.

Without further thought, he dived in after her. Turning and swimming toward her, he forced his eyes to see through the blur and bubbles of the water.

Great bubbles emerged from her mouth. Not a good sign. Kicking with extreme vigor, he scooped at her and brought her to the surface. She was limp in his arms. And very luscious-looking.

Section Chief Norman Roth scowled at the video feed inside the command vehicle. Agent Tenney had the vampire in his thermal sights. Roth studied the vampire; it was nothing but a blare of reds and oranges on the thermal device. The figure stopped and looked up at the roof of the building where Tenney scoped in the last of the vampire assassins.

“Green, Tenney. Go.” Roth knew once the vampire knew he was being targeted, he would make elimination more difficult.

“I'm on him.” The radio gave Tenney's voice a mechanical quality.

The vampire shifted and vanished. Moving away was a flashing pinpoint of light – the implant given to all agents.

Roth waited while the video screen flickered through different colors. Tenney

was switching detection settings. The video screen became awash with blues making identification of anything almost impossible. But there, taking shape, was the vampire.

He didn't need to tell his agent to take the shot. The order was already given.

Streaks of brilliant blue shot into the barely visible figure. The vampire began to burn. Incendiary rounds worked wonders on vampires.

“C-team move in,” Roth said. The clean-up team would have the smoldering mass off the street within forty-five seconds.

“Roger.”

He stood and stretched. A fourteen hour surveillance of the vampire's dwelling had paid off. The dead Agent, Thomas Jensen, had been the last on a long list of vampire assassins used by the United States government to eradicate the leading biochemists in the country.

No witnesses and no assassins. No trail. No one left to expose the chemical warfare being conducted on the American people.

Roth's features shifted into darkness as his assistant switched off the monitors. He had heard his men talking about him. How his close-set eyes were “maniacal” and his skin pitted and “bad.” He cared for none of that. He had a job to do for the agency and the country.

He looked forward to the next morning, but not for the paperwork. The Director was meeting with senior administration officials to discuss a briefing on Plan Cyclone, an operation to exterminate the rest of the vampires in America. Roth had written the plan. He wanted all threats removed from the country, even potential ones. In his estimation, vampires were just too dangerous to let live, no matter how peaceful.

“Wrap it up, gentlemen,” he said. The three monitoring specialists were already stowing equipment. But it was his usual way of making an exit from the command vehicle.

Norman Roth was Leah's ex-brother-in-law. His greatest fantasy was to rape and then murder her. He would get his chance sooner than he thought.

## CHAPTER 2

Leah saw light at the end of a tunnel. Slow at first, but gaining speed, the light grew. When it filled half her vision, she recognized the trees and hedges of the yard. Sound began to register in her ears as a buzzing.

Blocking some of the light, lips descended on hers. Firm lips, but soft to the touch.

She snapped back to consciousness and heaved upward, her lungs convulsing. The handsome man was there with her.

*Must have done mouth-to-mouth on me.*

A great gout of water erupted from her mouth and splashed her rescuer in the face, followed by a coughing fit.

*How can this be happening to me? I barfed water on him?*

“Now that was quite a sight.”

She looked around at the voice. It wasn't the handsome man. It was a man around forty with a swimmer's physique. Bold, blue eyed, but amused.

Handsome man shook his finger at the other. “I could toss you in--”

“I swim better than you.”

The older man nodded and turned to Leah.

She blinked at her rescuer. His long black hair was wet and straggly. Silver and white strands were showing, but not many. He had a salt and pepper beard he kept very trimmed. Maybe he was fifty?

But his eyes... weren't they red? Or had she imagined them? Looking at her now were deep mahogany jewels of sensuality. Those eyes held her pinned in place, wet and dripping, on the edge of the pool. They were soft and hard at the same

time, but the set of his eyes showed concern among the faint wrinkles there.

“Come,” he said. He took her hand.

She rose as he did, her hand held in his. On her feet, the man almost towered over her. He also had no potbelly.

Gardener, she thought at first. Or some manual worker.

“Come inside and recover.”

*Butler? Oh no, not the owner!*

“I, uh--”

“We insist.”

“We?” She was still trying to think beyond the fuzzy aftereffects of being unconscious.

“My friend and I want to make sure you took no injury.” His voice melted like butter across her senses.

*He has a funny way of talking.*

The brown-haired swimmer also towered over her, but perhaps not as much as the older one. He took her by the arm gently, a quirky grin on his face. He nodded to her.

*Are they gay or something?*

“Inside, you can dry off, no?” The older one said.

“Oh...” She was sopping. Her feet carried her forward along with the two handsome men.

The inside of the house was cool and dark. She began to shiver as the younger man made a fire in the living room.

“Agatha.” The older one's voice was a command, not a query.

The prune-faced old woman came into the room and scowled at Leah.

“Escort our guest here to the bathroom and provide her with a fresh towel and bathrobe. Please dry her clothing,” he said. Again, a command and not asking.

“Bathrobe? But--” Leah's eyes went large.

“You need to dry off,” the younger one said. He ran his hand back through his shoulder length hair to clear his eyes. He looked her up and down, but with amusement.

“But...”

“Do not worry about us seeing your ankles,” the older one said. “Your shorts not only show all of your leg but being wet show everything else, too.”

She turned red. Heat flooded up her face and colored her features.

The younger one looked at her and nodded agreement with his friend. His smile was slow, but genuine.

She turned redder. And then redder still.

“Come with me,” said Agatha.

She went, if only to compose herself.

Nicolo brought out a tea tray and set it on the long dining room table. The house they had purchased had an adjoining living room and dining area. The table was close to the fireplace.

“She is very pretty, hmm?”

“Ah, yes. I wondered why you were staring at her through the window.”

“Do you not agree?”

Randy showed one of his lopsided grins and sat at the table. “Oh, very pretty. But you haven't bothered with women for...”

Nicolo nodded. "A long time."

"Too long."

He shook his finger at his friend. "Women today are so... eh, how would you say. Mmm chasing after an image their bodies and food will not let them have."

Randy crossed his leg and grasped his knee with both hands. Looking up to hide his smile, he kicked his foot back and forth. "I seem to remember the last woman you had was that go-go girl we shared in the sixties--"

"Shh, she comes."

"I heard her. Are you afraid to talk about go-go girl?"

"Of course not, but she was one of many over the years. Now tame your mouth or our guest will think we were talking about her."

"You weren't talking about me?" Leah entered the room clutching a bathrobe tightly about her.

"We were--" Randy said.

"No, of course not--" Nicolo said.

Leah looked back and forth between one of two liars.

*Great, they were talking about my fat legs. Or my enormous nose. Or my crossed eyes.*

The older man rose to his feet and pulled out the chair closest to the fire.

"Please," he said, and indicated the chair.

His voice had a soothing quality and a touch of sing-song. He wasn't American or English.

He must have read her pondering as hesitation. "Please, we have tea and honey."

She sat and accepted the cup the older man offered. The swimmer had a very

amused smile on his face. He was handsome as well with a ruggedness to his chin that most men did not have nowadays. They must be gay. Most of the skinny older men who had skinny male friends were gay. She had seen it on TV. "Thank you."

"Agatha tells me your name is Leah. I am Nicolo," the older man said. He indicated his swimmer friend. "And this is Reinhard--"

"Randy," Reinhard said. "Just call me Randy."

"So you were talking about me? Or you weren't?"

"We had been--" Nicolo said.

"No, we were not--" Randy said.

Both men looked at each other and laughed. Their ease was infectious, though the subject was her.

"We talked about how pretty you were--" Nicolo said.

Leah burst out laughing.

"No, no, we were," he said. "But then we started talking about... um..."

"The go-go girl," Randy said.

She raised her eyebrows. "The go-go girl?"

"Yes," he said. "We--"

Nicolo cleared his throat and shook his head at the other.

"Ah, well. You know, yeah?" Randy's smile was easy, as if he'd smiled his whole life. But there was also a tension to his eyes that said he had seen things.

*Must be gay.*

"I know I'm not pretty," she said. "There's no need to pretend--"

"I do not pretend in matters of women--" Nicolo said. His protestation was

adamant.

Randy grinned. "What makes you think we are lying?"

*Oh great, piss off the employers.*

"Well, I didn't mean..."

Nicolo touched her hand. His eyes drew down in concern. "Why should you not think you are as beautiful as you are?"

She quivered from his touch, from his intensity and his aura of command. She never thought she would find gay men attractive or masculine.

*Maybe they were bisexual.*

He squeezed her hand. "Why?"

"Well, my nose..."

"What about your nose?" Nicolo looked confused.

Randy cocked his head and looked at her nose. He looked annoyed and shook his head.

"Well, it's too big."

*There, I said it.*

"It is?" Randy said.

She blinked. He looked like he was being honest.

"My darling," Nicolo said. "Who told you this? Your nose is perfect."

The odd thing was, she thought she saw a look of confusion on Nicolo's face.

She started to laugh, but then caught herself. Were these guys crazy? Loony? Goofy? Were they accomplished liars? Everyone knew her nose was too big.

*Maybe gay men like big noses on women because it reminds them of penises.*

They were still looking at her.

*Maybe I should run.*

“Who?” Nicolo repeated.

“Well, my nose is bigger than other women's noses--”

Nicolo snorted in disgust.

Randy waved his hand.

Were these aliens or something?

“No woman has a nose like mine on TV.”

“You should not watch that device,” Nicolo said. “It rots your mind.”

“The women of my day--”

“Randy.” The note of command was back in the older man's voice.

“Of your day? What?”

“I mean of my country,” he said.

“Ah, what country?”

“Deutschland, but I left long ago.”

“Germany? Really?”

Randy nodded.

“In my country, too,” Nicolo said, “Italy. The women had strong noses.”

Leah nodded. Randy's German heritage showed in the clipped way he said “yeah.” Nicolo's odd way of speech and rolling accent fit as Italian.

*So I don't have a big nose?*

She felt a flush run through her at the attention of these two handsome men. Most men seemed to only want to talk about TV or football. “So how did you two become lovers?”

*Oops, did I just say that?*

Randy sat up straighter. His look was annoyed.

“I beg your pardon?” Nicolo said.

“We are not homosexuals,” Randy said.

“I meant to say--”

Nicolo frowned. “No, we are not--”

She fiddled with the end of the strap tying her robe together. “I mean, how did you two meet? An Italian and a German?”

“Ah,” Randy said. “We met in the war.”

“Yes,” said the other.

“Oh, like Iraq or Afghanistan?”

“No, in Russia--”

“Randy.” Again, the note of command.

“Sorry, I can't help it,” he said. “She is captivating, yeah?”

What didn't they want her to know? Were they secret agents? Oh brother. Don't tell me. Spies?

The warmth of the fire and the warmth from inside her warred against her instincts that were telling her to run. Two handsome men paying attention to her? Telling her that her nose looked fine? Focusing on her and not something else?

*Maybe I drowned and died and this is heaven. Or hell. Why did they have to be so handsome? Why didn't they look dumpy and fat?*

She looked at Nicolo all dressed in black and sexy. His dark hair hung back and down to his mid back. His trimmed beard displayed kissable and sensuous lips. Randy was dressed in tan slacks with a well-fitting white collared shirt. His wavy brown hair was pushed back and hung down to his shoulders. His five o'clock shadow probably never left his face.

“Is something wrong?” Nicolo's voice purred at her. He still held her hand.

Randy looked concerned, worried. He reached out and took her other hand as it rested near her teacup. Jolts of electricity shot through her as two sexy men held her hands. Involuntarily, her pussy twitched. Her face reddened.

*Run, you fool!*

She shot out of her chair. The teacup tipped over and the tie of her robe was under her foot. With a tug from standing, it came open. She scrambled for the teacup before realizing she was open to both men. They could see her nakedness.

*Ahhh! She screamed in her mind but it came out as a squeak.*

Both men got to their feet, worried looks on their faces.

She tried to reach over to tug the tie from under her foot but it wouldn't come up. She lifted her foot and felt her balance shift. She fell into the strong arms of Nicolo. She looked up in fright and saw his amused eyes gazing down into hers.

*Why am I the only one in a panic here?*

“Please, I am sorry if we said something to hurt you,” he said.

She trembled in fear, in lust and in uncertainty.

*Why did he have to be so handsome?*

She felt his strength. She felt his confidence. She felt his concern. She also felt a lump against her that could only be his erection.

*Oh my.*

She felt the lust winning. Her head became dizzy and she couldn't think straight.

Nicolo gazed down into her beautiful eyes. His heart thudded in his chest and his penis hardened even further. This was much different than women he had held in his arms recently. Far different. Feelings stirred within him that ignited passion. It had been too long.

He could see thoughts skittering through her mind as she struggled to make sense of her feelings. He could feel her nakedness pressed against him. His erection threatened to begin hurting. He smiled and lowered his mouth to hers.

“Uh--” she said.

Then they were kissing. His lips pressed down softly onto hers, pressing them and massaging them. His tongue licked and teased as she panted and then opened her lips to admit his tongue. The hot moisture of their mouths collided like a slow-motion wreck.

When he broke the kiss, she leaned her head back and said “Ahh...”

His hand traveled up the robe in back until it cupped her head, his fingers entwined in her hair. Next would be a real kiss.

Her moan of pleasure turned panicked. With a squeak, she reached up and slapped his face. Then she launched herself toward the hallway, right into the arms of Randy.

Nicolo touched his face and rubbed the cheek she slapped. He smiled wistfully.

*A good slap to start a romance.*

He watched Randy steady her in an embrace that turned into a hug. He gave her a big grin but didn't try to kiss her. Both men were aware she was in a panic and did not take advantage of her state of confusion.

But she didn't know Randy wasn't intent on mauling her. She squawked and slapped his cheek, too.

Nicolo laughed.

Leah struggled in the arms of Randy. That she didn't have her feet under her didn't matter.

*How dare he hug me to keep me from falling? The nerve!*

She landed a solid slap on the chiseled German face.

*That'll show him.*

When she heard Nicolo's deep, throaty laugh, she knew she was in trouble.

*They mean to kidnap me. Or something. Run!*

She had little coherent thought except to get out of the house. Too good to be true was too good to be true. Some famous mass murderer in the eighties was devilishly handsome. The only nice men she knew were metrosexuals. They were overweight from eating too much soy and wore baggy shorts and baggy t-shirts.

She dashed into the hallway and almost into Agatha. She ducked around her.

*You aren't going to get a hug or kiss from me. Gah!*

Reaching the front door, she expected it to be locked. It was not. Leaping outside like a deer launching into the air, she ran for her truck.

Nicolo sighed.

Randy motioned to the open front door. He snickered. Not cruel, but amused.

Leah had run outside, robe and hair flapping behind her. She was hauling on the door of her little truck but it was locked. Her small breasts jiggled with the effort though, and Nicolo found himself smiling next to Randy.

She must have realized she had left her purse on the pool chair because she made a mad dash for the side gate.

He and his friend moved to the back sliding glass door to watch.

Leah bounded into the yard and over to the chair. The muscles of her soft thighs bunched and worked under the firm skin. Grabbing her purse, she turned and dropped it, spilling the contents onto the cement.

“Ack!” They could hear her through the glass.

She squatted down to shove the contents back into her purse and then glanced at the sliding glass door.

Randy waved.

“Eep!” With a frantic desperation, she shoved everything back into her purse. Standing, she shot toward the gate like a runner at an Olympic event springing forward at the shot of the starter pistol. Her robe still flapped behind her.

“Magnificent,” he said.

“Yeah, truly,” Randy said.

“You might need to corner Agatha for a kiss.”

Randy guffawed.

They moved to the front door.

She was already at the truck, hauling on the door.

Nicolo frowned. “She is in a great state of panic.”

“Maybe we should go calm her?” Randy said. “I wouldn't like to see her get hurt in an auto accident.”

“No, neither would I, but I think we would only increase her panic.”

Randy grunted.

Leah had finally realized she still needed to unlock the door.

Nicolo walked out and leaned against the porch post. Randy followed and stood

beside him, his arms folded and head cocked.

She saw them and emitted a strangled scream.

“She has beautiful eyes,” Nicolo said.

“Yeah, it makes me wonder about what is behind them.”

Nicolo looked at Randy.

“In her mind,” his friend said.

“Beauty. It radiates from her like a vampire radiating power.”

Randy nodded. “You will receive no argument from me, Rottenführer Rossi.”

Nicolo grunted. “You outranked me in that war.”

“It was my only war.”

“Ah, well.”

Leah dug through her purse with a desperation.

“It will be my last war, mein Freund.”

Nicolo nodded. It had been a horrible war.

“I don't know how you do it, with all your wars,” Randy said.

“I haven't warred since then.”

She dumped her purse on the ground, spilling all the contents to find her keys.

They could hear her strangled cry of frustration.

“Because we lost?” Randy looked over at Nicolo.

He nodded. Then he sighed. “It was a good fight, but we lost.”

“Bolshevism won, and freedom died.”

Nicolo nodded again.

She stopped scrounging around on the ground beside her truck and looked at them. She couldn't hear them, but her face had a look of suspicion.

Nicolo arched his eyebrow as Randy dangled her keys at arm's length, beckoning her to come get them. "You are a scheming devil."

"That's why I outranked you," Randy said.

"Bah, it's the past."

"Don't act hurt over it."

Nicolo scowled. "No, it's not that. It is a small slice in time, easily forgotten and hated by history."

"I suppose you would know."

He turned to look at his younger friend. Leah was forgotten for a moment. "I do. Perhaps our war together saw many deprivations. But the good side almost never wins. There is far more to this than you know."

Randy grunted.

Leah slowly approached them after putting her purse back together. Nicolo saw that she clutched the robe about her to hide her nakedness. Pity.

Randy made no move, his arm still extended out to her – keys dangling from his fingers.

Leah wondered for the third time in less than a minute if she should just run for it. Her truck door was locked and the young and handsome Randy had the keys.

*Trap!*

She looked over her shoulder at the street behind her.

Was she scared of them? They had done nothing to hurt her and had been

concerned for her well-being. The worst assault had been a kiss. She had even slapped both of them. Weren't men supposed to slap their women around? Like her ex-husband? Unless they were metrosexuals, of course – all soft and effeminate like on TV. But these men? These too-good-to-be-true men?

She stopped a few feet away - safely out of reach. She could snatch the keys. She was fast. Then she could drive away in the safety of her truck.

Before her mind could register what happened, Randy was standing close to her, his hand gripping hers. He turned her palm up and dropped her keys into them. But she didn't see it. She felt the keys drop into her hand. Instead, her eyes were fixed on the compelling blue eyes of this enigmatic man. They radiated comfort, security and passion. She wanted nothing more than to stand here and drink in those eyes.

But, her pussy twitched and awoke her from her reverie. Startled, she scrambled backward with the keys. Randy wore a knowing smile and a twinkle in his eyes that ignited fires in her that were long dead. A glance toward Nicolo showed a keen interest in her and a hunger that promised the loss of her consciousness if she let go.

She ran for her truck.

She was already trapped in their web.

## CHAPTER 3

Section Chief Roth tapped the keys on his computer to scroll through the lists the FBI had compiled on the whereabouts of the nation's vampires. Most could be taken out by established sections. A good five dozen would have to be hit by special teams dispatched to areas not immediately close to the various local departments.

Cyclone was being delivered and discussed at this very moment. With luck, the plan would be approved and he would be at the forefront of the final extermination.

“Glorious,” he said.

“Pardon?”

His assistant stood there with several documents in her hand. Intelligence briefings.

He sighed. “What is it?”

She placed them on his desk. “Details of three groups who claim they would like to see the government of the United States returned to the original Constitutional authority.”

Roth sighed again. Such groups could wait to be exterminated until after he had removed vampires from America. He cared not for their history of faithful and patriotic service. The groups who complained about the government would have to wait. They would be dealt with in good time. Once he was done orchestrating the most brilliant operation in the agency's history, then he would focus the kill squads on malcontent Americans. “Leave them. I will review them later.”

The assistant nodded and left. The look on her face said she disapproved.

But Roth knew the score. He knew the game. A few calls to reporters and he could plant the seeds of a media frenzy. He would suggest certain groups to the

media were really bad and trafficked in child porn. It worked every time. The reporters would race out to give the worst coverage they could of the groups with their careful orchestration of camera direction and angle, lighting, and sound-bite questions. Then there would be the various round table discussions with what the media called “experts.”

Within a couple of weeks, he could turn public opinion overwhelmingly against any group in America. The tactic had never once failed.

Of course, that the suggestions were lies mattered nothing. The destruction of a group targeted by the government was a simple thing. The child porn charge was used to bludgeon the group into splinters. When the leader of the group was accused of it, all the rest of the members distanced themselves and abandoned the unfortunate idiot to be devoured by public opinion. The accusation itself was used as a method of plea bargain.

It was simple, really. Everyone had child porn on their computer. An image search for the national flag of Atlantis would turn up a naked woman somewhere in the pages of the search. Instant child porn, even if the woman in the picture had gray hair. Did the idiot leader hold the 2257 requirements for age? Of course not. What proof did the leader have of her age? Oh, none? So he couldn't prove she was old enough to turn up on an image search for a flag?

It was neat and tidy. Worked every time. Cop a plea to the child porn charge and we'll drop all the charges of terrorism, murder, conspiracy and all the rest. We don't care if the child porn isn't true. It's your choice, mister ringleader. Face fifty years on federal charges that we'll force to stick or cop the plea and face a year in jail and probation. What sounds better?

But of course, they all cop the plea and their entire organization crumbles around them. Beautiful. Easy. Effective. There was no better way of destroying those citizens who would not submit to the United States government. It made his nipples hard.

He would read the briefings before leaving the office for the day. He could get the ball rolling on the groups a few weeks later when they were in the process of exterminating the vampires.

He tapped a few keys and moused to the documents used in constructing the Cyclone Plan. He had intentionally ignored all the reports of the services

rendered to the country by vampires.

Their history of cooperation with the governments around the world went back centuries. A secret symbiosis existed that allowed vampires to feed while removing unproductive members of society. The governments looked the other way as long as vampires preyed on the poor or criminals. But later, a closer relationship had developed. Governments recognized vampiric abilities and began using them to accomplish what was difficult to accomplish.

*But that is going to end. The filthy things will all die.*

He grimaced at the file of alleged vampire crimes against the state. It was empty, sort of. It contained a single report, verified against all databases. No vampire had ever struck a blow against the government of any country it called its own.

*I can do a better job than any creature. They will see.*

He had presented Cyclone with manufactured evidence of threat. The truth never mattered when the state was involved. Using the Cyclone Plan, he could catapult himself to the top of the Agency – Deputy Director, at the very least. A quick congressional confirmation and he would be the Beria to Stalin's empire.

*No one would dare stand against me then. Judicious use of a death squad here or there and word would circulate that Norman Roth was the power behind the United States.*

*Easy.*

He received the call from the Director two hours later. The plan was signed by the president.

## CHAPTER 4

Leah hauled on the truck door again.

*Oh. Right. It's still locked.*

Fumbling with the keys in her hand, she tried to grip the key to unlock the door. She had it gripped from the wrong end. She tried to stick the end of the key into the lock that was protruding from her fingers and then work her fingers back to push it in. Instead, the weight of the keys on the ring pulled the key out as she shifted her fingers and they dropped to the ground.

*You've got to be kidding.*

She snatched them up and stole a quick look at the house. She knew she was fast, but maybe they were fast, too.

*Don't be silly. A seven-hundred pound one-legged pig could have crawled over here in the time I've fiddled with these keys.*

Both men were still standing there.

*Why aren't those hunks chasing me?*

Now where did that thought come from? As if in response, her pussy twitched again.

*Great.*

She inserted the key carefully and unlocked the door. Climbing in, she started the truck and threw it into gear.

*I can't even trust my own desires, much less theirs.*

She hit the gas and the truck shot forward – toward the two men.

“Oh crap!” She mashed on the brakes. Shifting into reverse, she stomped the gas

and shot backwards.

Randy gazed wistfully after Leah Parini. He recalled a few minutes ago when she had fled from Nicolo right into his arms. The memory of her warm, naked body pressed against him caused his cock to swell again.

She had taken the keys and was fumbling at the door to her truck.

He glanced at Nicolo. The enrapt gaze on his friend's face supplied all he needed in confirmation that the woman was a true find. Even between Germans and Italians, the definition of an object of worship could hardly be argued.

*Sure, Rottenführer Rossi has seen far more than me, but we both see her beauty and appeal. He didn't call Nicolo by his rank and last name very often, though it was always what he called him in his thoughts. However, it slipped out on occasion. Habits were hard to break. Habits born in war when death was a second or two away were even harder to break. Too many times, against too many Russian assaults, they had stood together while their comrades died around them.*

They had been drawn together in combat, standing side-by-side as now. But this combat was different. This was a struggle of romance between an old soldier and a beautiful woman who deserved to see better times.

He looked at Nicolo just as Nicolo looked at him.

“She's mine,” they both said at the same time.

Randy laughed and Nicolo joined him.

“I thought I saw that spark in your eyes,” he said.

Nicolo smiled and shrugged. “She is more beautiful than most in these days.”

“She could have stepped out of the past.”

“Indeed.”

They watched the truck careen out onto the street, tires squealing as it aligned with the road and lurched to a stop. Then it shot forward and disappeared from view. Its engine was a dwindling whine of desperation.

“Are you sure we should have let her go?”

“Mmm, I think it was best,” Nicolo said. “Let her find her breath and come to her senses.”

“Send a gift?”

“You are beginning to know me too well, my dear friend.” Nicolo clapped him on the shoulder. “Agatha, bring her contract to us.”

His call into the house produced a satisfying scurry from the old woman they both heard. No human could have heard it, but they did.

Agatha had been a young widow when they met her in Berlin just after the end of the war. She had been raped repeatedly by Russian troops who had come upon her in the Prussian town of Elbing. She had been traumatized by the four hundred or so rapes forced upon her. Many German women in the area had not only been raped but murdered or ground under the tracks of advancing T-34 tanks as they fled in refugee columns. It took many years to convince her she had been fortunate to have come out alive.

Once in a while, she would lament having survived at all and considered her dead neighbors as fortunate. Nicolo and Randy did their best to employ her and give life where so much had been taken away. This was the reason they had never turned her. With an enduring pain such as she bore, how could they give her immortality? Who wanted to suffer more than a lifetime?

Turning was always a very difficult decision. Nicolo had turned him following the surrender of their division in Berlin. They had escaped their prison compound and thus avoided certain death in Russia's gulags. After the turning, they had both taken pity on Agatha and had helped her escape Germany altogether.

Neither of them wanted to turn Agatha. Neither would.

“Sirs,” Agatha said. She held the contract out, her back straight and her chin up.

“Very good, Agatha.”

Randy understood Nicolo's brevity with her. She fared well under order and could perform for them forgetting the depravities in her past. The command and discipline gave sense and meaning to her life, restoring some of that which she had lost when her husband, country, and way of life had been destroyed.

Nicolo scanned the contract. “Two-thirty-one East Warren Street, apartment twenty. Agatha, wait for us in the dining room where we shall pen a note to Miss Parini.”

“Understood, sir.”

“A nice bouquet of flowers with a note would be nice, no?” Nicolo looked at him.

“Yeah, good.” Randy always tried to lengthen the accent of ja into yeah, but he often saw people cock their heads at him. Seventy years and he still couldn't erase his accent. At least he had turned it into a short “yeah” instead of a long “yaw.” Still, in his mind was “Ja. Sehr gut, mein Freund.”

Their decision would bring them face-to-face with death.

## CHAPTER 5

Leah drove fast until she merged onto the main boulevard. Her breath came in pants – gasps, really. Her mind split one way, then another, and then another.

Both of the men were so handsome that looking at them was painful. How could two handsome men find each other, despite the age difference, and not be like any other pair of metrosexual roommates? Without a hint of homosexuality, she was inclined to believe them about their aversion to it.

What were two heterosexual men doing living together? They weren't college students. They weren't just starting out in the world. Most roommates found that after the initial savings of rooming together that they were loathe to stay so mated together. If college was done, why be roommates? If their careers were started, why stay together? Further, these two were ten years different in age – not a likely span between college roommates.

*Something else is going on here. But what?*

Her head swam and she was becoming distracted. She pulled the truck over to the curb and allowed the traffic to flow by her. Men drove to their meetings. Women drove to pick up the kids. Couples drove to a restaurant or movie. Life drove and passed her by without a single look in her direction.

Shutting off the engine, she leaned her head back. Had she done the right thing? Were they a danger? Had she been threatened at all? If not, would she still have the job? She didn't even have her shorts and t-shirt. She was wearing their bathrobe.

Idly, she wondered to whom the robe belonged.

*Nicolo? Randy?*

Thoughts of both had her recalling the feel of their bodies and their erections as her own nakedness pressed against them. Quite by accident, of course.

*Yummy.*

A warmth spread through her and she squirmed on the seat – an ache settled deep within her and refused to be ignored. She realized with a start that the robe was still open and her naked breasts were showing.

*Not as if there's anything there to see. Got a magnifying glass?*

She adjusted the robe about her so that it was closed. But her hand crept down on its own and rested tentatively in the short hair of her vagina. She thought of Nicolo - dominant, commanding, and self-confident. Then she thought of Randy – daring, but reserved. Masculine, but controlled. Randy hid the pain that was absent in Nicolo – sensitive, and yet nonchalant.

She realized that her hand had inched down until it was rubbing slowly along her folds. Her fingers ran over her clit and down to her opening - then back up to rub once again at her throbbing nub. Ripples of pleasure spread through her at each pass. Faster and faster she rubbed that trail until she stopped and circled the pleasure center of her pussy. Her fingers twirled around her clit and caused her to gasp.

What would Nicolo look like naked? He was ten years older than her, easily. Would he still be virile? Would he still be erect when excited? Would his cock look good? He was too handsome to have an ugly cock.

And what of Randy? Would his swimmer's body reveal a tiny dick? Or would his tool dangle in front of her all fat and begging to be stroked and licked?

Her pussy convulsed and her fingers circled her clit faster. Her gasps filled the cab of her mini-pickup truck. Heat and moisture seeped from her and she squirmed in the seat. A moan escaped her lips and she spiraled on the very edge of release.

If they were not mass-murderers or rapists, would she be welcome back? Would she be able to keep them as clients on her route? Would she be able to talk to them again?

Spots appeared before her eyes as she felt control slipping away. She moaned low. The memories of their bodies pressed against hers made the ache deepen inside. She dipped her fingers inside her hole and felt the thrill and tingle of

promise. But her fingers were headed back to her clit, carrying moisture. With the added lubrication, her clit sent waves of pleasure rippling up her body until she could feel her nipples responding. Each rub and twirl felt as if her nipples were being sucked into a void of lust.

She closed her eyes. She was almost delirious.

Would they want her back? What if they did?

The ominous wave of sexual frustration raced toward her and pushed her over the edge of the abyss. Convulsions wracked her body as an inescapable orgasm tore through her. Pain flared, again and again, as her body released pent-up tension. Once the last wave of pleasure was torn from her, she sat gasping and tingling. Her entire body vibrated like a plucked guitar string that sang only silence.

Colors danced before her eyes when she finally opened them. Looking around, she saw that no one had noticed. Life continued to pass her by as she sat lonely in her truck. Nothing was here with her but her gasps and pants in her post-orgasmic state.

Section Chief Roth put his glass of designer bottled-water down. He motioned to the bedroom door.

The young black man smiled and immediately headed that way.

*So obedient.*

Young homosexuals were willing to do anything. Perhaps that's why there were so many of them in the FBI. But this specimen wasn't among them. No, definitely not. This one was pulled from a gay club.

“You want me on the bed, or do you want me to blow you first?” His voice was high-pitched and nasally as young blacks sometimes had. The young man batted his eyelashes at Roth.

He glanced at the side of the bed, where the cover hung down to hide what was underneath. The bludgeon there would be a surprise to the young gay – as it

always was. His body would be a simple disposal chore. But first, he wanted to feel the young stud's cock. Later, he would feel his warm blood on his hands.

“A blow would be fine,” Roth said.

The young man knelt.

His mind wandered as he relished the oral ministrations of the ignorant homosexual. Tomorrow he would push the advance of Plan Cyclone. Soon all vampires in America would be faced with the death squads. The thought made his dick harden further. The young man sucked faster, thinking his skills were responsible.

“Agh,” Roth growled. His fist caught the homosexual in the side of the face. “Don't drag your teeth, you piece of shit. Do it right.”

The young man rubbed his face. “Sorry, sir.”

The use of the honorific had the FBI-trained mind classifying the young black man as ex-military. His build was right. The shoulder muscles were thick from push-ups. But his face was soft. Likely a discharge.

For good measure, he slugged his fist into the side of the gay's face again. The young man's lips were pulled from his cock with the blow.

“I wasn't draggin'!”

“And don't forget it, faggot.”

“Yessir.”

Roth grabbed the young man's head and pulled it toward his prick while thrusting his hips forward. Sighing with pleasure once firmly ensconced back inside the gay's mouth, he let his mind wander to Plan Cyclone. Within a day or two he would be at the head of a nationwide operation to exterminate a section of society no one wanted.

His dick swelled in the young black man's mouth.

He would be at the head of an operation so big and so important that he would

be made Deputy Director within a month. After congressional hearings, he would become Director of the FBI. The current director would die of a surprise heart attack. A simple injection, undetectable to standard autopsies, would stop the man's heart and Roth would valiantly step in to take his place.

Such tactics were common, although assassinating the head of a government agency was not normally practiced. But Roth had no worries. He would outmaneuver and out-murder anyone aligned against him. He would strike all the necessary blows before anyone could stop him. He had a list in his office of those most threatening to his rise. One or two on the list might draw the ire of those around him. The death of the entire list would paralyze the apparatus of government and alert the successors of those dead men that Norman Roth was not to be trifled or challenged.

When he came out of his reveries, he realized his fists had dealt to the black boy his passion. The gay lay bleeding and unconscious on the floor. With a snarl, Roth landed a kick to the boy's ribs, getting a satisfying crack in return. For the next several minutes, he kicked the boy repeatedly until he was panting with exhaustion.

*How dare the faggot lose consciousness when I had not shot my load!*

Pulling the bedcover down, he rolled the unmoving body onto it. Retrieving the bludgeon from under the bed, he vented even more anger against the young gay. Within minutes, the skull was no longer identifiable.

*Just as this faggot dies, so shall all the vile vampire scum infecting this country.*

He would oversee the extermination. He would see the results. He would enjoy the promotions. He would assume the most powerful mantle available.

His actions were going to initiate a worldwide war that would go unnoticed.

## CHAPTER 6

Leah answered the knock on her apartment door. A young man stood there, holding a vase of flowers in his hand.

“Flowers for Miss Leah Parini?”

She blinked.

*Me?*

“Oh, sure, of course.” She accepted the offering and shut the door. The bouquet was gorgeous, but not outrageous. There was a card stuck in the arrangement on a clear plastic shaft.

Taking the small envelope, she read the note inside.

“Dear Leah, we hope you took no injury or offense at our home today. We value your continued service and look forward to you managing our pool. Sincerely, Nicolo and Randy.”

Relief washed over her like a dip into a cool pool.

*They probably just want their robe back. What would they do with my clothes? Would one of them get use out of my shorts? She imagined one of them wearing her shorts, but then the shorts were so large that they kept falling off.*

She frowned.

*I'm not that fat.*

She had heard enough people call her thin, but she believed none of them. They were all trying to flatter her for reasons of diplomacy, of course.

*If you can't say something nice about a person, then don't say anything at all.*

Her mother's words rang in her head. But her mom had grown up in a day and

age when people respected one another. In this day and age, people hated one another but hid it. Modern people were worried others would discover their hatreds and cause them to become objects of hatred themselves. Hate the haters. Hate is really bad except when you are hating a hater.

It made no sense to Leah.

But that was the way of the world.

The smell of the bouquet afflicted her with thoughts of happiness and loneliness. The dichotomy worried her and she spent the next few hours analyzing her life and her prospects. She had a small pool-cleaning route. Providing she could keep the new account from which she had fled today, she could probably make all her bills. That would be a huge relief to her as living off of debt or parents generosity couldn't go on forever.

Building even one or two accounts onto her current base would allow a margin of profit that would free her from slavery to worry and indebtedness.

The phone rang.

Only a few people had her number. At this time of day, it was likely Nancy.

“Hello?”

“Hi girl, how's it going?”

“Hi, Nancy,” Leah said. Her smile was evident through the phone lines.

“You sound good; how was that new account?”

Leah laughed. “Perfectly awful.”

“Tell, tell.” Nancy's excitement promised more laughs.

“Can you believe I ran from the new account naked?”

“No way!”

“Way!”

“Get out.”

“No, seriously. Like I had started to drown--”

“What?” Nancy's voice was tinged with panic.

“I fell in the pool--”

“Again?”

“Stoppit--”

“Doncha know that falling into your client's pools is bad for business?”

“Yeah, well, I thought that as I fell in.”

“Unless the owner is a hunk and sees your wet t-shirt.”

“You're incorrigible.”

“I'm what?”

“Incorrigible.”

“Whuh?”

“You know, bad and can never become better?”

“Oh gee, thanks.”

Leah giggled. “The owners actually are hunks.”

“What?”

“No joke.”

“Did you say owners?”

“Yes, I did.”

“No way.”

“Way.”

“What kind of hunks?”

She rolled her eyes. “Well, one is around fifty--”

“That old?”

“Yes, that old and he is very sexy.”

“I don't know what has gotten into you, girl—”

“I think it is what hasn't gotten into me.”

“What? Oh...” Nancy laughed. Her twinkle of mirth on the phone soothed Leah's nerves.

“And the other is a swimmer guy around forty.”

“Ohhh...” The word almost came out as a moan.

“No, they aren't fat.”

“Now you're dreamin', girl.”

“No, seriously.”

“Get out.”

“No, you.”

“What do they look like?”

“Well, the older one has long dark hair--”

“How long?”

“Midway down his back?”

Nancy's intake of breath constituted a gasp. “That long?”

“Yes.”

“No way.”

“Way!”

“No one has hair that long. They're all bald.”

“Tell me about it,” Leah said. “His hair was dark and had silver and white strands running through it. His beard--”

“Eww, a beard?”

“Yes--”

“I don't like beards--”

“It wasn't typical.”

“Oh?” The skepticism was evident.

“Yes, really. It was salt and pepper and very neatly trimmed.”

“Hmm.”

“His eyes were a deep brown and he told me he was Italian.”

“Oo la la.”

“That's French.”

“So? Who cares. You're getting me excited.”

“Back off, Nancy. These guys are mine.”

“What? Both?”

“Yes, both. Put the vibrator back in your purse.”

“Don't be so mean.”

“Deal with it.”

“I love you, too, Leah.”

“Yeah, right.”

They both laughed.

“What does the other one look like?”

“Oh, swimmer, hunk, brown hair to the shoulders, blue eyes--”

“Are you on drugs?”

“What?”

“I said, are you on drugs?”

Leah snorted. “Get real.”

“You expect me to believe you met two hunks out of a fantasy today?”

“But I did.”

“Bullshit.”

“No really.”

“Uh huh.”

“And I ran away from there today bare-assed naked.”

“No!”

“Yes!”

“How did that happen?”

“I fell in the pool--”

“Yes, you said that.”

“And I was drowning--”

“You? Drowning?”

“Yes, me. I was frightened--”

“So what happened?”

“I guess I was unconscious and the older guy revived me with mouth-to-mouth.”

“No way!”

“Yes, way.”

Nancy was silent for a moment. “Are you okay?”

Leah smiled. Her friend’s caring warmed her. “Yes, I am now. Thank you.”

“So this Adonis saves you--”

“Pretty much. Although I hawked up a gallon of water from my lungs onto his face.”

Nancy burst out laughing.

“Stoppit, this is serious,” Leah said.

“I'm sorry, go on.”

“So the swimmer guy comes out – he's named Randy.”

“Randy?”

“Well, Reinhard or Reinhardt. Something like that.”

“Are they gay?”

“I thought that too, but they were really offended when I suggested it.”

“Wow. What's their address?”

“Stoppit.”

“Gimme.”

“No.”

Nancy sighed. “Fine.”

“So they took me inside and had the housekeeper take my clothes--”

“You ran around the house naked?”

“No--”

“Do you do this kind of thing--”

“Would you shut up?”

“Sorry. Go on.”

Leah sat crossways on her comfy chair. Her head laid against one arm while her legs dangled up and over the other. She kicked her feet to the pace of the conversation. “So they talked about how beautiful I was.”

“Wow...” Nancy's voice became quieter and more wistful.

“I thought they were full of shit, but I didn't want to say anything because they're my newest client.”

“Right...”

“They both talked about me like I was some princess--”

“Are you sure these guys aren't gay?”

“I really don't think they are.”

“How did they get together?”

“They said something about a war.”

“Ohhh...” Nancy sounded as if she suddenly understood.

“But I don't know much about wars. They said it wasn't Iraq or Afghanistan.”

“Huh.”

“Yeah, I don't know, either.”

“So how did you end up running out screaming and naked?”

Leah snorted. “Well...”

“Tell me.”

“I started wondering if they were serial killers or something.”

Nancy laughed. “No way.”

“Come on, how many handsome guys do you know around our age live together and are heterosexual?”

“Uh? None?”

“Ding-ding-ding, the bimbo wins the prize.”

“Hey now--”

“But what I mean is that the situation was so absurdly abnormal that I couldn't comprehend it. I was wearing a bathrobe their old housekeeper had given me and I ran out with it open and flapping.”

“I thought you said naked.”

“It was open. I was naked.”

“With a robe on--”

“Anyone could see anything--”

“With a robe on.”

Leah heaved a heavy sigh. “Fine. With a robe on even though it was open and my boobs were jiggling in the breeze.”

Nancy giggled. “Did you do that on purpose?”

“No!”

“Then why?”

“I was afraid those guys were serial killers or something and didn't want to be their next victim.”

“Well, I guess that makes sense--”

“Come on, how many hunks do you know live together and aren't gay?”

“Well, none--”

“Exactly. So I was a little panicked.”

“Did something happen?”

“No, not really.”

“Oh come on. Do tell.”

“Well, I stood up and my foot was on my robe tie. It yanked everything open and I fell into the arms of the older guy--”

“You did this on purpose, right?”

“No.”

“I call bullshit.”

“Would you shut up?”

“You just happened to stand up, your robe flying open, your tits springing out and you accidentally on purpose fell into the arms of some long-haired hunk--”

“It didn't happen like that.”

“Oh, and how did it happen?”

“I was frightened. I didn't know if these guys were freaks or not. I was trying to run and I stumbled.”

“Oh...” Nancy's tone softened.

“But the older one, Nicolo, had stood and he caught me.”

“Now you're talking.”

“He kissed me.”

“Ohh, wow.”

“And then he was going to kiss me gain, but I panicked.”

“Oh no!”

“Yes.”

“Is that when you ran from the house?”

“No, that is when I ran into the other one. He had to grip me in a bear hug to keep me from falling.”

“Mmm.”

“But I was really scared, so I broke free and ran.” Leah figured Nancy didn't need to know about the whole key and lost purse issue.

“Could you get a picture of these guys?”

“Oh, Nancy, come on now--”

“No, really. Just take a pic and send it to me.”

“Well, if I can.”

“Cool-dles!” Nancy uttered the made-up word they had shared in high school so long ago.

“They sent me flowers...”

“They what?”

“Sent me flowers. You know, the green things with bright petals blossoming--”

“Oh stop it.”

“You asked.”

“Wow, flowers?”

“Yeah,” Leah said. Her giggle intimated at a shared secret with her friend.

“Flowers.”

“Don't screw this up.”

Leah didn't answer. What her friend said impacted her deeper than her silence revealed. Her life was full of rejection, disappointment, aggravation and defeat. Her ex-husband was out there somewhere, hunting her like a hunter tracking a wounded deer. She often wondered if she would ever get away from him.

*Why couldn't he just let go?*

Could she get beyond him? Could she allow someone to enter her life without scaring them off? Could she allow someone close to where she had been so grievously hurt before? Could Nicolo be the one? Or Randy? “No, I refuse to blow this one.”

“Good girl.”

“Never again.” The ferocity in her voice stunned Nancy to silence.

In two days, her apartment would be bathed in her blood.

## CHAPTER 7

Nicolo observed Leah entering the backyard toward the pool. She kept her head down – making a pointed effort to avoid looking at the house. In her flight yesterday, she had left her poles and kit.

Retrieving her gear, she returned to her truck. She then approached the house with the borrowed robe.

Agatha answered the knock. “Ah, yes?” He heard her say.

“Hi, I came to return the robe and collect my clothing?”

“Yes, yes, good. Come in, please and wait here.”

“Thank you.”

Nicolo glanced and nodded at Randy. Both rose silently and walked around the corner to the foyer of the front door.

She stood there, twisting her fingers together.

“Leah,” he said, “welcome back.”

“Oh, I just came to get my clothes and to apologize for my actions yesterday.”

“What? No, no, please. There is no need to apologize. Perhaps we should apologize to you, no?”

“Yeah, bitte, Randy said.

She blinked at him and cocked her head. “Pardon?”

“You mean to say 'please',” Nicolo said to Randy.

“Oh, yeah, I am sorry. Please, of course. Old habits are hard to break even after so long.”

Nicolo slapped a hand to his forehead and shook his head.

“I mean, I um...” Randy shrugged. “I am still learning all of this. I make a better soldier than um...”

Nicolo rolled his eyes. “Mm, maybe you should just smile, no?”

Randy instantly shut up and flashed Leah a charming smile.

There was a twinkle of mirth and confusion hiding in her eyes, Nicolo saw. There was a hint of joviality mixed into the prison of her questionable self-confidence. Her view of herself hindered her expression as much as heavy chains on hands and feet hindered movement. What beauty lay there, half dormant, waiting for her to realize she was a beautiful person with hopes and desires? What would it take to nurture just enough self-confidence to allow her real personality to emerge from behind her own limitations?

She must have seen sadness on his features. “Did I do something wrong?”

He saw fear replace everything else in her eyes. He had seen such before, in countless women, over the centuries – the look of a physically abused woman. His sadness turned to anger and it burned in him. He gritted his teeth.

Leah backed up against the wall. She must have done something wrong – something terribly wrong. Nicolo's face had gone from sadness to anger.

*Great. They're going to fire me.*

But worse than the anger was the glow coming from his eyes. It reminded her of the pool – hadn't she seen his eyes glowing red? She blinked several times to clear the image, but they started to glow with even more ferocity.

This was a man on the verge of violence. No, not violence. This was a man on the verge of murder. She hit the wall, her eyes big and wondering if she should run again.

Randy was gazing at Nicolo, a look of study on his face. He seemed at ease, but was balanced on the balls of his feet as if ready for action. He must be familiar

with seeing this.

Stunning her with his speed, Nicolo lurched forward toward her. She shut her eyes and raised her hands to ward incoming blows from her face. But there were no blows. Instead, hands gripped her shoulders.

“No, no, please, Leah, my beautiful. Do not fear me. Do not fear us.”

She opened her eyes to find Nicolo standing over her, tears rimming his eyelids. Randy still stood, ready to act, like a coiled snake. His eyes never stopped moving as he slowly scanned the hall, the room, the door, the window – as if seeking threat.

“I--” She was at a loss for words.

His hand reached up and brushed the hair back from her cheek. Chills ran up her spine and down her arms. Tingles spread from her pussy to her hips and inner thighs. She looked up into his eyes and almost collapsed. They were normal again – deep pools of sensuality and lust. An ache developed in her that caused her to shift her feet.

“I think I will send Agatha for some groceries, no?” he said to her or Randy. She wasn't sure.

Randy relaxed and nodded.

A void opened up in Leah as Nicolo moved away and into another room. She looked at Randy and started twisting her fingers again.

He smiled at her. The smile looked right. It looked safe. It looked pleasant. In fact, it looked respectful – something so lacking in her experience.

*What do I make of this? Who are these people?*

“There is no need to fear us, fräulein.”

“Yes, you keep saying that.”

“You show fear around us. There is nothing to fear.” He shrugged.

“I do?”

A nod.

She twisted her fingers together and around each other faster.

He stepped closer.

Her heart beat a little faster and she felt herself quivering.

*Handsome men don't approach me, ever.*

Taking her head gently in his hands he leaned toward her face. As his ruggedly handsome face came closer, she found her insides melting to water. Her knees trembled, threatening to buckle. When his lips made contact with hers, she grew dizzy. She closed her eyes to keep from losing balance. The feel of his lips on hers was electrifying. They were strong lips, but sensuous. Pressing gently and parting, she did likewise. Their tongues met in a slow fever of exploration.

She reached her arms up to him and he stepped in closer into a full hug. Their bodies melded together and she luxuriated in the feel of this handsome man pressed against her. Heat blossomed from between her legs and rose throughout her body. Her neck became hot and she began kissing him harder.

One hand held her back and the other rose to tangle in her hair. He held her head captive, but she was willing. His kiss matched hers and she pressed against him, swooning in lust.

*It's never been like this. What is this?*

He broke the kiss and she gasped, then moaned in loss.

*What is happening to me? First Nicolo and now Randy?*

“You are a beautiful woman, a creature of wonder and delight.”

“What?” She tried to make sense of the words.

“You are a treasure and a pearl in the eyes of God--”

“You must be kidding?”

“Nein, meine Fräulein,” he said. “A beauty most desired.”

Her insides, having solidified after the kiss, once again turned to water.

*No man has ever said this to me.*

“I--”

“There is no need to speak. Take your comfort with us and be at peace.”

“Comfort?”

“Excuse me, I cannot yet put my mind to the English language as consistently as required.”

“Yes, you were German?”

“Yeah.” The word was short and clipped, as she imagined ja in German must sound. “I mean to say, be at ease.”

“So, I shouldn't worry that you are both mass-murderers or serial killers--”

The lowering of his brows into furrows of anger stopped her.

“We are not such, no.”

Her head swimming, she spoke without thinking. She spoke without defending her intellect. She spoke without defending herself from the injuries of typical male thought. “Why me?”

Reaching a hand to brush her cheek and smooth her hair back from her face, Randy leaned over her and gazed his wonderful eyes into hers. “Because you are an object of beauty amongst the refuse of modern women.”

“I'm what?”

“Is it so hard to understand?”

“No, I understand you, but...”

“But?”

She blinked and drew breath. “Well, I have never heard any man say that I am beautiful. As if such an admission might threaten them--”

Randy laughed.

“What?” she said.

“I am not threatened by you, my dear.”

She swallowed. “Then what--?”

He smiled seductively and wantonly at her. “I am entranced. I am overcome and consumed. I have awaited your return with my heart beating a pattern of longing and waiting.”

She was floored. No man had ever spoken to her in such a way.

*This is not real.*

But he was leaning into her again and consuming her mouth, forcing his tongue against hers and stroking her lips and tongue with his own in a frenzy of passion.

The ache in her pussy spread. It became deeper, more insistent and unavoidable. She squirmed as she stood under his kiss. Her skin tingled from head to foot and she felt an inclination to explode. It built and broadened throughout her body. Spinning, she clutched him as their mouths continued their congress of passion. Her clitoris tingled and twitched. Her vaginal walls tried to clamp on what wasn't there.

She moaned in lust and frustration.

His hand stroked her hair away from her face and caressed her smooth skin.

*What does he see? Some wrinkled old woman? Some washed-up has-been who once might have been young?*

Their passion was interrupted by the return of Nicolo. He seemed unperturbed by her presence in Randy's arms.

“I have sent Agatha for groceries, yes? Maybe now we shall be without

interruption.”

His romance-language accent tingled along her nerves. That he closed the gap between them and came close to her while Randy's arms titillated her further. His hand stroking her arm as it clasped around Randy's shoulders sent chills up and down her spine.

The younger man stepped back, releasing her. Into the void stepped the ravishingly handsome and older Nicolo. The white strands in his hair commanded her as much as the fire in his eyes, though no longer red.

*Had I imagined that?*

Unsure, she allowed him to hold her in place of Randy.

*Was he unaware that Randy had just kissed me passionately?*

“Come, my beautiful,” he said. “Come with me.”

Without hesitation or other thought of resistance, she followed Nicolo as he led her deeper into the house. She was not surprised to find them in the bedroom. But what a strange bedroom it was.

Flags hung from the walls, carefully pinned to frames and backboards that offered little stress to the fabric. Some were simple, some were elaborate, and some were coats of arms. They were arranged in such a way that suggested age. The flags to her left as she entered were obviously extremely old. Beneath each were smaller frames that contained artifacts of various types. Under some were pins or cloak clasps. Under others were medals or some other piece of martial designation.

One particular flag troubled her; it was the last and newest one - a red, white and black flag that showed a swastika in the corner. Underneath it was a frame that held several pieces of metal and cloth that looked like awards. Some of them looked familiar. One of them was a black square containing a pair of silver lightning bolt runes.

The room was otherwise simple. The bed was comfortable-looking and large. Despite the impressive collection of flags, the room gave her the impression of emptiness – much like a motel room. There was a curious lack of clutter. The

nightstand held a lamp and a clock. A glass of water was there. But nothing else. The dresser was bare. Nothing else was evident. There was no piece of exercise equipment. There was no chair with a jacket hung over it. There was no pair of slippers by the bed. There was no unfinished magazine on the nightstand. No mail on the dresser. No pen or notepad. No box on the floor containing who knows what for later. Even motel rooms had more in evidence. There wasn't even a phone.

She must have shown her shock on her face.

“Is something the matter, Leah?”

“There's no phone?”

Nicolo nodded. “In the house, yes. Not in here. I find the thing too impersonal and I would not wish it to disturb my sleep.”

She blinked.

*What do you say to that?*

He stopped her at the foot of the bed.

Her heart thudded in her chest. Surely he hadn't led her here to show off his flag collection. He seemed the kind of man who didn't feel the need to show off to impress someone. Her thoughts wanted to find anything to skirt the real reason she knew she was in the bedroom. Realizing this, she let the thought assail her: they wanted to have sex with her. Heat boiled up once more – a lusty hotness that caused her pussy to convulse and weep moisture.

*With me? What was so special about me?*

Turning her to him, Nicolo ran his finger along her chin and jaw. She began to tremble. When his lips met hers, she was as eager as he to explore passion. Their tongues ran over each other, slowly, sensuously. His body pressed to hers and she could feel his excitement pressed against her.

*Oh my gosh. I can feel his cock.*

Her head swam and she let him hold her up, taking his passion and hers through

their mouths. She let her body respond, her hips thrusting forward, her hunger for that cock driving her closer to him.

He pulled back from the kiss. "I want to see you naked."

She should have denied him. She should have slapped him. She should have run. She did take a step back.

His hands caught her by the shoulders. "Now."

*He is just too sexy to resist. How can I?*

Her mouth open, her heart thudding, she nodded.

His hands began unbuttoning her shirt. He was in no rush. He just stood there, all manly and commanding. He smelled clean, but with no evidence of cologne or deodorants. His breath lacked any smell at all and certainly not the sticky toothpaste smell of mint. Perhaps he was like his room? He had nothing extraneous. Maybe he scoffed at smells and had no time for them. Maybe he thought smells were too impersonal and just dismissed them with a wave of his hand and his imperious gaze?

Removing her shirt, he reached back and unsnapped her bra as if he had invented the thing and knew exactly how it clasped.

She heard Randy rustling behind her but her eyes were glued to this dominating man in front of her. She watched his eyes as they dropped to her small breasts. The smile that lit his face appeared to hide nothing.

*How can that be? All men love basketball boobs. He must be one of those rare men who like small chests.*

He brought his hands up and ever so gently ran his fingers over her skin and around her nipples.

"Beautiful," he said.

And she believed it. Her sigh reinforced to her the feelings running rampant through her. He wasn't mauling her. He wasn't twisting her nipples like they were radio knobs. He wasn't pinching them and causing pain. His touch was a caress.

His touch was an expression of tenderness and appreciation.

*His touch is wonderful.*

Reaching from behind, Randy undid the button on her shorts. His chest pressed up against her naked back and she began gasping in lust. She could feel his swimmer's body pressed against hers and his light chest hair. She felt his warmth. She felt her own warmth reflecting and adding to his creating a hot tension that caused her to squirm.

*Oh this is too wild.*

He slid her shorts over her too-wide hips and dropped them down. For a few seconds, she was afraid to kick them away from her ankles, but the heat and lust gave her no choice.

*Run if they ruin it, Leah. Otherwise enjoy it.*

She did not normally make a habit of talking to herself, except when she was nervous. What did they see? A frumpy woman close to forty? Small boobs? Wide hips? Thick thighs? Her crossed eyes? What did they think? Did they think she was ugly? Was all of this some pity act? Or were they actually attracted to her?

Those thoughts were swept away when Nicolo started to undress. His smile was reassuring. He seemed pleased as he unhurriedly removed his shirt as if undressing for bed. She saw his chest hair – salt and pepper like his beard. His chest was covered lightly with hair, but not carpet-style. She loved manly chests with enough hair through which she could run her fingers.

Her smile must have further pleased Nicolo. His eyes smoldered at her with even more passion.

From behind her, Randy's body once again pressed against hers. His hands rose up from her almost flat stomach to her breasts. His manhood hung down, semi-hard, against her crack. She barely resisted the urge to reach back and touch it.

Nicolo removed his pants. He wore no underwear. His manhood was also semi-hard and impressive. Her eyes widened as she gazed at what might have been perfection. It was large, throbbing, and perfect. It wasn't deformed or suffering

from any bends or conditions that twisted or caused the penis to angle off to the side. The shaft was straight, even, and ended in a head that wasn't too large or too small.

*It looks suckable.*

Now where did that thought come from?

*Shush girl, this is something you need. Go with it. You can run later.*

Convincing herself to indulge, Leah reached forth her hand and grasped Nicolo's tool. It was soft, spongy, and warm to the touch. His smile widened and showed teeth.

“That's it. Let your woman out. Let it soar.” His voice soothed her.

“It's beautiful.”

He laughed. “Well, thank you. You are quite beautiful yourself.”

She shook her head. “No, no, there's no need to butter me up--”

Randy's hands never stopped their caressing of her flesh and nipples from behind.

“Nonsense, my love,” Nicolo said. “I have seen many women and very few were as beautiful as you.”

“No, my breasts are too small--”

“They are perfect.”

“My hips are too wide--”

“They are wonderful.”

“My thighs are too thick--”

“They are not.”

“And my eyes are crossed.”

“They are?” He grasped her head and gazed intently at her eyes. His grunt of concentration as he stared intently at her eyes startled her. “Yes, but not so much I would think you are looking two different directions.”

She snorted.

“You have beautiful eyes, a beautiful face, beautiful breasts, and beautiful hips. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise.”

“But I don't look like some fashion model--”

“Shush. The people in charge of the media information systems focus on what they think is sexy and what they want the rest of us to think is sexy. Personally, I do not think a woman shaped like a little boy is sexy in the least, no? I think those people in the media are sick.”

“Yeah,” said Randy in his clipped accent.

With Nicolo's tool in her hand, Randy's voice in her ear and his tool pressed against her backside, she realized the nasty situation she was in. Her head swam in lust.

Nicolo gently moved her to the bed. Randy moved back a few steps and relief wormed through her body. She wasn't a cheap whore.

*But I want to be.*

She fumed at herself. Wanting to let go and wanting to be a cheap whore were two different things. Passion and lust had nothing to do with being a whore. Enjoying and pursuing her lust did not make her a whore.

*Shut up before you ruin it.*

Nicolo eased her to the bed.

*Why couldn't my other men have been like this?*

He smiled as his hands stroked her shins up to her thighs. Forcing them apart with his hands, he climbed over her and pushed his face into her pussy.

Her gasp and convulsion rocked the bed. She felt his wet tongue running around the outside of her lips. It felt soft, wet, and hot. She felt her pussy spasm. His tongue licked over her clit and she again felt the spasm tear through her. Her nerves tingled, almost instantly on the edge.

*Oh yes. Don't ruin it.*

Her knees lifted in anticipation and her hands sought out Nicolo's head. Feelings of tension, lust and excitement radiated out from her pussy and she pulled his head in to increase the amazing sensations running through her. Her ex-husband had never done this to her. When she felt his fingers explore her lips and then enter, she approached the edge with increasing speed. This was it, there was no stopping what was coming.

“Oh, yes!” she said. Her hips pumped and her pussy convulsed. Pulses of wonder and release throbbed through her body. The tension and pain built and released with each convulsion until she lay gasping and suddenly sensitive. Her body thrummed with satisfaction. She panted in relief. Now she needed cock. She wanted the feel of fullness filling her empty and aching cavity.

She kept her eyes closed, but felt the bed move as Nicolo moved up and over her. She felt the touch of his hard cock against her slit. Moaning, she opened her legs wider. She wanted to scoot down and impale herself on him, but she stayed still. The entry of his manhood into her satisfied the need for impaling. Her pussy lips parted and allowed his beautiful shaft to penetrate – to slide in with no resistance.

*Yay.*

“Ohh, yes...” Nicolo said. His erection slid in. “Heavenly.”

The room swam. His cock, all soft and hard and sexy, invaded her over and over – filling that ache and need deep inside her. Each thrust brought a burst of sensations from her tingling clit as his pubic hair mashed into it. His mouth on hers sent colors flying through her mind.

*He's kissing me while we make love?*

This had never happened to her before and the effect was wild. Her heart thudded heavily. Her breathing grew desperate. Her clit began sending jolts out

with every thrust. She opened her eyes and looked around in a daze. There, off to the side, was Randy. He was naked – his beautiful body sinuously following the stroking of his hand on his full erection.

*Oh, this is nasty.*

She watched his hand stroking up and down his shaft and wanted nothing more than to reach out and stroke it for him.

As if sensing her thoughts, he moved forward until he was close enough. Without any reservations, she reached out a hand and stroked his shaft while Nicolo speared his penis in and out of her pussy.

*Mmmm, this is the life.*

Nicolo sped his thrusts and began pounding his cock into her. His excitement spurred hers. His need spurred hers. His lust spurred hers. She wanted to feel his cock in her. She wanted to feel it eject its fluid into her. She wanted to feel that warmth and satisfaction.

Her hand moved faster on Randy's cock.

The moans in the room were coming from her, she realized. They seemed to have an odd echo as she let go and allowed herself to feel the pleasure and wonder of such exquisite love-making. The feel of a hard cock in one hand and another plundering her was salaciously nasty.

When she felt Nicolo tense and push inside, she was ready for anything. His hot sperm gushed into her and his command of her body was complete. She felt like a violin being played by a master. She released Randy's throbbing shaft and languished on the bed, stretching and luxuriating in the afterglow.

Disengaging, Nicolo moved up to lie beside her and kiss her. She closed her eyes to the oral assault and only gasped when she felt Randy over her. She opened her eyes to see him between her legs. His tongue worked over her pulsing clit for a few seconds before he leaned up and put the head of his cock to her wet and used entrance.

*Oh no, too dirty, too dirty...*

She felt him slide in and she moaned uncontrollably at how she was the object of some very nasty sex. His cock invaded the very inner parts of her that were filled with Nicolo's cum. She felt as if her limbs were detached as his penis fucked her in and out. He was gentle, but she felt the commanding presence from him almost as strongly as she had with Nicolo.

The Italian's mouth descended on hers and they kissed while the German made love to her. Her world spun with the sensations. She felt the world tipping and turning around her pussy. Suddenly, angry waves of release that convulsed her body in violent jerks washed through her. Her pussy clamped down on Randy's invading cock as if biting it – trying to squeeze it still or squeeze the life out of it. Her grunts were bestial as spasm after spasm of relief and pain swept her. Her fingers clawed at Nicolo or Randy – she wasn't sure. But at the end of her convulsions, she drifted.

Randy's assault on her pussy continued and the ecstasy of sex carried her beyond consciousness.

*Could this go on forever? Please?*

Even when Randy grunted with exertion and forced his spurting cock as deep into her as it would go, she remained listless, drifting, satiated, and very satisfied. She wanted Randy to keep going. She wanted Nicolo to keep going. Just let her lay there, eyes closed, and enjoy what was going on.

*More, please.*

Her thoughts drifted, pleased and satisfied, until she fell asleep.

## CHAPTER 8

“What do we do with her?” Randy asked. His teacher would know. Surely.

Nicolo shrugged.

“That doesn't help.”

Nicolo looked across her sleeping form to him. “It is a difficult question, no? It always is.”

“Yeah, we never even turned Agatha.”

“But do you see the dilemma?”

“Eternal life--”

“No, eternal death,” said Nicolo. “Life and death interrupted with eternal life that is just as final as eternal death.”

“But it isn't.”

Nicolo arched an eyebrow at him.

“Despite your centuries of reference, it is simply an interruption, not a death.”

The Italian grunted.

“You've turned no one since me—” Randy said.

“And with good reason.”

He frowned at Nicolo's sing-song Italian accent. Sometimes it sounded flippant. But he knew better. The Italian had centuries of experience on him that the German's former elevated rank could not overcome. “Would we want to leave her to die?”

Nicolo was silent.

“Could we?” Randy stroked Leah's flesh.

“Can we?”

“What of her feelings? What if she wanted it?”

“Ahh.” Nicolo's grunt of disgust and dismissal raised the ire in Randy.

“And how would you know she--”

“I have lived centuries beyond you, no? I know.”

“Has she lived centuries beyond me?”

“Of course not--”

“Then how do you know?”

“But--”

Randy pushed his luck. “What if she wanted it? No woman has inspired you so in decades.”

Nicolo fell silent, brooding. “It is not an easy thing.”

“I am well aware.”

“She is likely to scoff and run from us to never return.”

“So you would rather take her for a few years and use her--”

“No!” Nicolo's gaze dropped to Leah's sleeping form. “Never would I abuse this beauty--”

“Then turn her--”

“You know not what you ask!”

“Just because I have never turned someone--”

“No, sir! This has nothing to do with who has turned who.”

Randy dipped his eyes down to Leah and nodded. “Forgive me. You have always been thoughtful and considerate. Please.”

Nicolo nodded after a few seconds.

“But what if she did desire to become as us?” Randy asked.

The older man remained silent, gazing at the sleeping form of the wondrous treasure between them.

“I know you have not felt like this since before you turned me, Rossi.” He used Nicolo's last name – the name he had called him while serving together on the Eastern front. “But what if she is willing?”

“Mmmph.” The grunt from Nicolo was almost dismissive. “Maybe I should let you make an ass of yourself.”

“What? How--”

“As if this creature of love would believe you when you claim to be what you are.”

They both stared down at her sleeping face.

“I must try.”

Nicolo nodded, but he looked sad – as if he knew the outcome already. “You may try.”

Randy nodded in respect. “Thank you.”

“Mmm, I think you will not be thanking me after you make a fool of yourself.”

Randy looked at Leah's beautiful face. He had to try.

Section Chief Norman Roth scowled at the body as it was removed from his condominium. The cleaning crew asked no questions. As far as they were

concerned, the young black man was an intruder. They did not question the sperm splattered over his beaten features.

On the morrow, he would need to assign other section agents commanding strike teams to various areas of the country. The process of removing vampires from American society would be an arduous and long path. The struggle would require time. But the removal of the infestation had to be thorough.

Not a vampire must be left living.

He cared not that vampires had served a valuable service in removing endless streams of poor and homeless. He cared not that none had ever stood against a lawful government. He cared not that many had served with distinction in the armed forces.

Vampires were a plague that required total eradication. They were different. They weren't like other humans. They would die. Something inhuman could not be trusted, even if they had shown complete loyalty in the past.

No. Now was the time for evolution to remove the weakness from the gene pool. Humans would overcome vampires and the real strength of humanity would be revealed.

Leah drifted on dreams of hills and valleys. She was searching for something, but she didn't know what. In a strange place, she searched for anything.

Randy was there with her, trying to help her search.

What was she looking for?

Smoke was all around her, white and concealing. Figures moved about, listlessly.

“Never again,” Randy said.

His face was drawn and haggard. Stubble of a weary sort was on his jaw. A loneliness haunted his eyes that spoke of horrors better forgotten.

Then Nicolo was there, wearied, but not haunted. “Come. Let us leave.”

“No,” she said. “Don't go. Please, no.”

“It is not our time here any longer,” Randy said. “But you could...”

Her dream took on an odd feeling of invasion, as if his words were being more than received through her ears.

“...make us...”

His words vibrated along her skin, increasing with each syllable.

“...whole.”

She awoke.

She was in bed, but not in Nicolo's bedroom. It was another simple bedroom, though. A guest bedroom maybe.

What had she just dreamed? Something about searching - she wasn't sure.

Stretching, she purred with contentment. The sexual satisfaction still suffused her body and soul.

*How could I have done something so dirty?*

A small smile lit her face no one would ever see.

*Maybe they hypnotized me and I had no control over the situation.*

That sounded right. Any woman would have run from them shocked and furious, of course. Unless they had coerced her. The thought that she had no choice in the matter made her feel better about herself and allowed her to remember the event. Surprising her was the rising lust and ache inside her at remembering what happened.

*Could I do something so dirty again?*

Her thoughts were interrupted by a knock on the door. “Leah, darling?”

Randy.

“Yes?” She sat up.

He opened the door and stuck his head in. “I had Agatha prepare the bathroom here if you would like to use it. We would like to have dinner with you?”

Just then, her stomach growled with a ferocity that would have quailed a mature lion. She giggled. “That sounds good. Yes, but I have nothing to wear--”

“We can take you around to your home so you can change.”

“Then, I accept.” Her smile must have pleased Randy because he smiled in return.

Refreshed, she stepped out the door. Nicolo sat behind the wheel of a black Mercedes that was new thirty years ago. But it was meticulously kept. The quiet purr of its engine vibrated in her pussy and sent tingles throughout her body.

*Wow, what has gotten into me? Could it be two men?*

She shook with silent laughter.

“We will follow you, okay?”

She nodded to Randy and got into her truck.

Unlocking her door, she looked behind her to Nicolo and Randy. “The place is a mess, I’m sorry.”

Neither man said anything, but they both snorted in disbelief and their scorn for her comment made her smile. She wasn't proud of her place, but she did keep it neat and clean.

*For times just such as these.*

You never knew when a handsome man or two was going to see your apartment. Her place was simple and resembled in a different way the house where these two men lived. Spare, little extra, and very clean. But in another way, it was a

mess compared to how they lived. On her small table was a magazine. On the kitchen counter were two envelopes of unopened mail. On her nightstand was a phone and a Bible.

Such clutter, if anyone could call it that, would not be seen in their home.

Not much else was in her small studio except for her small collection of angels. Porcelain and crystal, she had carried them with her from her marriage. Everything else had been left behind.

She selected a blouse and skirt while Nicolo and Randy peered at her angels. They kept sharing looks and nodding.

*What are those two guys up to?*

She dressed and came out of the bathroom.

Nicolo stood, dressed in black slacks and a black shirt. His hair was pulled back in a light ponytail tied with a black ribbon. He radiated confidence and command.

Randy stood at ease beside him, dressed in black slacks with a white shirt over a turtleneck undershirt. His wavy brown hair fell to his shoulders, free. He radiated sex and interest.

Her heart beat faster just looking at them.

*I wonder what they would say if I just jumped on the bed and offered myself to them?*

She smiled at the thought and blushed. "I'm ready."

"There was an Italian restaurant we passed a few blocks from here," Nicolo said. "Any good?"

"I hear it is, but have never been there."

"Ah, good then. A first time, yes?" His smile was disarming.

She couldn't help but nod.

“Your home is lovely.”

“Oh please.”

“No, no,” Randy said. “It is so. Be content with what you have for many people have less or had it all taken away from them.”

“And what you have,” Nicolo said, “is kept with pride.”

“Oh, well, thank you.”

“Shall we walk? The evening air is nice, even in the city.”

Outside, Leah walked between the two men. She felt at ease, relaxed, and safe. There was no jealousy between them to ruin the romance. There were no hurt feelings to cause irritation. Just two men who had sexually explored a woman walking her to dinner.

She sighed contentedly.

Until she saw Joel. His hulking form blocked the sidewalk like a mountain grown from cement. The forward angle of his shoulders and the tilt of his head back revealed his most threatening body-builder pose.

She stopped with a gasp and froze.

*Why does he ruin everything? Why can't he leave me alone?*

As if answering her thoughts, he said, “You're mine, cunt.”

Nicolo slowed so immediately she might have thought he froze. But his actions were fluid. He seemed surprised, but not alarmed. With a slow motion, he half-stepped so she was partially shielded.

*Oh no, Joel is going to beat them up.*

Randy stepped forward after a very slight pause to put himself up in Joel's face.

Her ex-husband was a tall man, even a few inches taller than Nicolo. His

uncombed curly black hair was tight to his scalp and his large nose dominated a brutish face. He pumped weights all the time and used his muscles to threaten anyone he thought was in his way. He had slammed his fist into her face enough times that she knew the power behind the punch. Too many times she had suffered a concussion.

She wanted to run, but Nicolo slowly snaked a hand into hers and held her there.

*No! We need to run!*

Joel puffed out his chest and waved his head from side to side, chin in the air, as overly-muscular men do. As if to say, "I am so muscled that it hurts and I'm going to take the pain out on you."

Randy raised his gaze to meet Joel's. "I don't care who you are. Es macht nichts aus. But you will go away now or regret it."

"No, Randy--" she said.

"Shh." Nicolo shook his head but didn't look at her. He squeezed her hand at the same time.

"That's right, grandpa. You'd best shut up before you get hurt bad. No one messes with my bitch," Joel said. He heaved his shoulders to loosen up his arms. He was getting ready to punch.

She saw Randy shift forward slightly, bending his knees and resting on the balls of his feet. They were spread shoulder-width. His hands came up in fists, like an old boxer. "Come, little man. Let us see what you have."

Joel shook his head as if he couldn't believe it, but sideways as he wound up a punch. "I am so going to pound your face--"

Randy stood still. Joel's punch launched straight at his face. Leah wanted to scream. With a meaty thunk, the huge fist connected with Randy's cheek.

But Leah almost fainted at the result.

*What happened?*

Randy's head jerked back a few inches from the punch but nothing else moved on him. He didn't go flying onto his ass. He didn't grunt or scream in pain. He didn't even stumble.

“Was that your best punch, little man?” Randy's German accent colored his speech.

Snarling in rage, Joel launched another huge punch at the smaller German. Leaning to the side to avoid the connection with his face, Randy moved with an odd motion to grab Joel's arm and pull him into a knee strike to his solar plexus. She had seen karate before and this wasn't it. This was some kind of military move. Simple. Efficient. Hard.

Joel dropped to a knee as the air was knocked from his lungs and by the spasms from his abdomen.

Randy stepped back and lifted his chin, looking down his nose at the gasping brute.

Just when Leah thought things couldn't get any more strange, Nicolo released her hand and stepped forward.

“You owe my lady here an apology,” he said.

“What?” Joel said. He sputtered and wiped drool from his lips. “Fuck you, grandpa.”

“And now you owe me an apology and I will have it or you shall suffer more, no?”

Her ex-husband glanced at Randy. “That was a lucky shot--”

Nicolo shook his head. “My friend here was just playing. You will apologize or it will be me who will make you suffer.”

“You?”

“It is so.”

Randy grinned and then looked at Leah and winked.

*What the hell?*

Nicolo might have been almost as big as Joel and all manly confidence and sexuality, but he was going to get destroyed.

Joel got to his feet and spit down to the ground at Nicolo. He flexed his arms. "I'm going to hurt you."

The Italian laughed silently, his shoulders shaking and his white teeth flashing in the twilight. He slapped his hands together as if rubbing dust and circled Joel.

Joel's face screwed up in rage. His punch looked like a freight train. "Eat this!"

She gaped.

Nicolo barely moved. He took three fluid steps as his body twisted. His arm and elbow wrapped and caught the punch in some odd style of something that looked like Judo, but wasn't. She had been bored on many occasions and watched TV at Nancy's place. Her boyfriend was fascinated with karate.

Before she could digest how Nicolo did it, Joel was sprawled on the ground, bellowing in rage. But, he was on his feet again in a second and racing toward a still-grinning Nicolo. Another fluid twist and some leverage from an elbow and knee and Joel was once again sprawling, but this time face down.

Nicolo flashed a look at Randy, then behind to an alley.

Randy ducked in.

Her ex tried again, spittle flying from his lips.

Another weird elbow used as leverage from the Italian, a sweep of a leg, and the brute was face down again. Gripping his pants and the back of his shirt, Nicolo scuttled Joel into the alley.

*Wow, he is strong.*

Leaning around the corner, she saw the Italian lift Joel with ease and pitch him into a dumpster. Randy closed the lid.

She didn't know what to say. Her eyes felt as big as saucers.

*Did two men just manhandle my ex-husband?*

Neither of them were out of breath.

*Did they just handle him separately? Am I dreaming?*

“Come, enough play,” Nicolo said and smiled at her.

“Yes, before big and stupid finds a way out of the trash.” Randy winked.

*I really am safe.*

Tears rimmed and then dripped down her cheeks. “Thank you.”

Nicolo kept his eyes glued to Leah's throughout dinner.

“So Nancy helped me escape him and we fled together. I didn't think he would find me, this time.”

“Determination and will are important to what a man can accomplish,” Randy said.

“He sure is determined. If he can't have me, then no one can.”

“I have known such men in the past,” Nicolo said. “The end is never good and usually ends up with the woman dead.”

“Yeah,” said Randy. “No good.”

She shrugged. “What can I do?”

Randy leaned forward toward her over their plates of raviolis. “If there was a way we could help you never fear him again--”

“Oh, I can't think of killing him--”

“No, no,” he said. “But there is a way that benefits all of us--”

“I'm not the kind to murder anyone or want them to be murdered--”

“No, not like that.”

Nicolo had leaned back when Randy started speaking and Leah looked at him. He would let Randy do the talking, but he saw the confusion on her face. He folded his arms and waited.

“What's the matter?” she said to him.

He shook his head. “I have given this for Randy to ask.”

“Pardon?” She appeared confused over his wording.

“He and I decided to let him ask you something. It is important.”

She blinked. “Ask me?”

Randy nodded. “It is a proposal--”

She gaped. “A marriage proposal? But--”

“Well no, but sort of--”

“I thought Nicolo was--”

“Was what?”

She blushed. “I thought Nicolo would have asked me to marry him out of the two of you.”

Nicolo smiled. “Marry?”

She blushed more. “Oh, I didn't mean to imply you would, just that--”

“It is more serious than that,” Randy said.

“More serious than marriage?” She looked totally confused.

Nicolo sighed and rolled his eyes at his friend. His head shake silently reminded Randy again of the futility.

“What am I missing here?” she said.

“Nothing,” his friend said. “I haven't asked you yet.”

“Asked me what?”

Randy sighed. “We are very lonely--”

She looked at him with one eye larger than the other.

Nicolo snorted and tried to use his cloth napkin as if to cover a cough or sneeze.

“Stop it, friend,” Randy said.

He waved while composing himself behind the napkin.

“Are you laughing at me?” she said.

“Mmm, no. At him.”

Randy grimaced. “You are making this more difficult.”

“I think you would have difficulty all on your own, no?”

“Yeah.”

“What?”

Randy sighed and his grimace vanished. “Nicolo and I are different from other men--”

“No need to tell me that.” Her blush was entrancing.

“But, I mean it in other ways.”

“Oh, so you are gay?”

“No--” he said.

“No--” the other said.

Both men looked back and forth at each other.

“Well, you seemed normal to me earlier--”

“Not like that, no--” Randy said.

“Then how?”

“We, uhm...”

Nicolo raised his eyebrows and grinned at his friend.

Randy shot a look at him and frowned. “You make a joke of this but you want it as much as I do.”

He shrugged. “I do not mean to belittle that desire or stomp across the results.”

“Then you could help, yeah?”

“Help with what?” she said.

He sighed and waved at Randy. Turning to Leah, he said, “I am much older than my friend but even I have not the experience to make this easy.”

“Older?” It was her turn to snort. “What are you? Are you even fifty? You only have a few strands of white--”

“Oh, my dear.” He shook his head. “I have looked like this for a long time, now.”

“What, you use hair dyes?” The look of disbelief on her face told her she would not believe an answer in the affirmative.

He sighed.

Randy chuckled.

“I am far older than I appear, and so is Randy--”

“You're more virile than men in their twenties--”

“No, please, Leah, I am not a man.”

“Oh! You're one of those transvestites? Or transsexuals?”

Randy buried his head in his hands on the table.

“What? No, of course not--”

“What are you trying to tell me?” She began to look worried.

Nicolo pursed his lips. “I am a vampire.”

Randy threw up his hands and gazed heavenward. “That is your centuries of experience?”

He growled at his German friend.

She sat back and looked at them both. Her fear was written all over her face. “So you do want to give me some kind of send-off. Had your fun but this is your way of breaking it off?”

“No, no--” He leaned forward to take her hand.

She jerked her hand back and rose from her chair. Tears welled in her eyes and then burst silently down her cheeks. “You don't have to make some foolish or elaborate claim to dump me.”

Randy's look went from amused to concerned. “No, Leah, never--”

“My love, please--” But his entreaty fell on hurt ears.

“You used me and now you humiliate me!” She turned and fled the restaurant.

Nicolo sighed heavily. It looked as if at least half a million eyes were turned, looking at him and Randy.

If he had known about the speeding truck outside, he might have stopped her from leaving.

## CHAPTER 9

Leah fled.

Tears rolled freely down her cheeks, blurring her vision. She wanted nothing more than to stop and weep until her soul bled out her eyes.

*Give me an empty pool and I will fill it with sorrow.*

She ran faster.

*Have to get away. Have to be away.*

She ran out into the street and crossed to the other side. At the corner, she leaped straight out, heedless of traffic. Horns blared. She felt the passage of a car behind her as she escaped its metal embrace. But as she started to cross the final lane, she saw the speeding truck approaching from the right, too fast.

*Not enough time.*

But she seemed to now have all the time in the world as she saw the truck coming to end her life. Time slowed. She slowed. The truck slowed. There was no way she could stop in mid-leap. There was no way the truck could stop. There was no way she could make it to the other side before the truck hit her. Closer and closer it came as she barely moved in mid-air.

*Here I am, about to die.*

She screamed out her defiance to the truck, the ex-husband who had abused her and to the men who had just used and dumped her.

From behind her came a masculine scream of rage. “Nein! Nein! Nein!”

The truck impacted with something just before it hit her. She was not thrown away from the truck, however, but in the same direction she had been jumping. She must have been split in two because a lump went rolling on the sidewalk to her left as the rest of her seemed to be carried straight ahead. She rolled on the

sidewalk, her breath and senses forced from her.

*So this is how you die? Senseless? Your body torn in two?*

Where was the pain? She could still think, sort of. She opened her eyes amidst a welling of pain.

*There's the pain. This is when death comes. Isn't death painful?*

Filling her vision was someone familiar.

*Who?*

Nicolo leaned over her, gazing down intently, then looking away at the rest of her body. Then he looked back to her. His hair had come loose from the ribbon and was in wild disarray.

“Leah,” he said. His voice was full of anguish. His hand smoothed hair away from her eyes. “Leah, my love. Do not leave us so.”

“What?”

He glanced away again at the other half of her body.

But she realized she could feel her legs. One was twisted under her and close to breaking. She cried out in pain.

How could she feel her other half if it wasn't attached? How could she feel the pain? But her whole body was here.

*What went flying when the truck hit me?*

Nicolo had tears of his own in his eyes. A few splashed her face and jolted her to realization. He had saved her. He had jumped and borne her out of the path of the truck. She was intact, not ripped in two.

*But what was the flying lump?*

She raised her head and saw the lump moving several yards down the street. But it wasn't a small lump. She was whole.

*Randy!*

“We must go,” Nicolo said.

“What? No, we can't leave him--”

“Come.”

She felt herself lifted to her feet. Several people had gathered around. She could hear calls going out to 911 on cellphones. “But--”

“Shh.” Nicolo led her toward Randy.

Tears anew welled in her eyes as they approached his friend. He had been hit full by the truck. He had interposed himself between her and the vehicle and taken the impact while Nicolo had somehow got her out of the way.

Randy lay, bleeding, broken, but still alive. His feeble kicks and twitches told her that he didn't have long to live. “We can't leave, him, please.”

“We aren't, but please, remain quiet.” His voice was harsh, but insistent in a concerned way.

Holding her in one arm, Nicolo leaned down and helped his friend to his feet. But Randy could not stand; both his legs were shattered.

Leah thought that she had been sad before. She thought she had felt hurt before. Thought that she could fill a pool with her tears. No, she could fill a thousand pools now with the tears that washed down her cheeks. “Oh no--”

“Shh.”

With a heave, Nicolo shifted the broken body so that he was carrying Randy under his arm like a heavy dog.

“Make no sound,” he said to her.

He led her and carried Randy beyond the ring of onlookers. None of them turned to watch them. The crowd continued to look where they had huddled over Randy. Passing through them, the Italian quickened his pace.

*I must be dead.*

She did not recall much of the ride in the Mercedes to their home.

Reinhard Engel drifted in and out of battles. Katyusha rockets screamed down around him, throwing huge gouts of dirt and explosions into the air. Small arms fire crackled all around as the rumble of tanks drove near and far.

Planes buzzed by overhead, but smoother. The buzzing was not angry like the Soviet planes.

*We have air support?*

He wanted to move but his body would not. If his comrades were going into battle against Ivan, he wanted to be there, too.

Something touched his face – a feminine hand.

Had the Valkyries come to call him home?

“My sweet Randy...”

But his name was Reinhard, not Randy. He was Oberscharführer Engel of the Germania Regiment in the Fifth SS Wiking Division – a volunteer formation serving on the Eastern Front against Bolshevism. And if he didn't begin moving, he would fail to issue the proper orders – fail to act when an enemy was vulnerable to counterattack.

In a delirium, he knew that now was the time. He knew he had to beat the enemy. He had to have the will to overcome. He gave the order, frantic, not wanting to be found cowardly. “Los! Los!”

The hand smoothed his face.

He felt the pull, one way to his duties and the other away to something different. He shook his head, trying to clear his mind. He would not want his comrades to see him weak. He wanted to be strong, to be willing, and to overcome the obstacles to victory.

But the pull of the hand on his cheek caused all that to recede and to become little more than an echo.

A memory.

He opened his eyes to Leah's beautiful and caring face leaning down over him. As a man, he had stood firm. As a man, he had faced massed Soviet infantry charges. As a man, he had stood his ground and fought back, destroying several tanks in the countless battles he had fought in the maelstrom that was the Eastern Front.

As a man, he looked into her eyes and wept.

Her own wet eyes gazed back at him, smoothing his brow and his cheek.

Comforted, he drifted. But his drifting was becoming dimmer, blacker.

Leah cried over Randy's broken body. His bones were shattered and his shoulders no longer had a shape. His head was split open, exposing blood and brain. His breath bubbled, suggesting bleeding and punctured lungs.

How he was still alive, she did not know. She had begged Nicolo to call 911 and get an ambulance. But he had rejected the suggestion and even Randy had shaken his head, feeble as it had been.

Agatha gently cleaned his exposed skin with a wet rag.

“I need to feed. I shall return. Do not let my friend die, no?”

“But--”

The Italian had leaned close, his eyes gaining an odd glow. He had peered at her, into her, and his words to her held all the importance in the world. “Hold his hand and do not let go. I will return soon.”

And so he had left her there with a dying man who could certainly not survive. Agatha seemed very caring, but not worried.

“Oh Randy,” Her sobs came from deep within. “I am so sorry.”

Over the next half-hour, his breathing bubbled more and deeper - a rattle in his chest that could mean nothing but the end.

“Please don't die. You don't need to die to save me. Just call my name. Call to me and I'll come. Please.”

Storming into the room came Nicolo. Without stopping, he said to her, “Very good. Now he must feed to heal.”

He pushed her aside none too gently when he saw Randy's condition. “Has he spoken?”

“No--”

“His condition does not appear good,” Agatha said.

Nicolo yanked his sleeve up on his arm, popping the cuff buttons in haste. The look on his face changed to worry. Exposing his wrist, he used very sharp-looking teeth to gash a hole in his skin. Blood spurted.

She gasped and stumbled backward.

Leaning over Randy, the Italian directed the blood flow into his mouth. The blood pooled there.

“No!” Nicolo said. “No, my friend. Drink!”

“What is--” Her head swam in dizziness. What was happening here?

“Drink, damn you! Wake up, Oberscharführer Engel!” Nicolo landed a desperate slap on his friend's face.

With a convulsion, Randy jerked and swallowed the pool of blood in his mouth.

Nicolo pressed his wrist down over the working mouth and sighed with relief.

“You're going to kill him--”

“No, my dear, I am not. He will live.”

She saw the care and concern in his eyes, despite his shocking actions to his broken and dying friend. “But--”

“But it was close, yes? Very close.”

“He can't survive--”

“But he will. You will see. He should not have tried to absorb the impact of the truck; I would have had you safely out of the way. His act came from his love for you.”

“His love?”

Nicolo nodded. “Our love.”

“But I thought you were dumping me with your weird vampire--”

He shook his head. Lifting his wrist, he wiped the wound with his other hand. The bleeding stopped just as suddenly.

Randy opened his eyes. “Ja, ja. Gut.”

She gaped.

“I am Nicolo Rossi da Milano. I was born in the time of the Roman Emperor Constantine the First. I was a baby when the Edict of Milan was given.”

“Bragging again, mein fruend?” Randy's voice was a croak, but the bubbling and rattle was gone. Still, he coughed. “Ow, that hurts.”

She rushed to his side and stroked his head. “Shh, you are hurt--”

He shook his head. “Nein, not for long.”

*Vampires? Are they serious?*

“We are vampires. It is very difficult to kill us. Randy will be fine.”

Agatha peered at Randy and then nodded. “Ja, he will be fine.”

“Ja, good as new soon.” But Randy's face twisted into a grimace of pain.

Then she realized he was straightening his shoulders and arms. The effort left him panting. Not a hint of bubbling remained from his breathing. Startled, she also registered that the open gash exposing his brain had closed. “Randy? Nicolo?”

The Italian touched her shoulder. His gentle hand rested there, comforting her. “Telling someone is never easy, but yes, we are indeed things which you have grown to disbelieve.”

*Vampires?*

Nicolo had saved her in the pool and his eyes had glowed. Had that been real? “Your eyes--”

“Yes, sometimes they glow when we focus our powers--”

“But you've been in the sun--”

“Yes, we have. But it is very bright.”

“I thought vampires burned up in the sun.”

Randy chuckled.

She blinked. He had been almost dead just a few minutes prior.

“No,” Nicolo said. “Much of what you know about vampires is a myth.”

“I leave you to your talk,” Agatha said. Her bow was curt.

“Vampires,” Randy said, “have worked with leaders throughout time culling the very weak or sick from society. Also as a way to eliminate the poor or curb crime by feeding on criminals.”

“The government knows about you?”

“Mmm, yes and no,” the Italian said. “They know about vampires and many vampires work with the government in various capacities. However, I and my friend have tried to avoid coming in contact with the government.”

“Why?”

Nicolo shrugged. "Habit by now. But we fought together for Hitler against the Bolsheviks. That is not a good thing to be known."

"You were Nazis?"

"Yes, but--"

"You killed Jews?"

"No, we did not." Nicolo seemed angry.

Randy grunted. "We were soldiers and we fought."

"But the Holocaust--"

"We saw none of that and heard nothing of it until after the war." Nicolo's tone told her he was telling the truth. His indignant bearing said his honor was insulted. "We fought against Bolshevism – the enslavement of man to enrich a few at the top."

Randy's mutter held other secrets. "Don't believe everything you hear, either. The victors write the history."

"So you are Nazis on the run?"

"No," Randy said. He sat up on an elbow. "Nicolo turned me to help me escape a Russian prisoner compound and the country. Ever since we have been shy of government."

"But we did nothing as soldiers of which we are ashamed," the Italian said. "The government only hunts those who served in the camps."

She nodded. He was right; Nazis were hunted for what happened in the concentration camps, not that they had served in the armed forces.

"I have served in many wars, most of them were lost," Nicolo shrugged. "Randy likes to joke with me that maybe I should fight on the side I do not want to win."

She blinked. "Your flag collection--"

"Yes, every war I have ever fought in."

Randy swung his legs down and gently placed his weight on them as he stood.

She laughed – a nervous laugh that threatened hysteria. A dead man recovered in less than a few minutes? Vampires? Wars? Government knowledge?

She found herself in Nicolo's arms. He cradled her and she realized she must have fallen in a faint. “This is all so--”

“I know,” he said. His voice comforted and thrilled her. His gaze melted her worries and warmed her soul.

Randy cleared his throat. “I will go feed. Then I should be well again.”

Leah sat with a cup of tea next to the fire. Nicolo sat with her, shirtless, his broad Italian chest exposed while Agatha sewed the cuff buttons back on his shirt.

“Why were you telling me about being vampires?”

“Mmm?”

“At the restaurant.”

“Oh, yes. Because we wanted to ask of you if you wanted to join us.”

“Me? Join? Vampire?” She recoiled.

“Mmm, yes,” he said. He appeared uncomfortable. “Asking is not an easy thing.”

“But why?”

“Because people do not understand--”

“I meant, why me?”

His eyes lit up and his smile warmed her like the fire. “Because you are such a beautiful creature that living without you would not be living.”

“Oh please.”

“No, it is so. I and my friend do not have feelings for other women like we have had for you.”

“Ja, it is true,” said Agatha over her sewing. “The boys act as if they do not need love.”

*The boys?*

“Shush, woman.” But Nicolo's admonition was gentle.

She had never known a gentle man. She had never known a kind man. She had never really been loved. Could she love? Could she love these two men? Could she love two vampires?

*Vampires?*

“Believing is still hard, no?”

“It is hard, yes,” she said. “But I find it harder to believe you chose me. Is this some kind of joke?”

“No, my dear. No.” His gaze melted her. The power behind his voice soothed her. “The moment I saw you I knew I wanted you. The moment Randy saw you, he wanted you.”

She blushed.

“No woman has captured me like this since...”

“Since?”

He shrugged. “Randy says I loved someone in the sixties, but he exaggerates. I think maybe in the nineteen twenties.”

She giggled.

“But even then, not like I love you.”

“Oh come now--”

“No. I never offered to turn her.”

Her insides were water. She felt sick, warm, and loved. Butterflies played havoc with her stomach. Her pulse raced.

*Is this love? Does it get better or worse?*

“I am not worth turning--”

Nicolo stood and gripped her hand. “Come and let me show you.”

The Italian vampire could scarcely control himself. He wanted nothing more than to shred her clothes and take her with passion on the bed. Closing the bedroom door behind them, he gently embraced her.

She was so fragile and her time on this world was running out. He didn't want to be without her. He could not bear to see her grow old and die lonely.

*No, not our Leah.*

His mouth descended on hers and he barely restrained his flaming passion. Their kiss started slow, but his need and her hunger drove their mouths together in what turned into a frenzied kiss of desperation.

Breaking the kiss, he let her gasp and catch her breath. He removed his slacks and stood there naked, his penis hardening rapidly.

“Undress,” he said. His voice was a growl of smoldering heat.

Trembling, she did so. Her skirt came down and her blouse came off.

Impatient, he grabbed her panties and tore them down. His cock throbbed and stood out, full and hard. The hardness of his erection pulled him forward, toward her. He had to have it between her legs.

Piercing her with his eyes, he pushed her down on the bed and threw open her legs. Her sex was there, displayed and open. If anything, his penis grew even longer and harder. The fullness was like a simultaneous itch and scratch that tormented and relieved. Growling, he dove his face into her pussy. His tongue flicked hard at her clitoris and his teeth grazed it in a tease designed to torment.

Her gasps turned to moans and her hips jerked with tension.

“What are you doing to me?” she said.

He lifted his head long enough to respond. “Showing you my love. My lust. And my determination to make you mine. To make you ours.”

She gasped again, loudly, as he applied his mouth to her.

But his patience was at an end. He wanted her. He would have her. In fact, he needed her. Now. Lifting her, he rose up holding her to his chest. Bouncing her upwards, he positioned her over his cock. Her legs were wrapped around his waist as his penis found and lined up with her quivering hole.

Snarling with barely-contained lust, he forced her down onto his erection. Her privacy was stabbed, invaded, and violated in one thrust. He felt his cock bury all the way up inside her. The feelings were wonderful – all hot and wet silk covering every bit of his penis. A delirium of pleasure swept over him and he lost control. Growling in a feral rage of lust, he lifted and dropped her over and over onto his bulging penis. In and out he speared her. Her pussy dropped down onto him repeatedly with wet slaps and grunts.

They moved in an unspoken agreement – a rhythm that belied their new relationship. He threw back his head and used his hands to slam her hips down harder onto him.

*There is no possible way I can let this woman go.*

She clung to him, biting his neck and shoulder. Her pussy rode easily up and down on his shaft, accommodating it in lubricated welcome. Her moans turned to sobs and then to interrupted gasps of struggle. Her body clenched and then released in a quivering explosion of uncontrolled reaction.

Without pulling out, he drove the both of them down onto the bed. The frame hit the wall and he heard a distinct metallic snap as they hit the mattress. Her eyes were closed in a delirium and he drove his cock into her until he was sure neighbors five houses away could hear.

She whimpered, limp, as he shoved his erection all the way in and exploded. The orgasm seemed to last forever. Wave after wave overtook him and seed gushed

out of his cock and into Leah's pussy. After what seemed like several minutes, he finally stopped shooting sperm into her.

She lay, limp, unresponsive, and drifting on the high of orgasm and great sex.

*She is mine.*

She drifted off into sleep almost immediately, his sperm running out of her satisfied hole.

Leah dreamed of a friend come to visit. She wanted him but was married to... someone. Who was she married to? Or was she engaged? It was some kind of commitment. She wanted to touch her friend's penis, but was afraid of what her husband would say. She wanted to kiss and suck on that cock, but she wasn't sure if...

Her friend didn't seem to care.

*But what if we are caught?*

Her friend touched her in places that were naughty. Her body responded and she forgot about her husband or fiancé or boyfriend. She was overloaded with sensation. Her pussy quivered at his touch. Her body trembled to his advance. Her lips parted for his kiss.

Waking, she found Randy over her, smiling. His hand gently stroked her flesh and touched her in places of which she had dreamt.

“Randy,” she said.

“I am here, my wonderful Leah.”

“You are okay?”

“Yeah, all good.”

A tear threatened but he was quick to notice and thumb gently over her eye.

“Please forgive me for being so rash and risking myself for you when Nicolo had

it all in hand.”

“Nicolo?”

“Yeah. He launched himself faster than I did at you. He bore you away from the truck so that it did not hit you.”

“I thought you saved me?”

“No, but...” He shrugged. “I aimed to stop the truck from hitting you by putting myself between you and it.”

“You--”

“I know, stupid plan.”

She raised her hand to his face and cupped his cheek and jaw. “No, no. You did something I could never do. You were willing to sacrifice your life for me--”

“Or die beside you.”

“Oh, Randy.”

Their kiss thrilled her with a slow rebuilding of passion and contentment. Once again in the last hour, she felt herself giving in to the commanding presence of this wonderful and thoughtful man.

*How could I get so lucky to get not one, but two? Will I be able to choose between them?*

Her sob was sudden and explosive.

“I am so sorry,” she said. “I am so very sorry to have endangered you--”

“Shh, my beautiful lady--”

“No, I--”

“Please, no. Do not feel such.”

“But, I--”

His mouth met hers and wiped away all the tears and sorrow. He was gentle, thorough, and sexy. His passion was tentative and questing. She threw herself open to his advances and his mission. Exposing her inner core to his thrusting curiosity, she reached other heights of sensation and satisfaction in his gentle touch.

Joy leaked from her eyes in a watery emission of surrender. They embraced each other gently as his penis thrust into her with slow and filling strokes. Turning her head to the side, she saw Nicolo leaning against the wall, his erection in hand and stroking it in time with Randy's thrusts.

Her pussy flooded with moisture and heat.

*These men are hot over me? Both?*

Looking at Nicolo, she allowed Randy to slide into her with slow strokes. If nothing else, she could die remembering this as the pinnacle of emotion in her life.

Could there ever be better? Would there?

A whisper in her ear brought her to her senses with a clarity that numbed her. "Join us, Leah."

She looked up into Randy's eyes.

"Join us and never leave. Be with us always."

She didn't know the future. She was no psychic. But she knew this was something she could never release. This emotion and passion for these two men was not something to be passed over and missed. These two men were not pieces of junk mail to be thrown away without consideration. These two men were not the plastic wrapping on a purchased good to be tossed without thought. No. These two men were the essence of life and reason.

But could she join them? What was it to be a vampire? These two didn't flit around at night in bat form sucking blood. But could she join them knowing that both men wanted her? Knowing that she would give herself to them both for as long as they lived?

*Shut up, girl, she told herself. The biggest gift you have ever been offered and you think to turn it down?*

“Yes, please. Anything. I want to be--”

His eruption in her startled her in a pleasant way. His flood of hot man liquid warmed her already hot insides and satisfied her womanly desire for control over men. It gave her a sense of power was there that was not there normally.

Nicolo came forward, his eyes sad. “It is not an easy thing.”

“I don't care. Take me. Take me with you,” she said. Tears formed anew in her eyes. “Just don't leave me alone.”

“It is a very painful thing--”

Her head came up off the bed. “I don't care for that. Life is painful enough as it is.”

Nicolo shared a look with Randy. Both nodded.

Randy looked down at her after pulling his spent cock from her womanhood. “We love you, remember that.”

She saw sharp teeth descending and her vision glazed, swimming. A sharp pain at her neck was followed by a descent into darkness.

Leah drifted lower and lower. Her essence was sucked out of her. Then life flooded her mouth. She tried to draw in as much as she could in fear that not enough would result in her death.

And she drifted some more. Pain suffused her being in much the way she had imagined birth pangs would feel. Hard, then faster. A pounding filled her head as she felt herself sinking away from life.

*No, I was supposed to live!*

A pain blossomed all over her that threatened to explode her skull with pressure.

Pain escalated to agony. She wanted to hold her head at the threat of its explosion. Her entire body flared with agony and death.

She cried out, louder, until it turned into a scream. With a wrench of cognizance, she opened eyes to a weird room – at once strange but also recognizable. She saw colors she had never seen before.

She saw shadows and light where there were none.

Above all, a hunger drove her to a sitting position. She lashed out at the figure beside the bed. She sunk her teeth into his flesh and the feel of the puncture made her squirm in excitement.

Drawing deeply, she drank of the wondrous fluid in his veins. But before she wanted to let go, two pairs of hands wrestled her back down onto the bed.

She growled, then whimpered. Anger warred with her natural timidity. The battle waged on as she slipped into sleep.

## CHAPTER 10

Leah opened her eyes to a bright light. Or maybe it wasn't so bright, but it felt bright. A lamp was turned on beside the bed in Nicolo's room. His flag displays lined the walls. Her mind registered seventeen plexiglass displays. But the light was too bright.

An old woman got to her feet from a chair and left the room. Leah tried to rise – tried to pursue the mouse like a hungry cat. But she could not. Her limbs were alive, tingling, but not all too responsive.

*Am I paralyzed?*

Within a few seconds, Nicolo entered the room. She saw him differently now. No longer was he mysteriously commanding, but just very commanding. Order and domination were there, controlling those around him. His presence was as strong as ever. He wasn't any less than he was before, just less of a mystery.

Nicolo was a vampire - an Italian vampire of great age. She could sense in him a profound ability.

“Are you going to teach me?” she said.

*Why were those the first words out of my mouth and why were they so natural?*

“I am and I will.” His voice soothed her heightened senses. A trick of being a vampire? Or centuries of confidence? “Randy will help.”

She nodded and smiled. “Of course.”

“Welcome, Leah, our beautiful Leah.” His voice was soft, impassioned and deep. In it she found solace.

For a second, she felt as she had before – vulnerable and needing comfort. Perhaps she still did, but his words eased her mind in a way she could not have on her own.

Randy leaned into the room, looking hopeful.

The Italian turned and nodded to him, and then left the room.

The German's face lit up in a huge smile. He rushed to her side and grasped her hand. "Leah--"

She realized, in a way, that this was much like what a vampire marriage must resemble. She drifted into oblivion again.

*And here I go, falling asleep on the honeymoon.*

Randy gazed down at her face, memorizing and cherishing the lines. He wanted to kiss them and caress her cheek.

A thought fluttered through his mind, something foreign and unknown. Unease flicked at the outer edge of his consciousness.

Something...

His danger-sense kicked in. He had developed a sixth sense of impending danger while serving on the Eastern Front. Some of his mates thought he could smell the Russians coming. Often, you could, if you were downwind. Smells of food, bad tobacco and unwashed bodies carried distinctly. But even without a wind, he seemed to sense something about to happen. Diving out of the safety of a foxhole caused some to think he was not all sane – those witnesses that survived, that is.

*So few survived.*

Here in Nicolo's room, sitting beside Leah was a different sense altogether. No, he didn't smell Ivan lurking about to spring an ambush. No, not like that at all. But his danger sense was sounding an alarm nonetheless – caused by the odd sensation in his thoughts.

Leah raised her head. "Something is wrong."

Her sleepy voice drew his attention to her. "Yes, I think so. Nicolo calls it an

ability. I did not or could not develop that ability like he has his own. And you take after him – stronger in that area.”

The Italian entered the room with Agatha. The old German woman began taking the displays off the wall.

“Ach,” Randy said.

The Italian nodded. “Something is developing. We need to move.”

“Something bad,” Leah said. She groaned, trying to get up.

“Here, drink a little.”

She looked for the proffered glass but saw only Randy's wrist. “I--”

“You can. Do not worry.”

He saw the fever in her eyes. It was strong, but would diminish. He had been driven by an amazing hunger for blood when Nicolo had turned him. After a day or two, it had gone, only flaring up as his body required blood. Slowly moving his bared wrist forward, he watched her shake her head no while also moving her mouth closer. Her lips were parted and he could see her teeth glistening.

She struck like a rattlesnake – almost too fast to see. But she tried to be gentle. She bit into his wrist. He would show her later how to bare her teeth and slice, or even open a small gash by transforming her fingernails into razor-like sharpness.

Leaving teeth marks was almost a crime. Not that a coroner would really believe in a vampiric attack, but even a rumor of someone trying to act like a vampire and draining blood – though ridiculous to those who didn't know – could still stir suspicion and the focus of authorities who were not aware of the existence of vampires. A coroner would interpret a vampire slash from teeth or nails as a knife-cut because it made the most sense. But teeth marks?

She drew on him, greedily. Still somewhat weakened from his own ordeal several hours earlier with the truck and his recovery, he stopped her before he began to feel like he would have to go feed again. “That's enough for now.”

He saw her glance at Agatha.

“She is not to be touched,” he said. “Those we trust, we give our word and honor that they will not be harmed or used.”

She tilted her head, her mind working over what he had said. “I understand.”

“I will teach you the beginning of your powers later, but for right now I will explain the basis of what you need to begin in understanding what you are and what you can do.”

“Okay,” she said.

“Your mind is the origin of your powers. Put your mind to a task and it will be done. If you want to go unnoticed by a crowd of people, for instance, as we did earlier, focus your mind inward on being invisible as it were and you will be unnoticed. Even other vampires will not notice you if your focus is strong enough and they aren't paying attention.”

“Like bio-feedback?”

“Precisely. Very good. Except that our capacity for effect is greater than that of a normal human. Someone might be able to stop their own headaches, but they will never be able to shift themselves.”

“Shift?”

“Yeah, into something else.”

“Like a monster?”

“Well, I suppose. But something familiar, like a wolf or small horse. Even partial shifting is possible, which is how the centaur figure had come to be known.”

She raised an eyebrow at him.

“It takes effort and I am weakened or I would show you by changing to a dog-headed Randy.”

She giggled, then grew quiet.

“Yes, we must move. This is why we have so little possessions. I must go secure

my own things. We should be ready to leave in a few hours.”

She nodded at him and gazed into his eyes with her wonderful orbs. They reflected love and a passion he had wondered if he would ever feel again.

Leaning down for a quick but lingering kiss, he pressed to her the lips of his soul and felt hers in return.

Norman Roth looked at the caller ID on his private cellphone. It was Joel.

“Yes, Achi.” He always referred to Joel in Hebrew instead of English for “brother.”

“I found her.”

He sat forward at his desk. “Yes? Give me details.”

For the next several minutes, he wrote notes on her location, address, and the two men with her. “See if you can find out where they live or what their names are, then we can pull up their records from our databases.”

After hanging up, he tapped his pen against his notebook. He would help his brother any way he could. That the whore had left him and divorced him was an affront to the family. For a long time, Norman had wanted to take his sexual appetites out on that woman, but she had been married to his brother. He could not in good conscience. But he could now that they were divorced. Forcing her would even be more satisfying than a brutal anal-rape of some ignorant black male prostitute. He had long warned Joel of his folly in marrying a Catholic girl.

He had known she had moved and to which city, but she had rented from a private landlord who only wanted to see cash up front without applications and background record checks. She had slipped the system for a few months.

But now they had her. Once he was done using her, he would simply tell his brother she had died. Some unfortunate accident or other – so very sorry.

He pressed the intercom to his secretary. “I need to change the command center location for Op Cyclone.”

## CHAPTER 11

Nicolo personally loaded the plexiglass displays into the white van. Covering the whole bundle was a heavy, anti-flame blanket. Securing them was a simple matter. They would be buried until they felt reasonably assured they were out of immediate danger.

He had felt the stirrings of danger when Randy was turning Leah. He did not know if the danger was the result of the turning or something unrelated. All he knew was that he did not dare ignore the warning when it came. The sense was never wrong and had served them time and again to escape what might have been death – even for a vampire. Something was afoot. Something was impending. Something was imminent. He just didn't know what.

“Randy, would you escort Leah to her apartment and make sure she has the few things she might like to take with her?”

The German nodded, a single curt dip of the chin. With the addition of a click of his heels, Nicolo might have recalled the smell of jackboot leather, wool and gun oil.

He turned back to the van. His collection safely stowed, he pondered how long the vehicle would need to remain buried? He would have to feed to have the energy to dig a hole so big, but digging the hole was nothing except an expenditure of his energy. It was even relatively fast. The first time he had seen his former teacher digging a hole with his claws so many centuries ago, he had laughed. The cloud of dirt and dust was horrific.

He watched the Mercedes pull away in a smooth and graceful motion. He knew without checking that Randy had shielded the car from those who might have an interest. Shielding the car was an easy thing and done almost without thought now. As easy a matter as keeping both hands on the steering wheel. But on a whim, he sent his senses out. The Mercedes was just leaving the driveway, and Nicolo felt... nothing. As if the car was not there.

*Very good, my German friend. Very good. Now teach her that.*

He slammed the back doors to the van and climbed into the driver's seat.

Leah squinted in the light of her first day as a vampire.

*Aren't I supposed to scream and shrivel in the sun? Burn into ashes?*

She rubbed her eyes.

“You get used to it.” Randy said, seeming to read her thoughts.

“I thought vampires couldn't survive sunlight.”

“Ach, well. Stories for children.”

“This hurts.”

“A vampire must focus to hone and use his abilities.”

“What does that have to do with--”

“Abilities aren't just being faster than a speeding bullet.”

“Huh?”

“You never read the comic book Super--”

“Oh, no. But does that mean--”

“No, no. We are able to do more. Not magic.”

“You said you could shift--”

“But it isn't magic.”

She rubbed her temple. The ability to think faster had them both interrupting each other, knowing what the other was going to say – or able to predict it. What stimuli allowed her to read his mind, so to speak? Changes in his scent? Flutters of his eyelids? Fluctuations in his skin temperature? “This is all so--”

“Overwhelming?”

She grimaced at him. “Yes, if I could ever get a word in sledge-wise.”

“Ach, I am sorry. But as for shifting, maybe some would think it is magic, certainly.”

“What is it, exactly?”

“Well, it is an alteration of our appearance and form. We not only resemble say, a wolf, but we become one.”

“What?”

“Yeah, it is so. We must be careful not to concentrate too hard or we risk staying as such.”

“Uh... what?”

“Is it so hard to understand? It is difficult to concentrate the first few times to maintain the shift. But after, it comes easy and if a vampire were to try too hard, he might lose himself in the form.”

“Oh. I think I see.” Her tone said otherwise.

“Allow me,” he said.

Not understanding for what he wanted permission, she gave him a curious look. He appeared to become more intent on traffic. Then he sat back. “Sorry, had to find a somewhat safe part of the roadway.”

“Why--” But her words stopped in her throat like a fat rat caught in a small pipe.

His face had begun to change. His eyes became more brilliant. His nose started to extend. His mouth widened. His teeth became larger. His head stretched forward. His face grew fur. Turning to look at her was not the face of a man, but that of a dog. With a human body.

She wanted to scream. She wanted to pee her panties. She wanted to open the door and leap out of the car. But on another level, she was drawn to the

magnetism of the mystery. She felt compelled to gaze at the ghastly visage. She wanted to learn the lore, explore the esoterica. She wanted to dive deep into the depths of the destiny that awaited.

“My god,” she said.

“No, I am not God. Nor would I pretend so.”

“I mean--”

“I know,” he said. His voice was slightly awkward due to the dog mouth. “But I hold God Almighty in high esteem. I would not so demean Him by comparing me to Him.”

She cocked her head.

*He makes sense, damn him.*

A surge of feeling welled up in her for a man that wore the face of an animal, but revealed the humility of a monk. She felt as if her heart would burst.

Why had she not had this with Joel? Why had she not found the quality she had found in these two men in others from her past? Were they special because they were born in a different time when men were real and chivalry was even more real? Was there any other man in the world, other than Nicolo, who had half as much manly character?

“You don't apologize for much, except if you think you have hurt me--”

“Ach, no!” His vehemence was at once urgent and soft. “To you, I would apologize for the world if it meant your embrace.”

His face shifted back slowly to normal.

A lump the size of Rhode Island grew in her throat.

“But in this time men apologize for everything. They apologize for speaking. They apologize for answering a question. They apologize for having an opinion.”

“Umm--”

“Yeah, they do. How often have you heard them say 'I am sorry, but...?'”

“Oh, well--”

“No. No excuses. Why should they apologize?”

His face was normal, but lit from within with a passion for expression that left her grasping for words.

He was right, of course. His simple observation forced on her a clarity formerly hidden. She realized now how right he was when it came to men. They apologized for everything. They slouched, trying to look less masculine. They wore clothes that blurred their masculinity.

*Why was this so clear to me now and not before?*

She looked at the virile and dominant man next to her. Sure, he was less dominant than Nicolo. He was not less of a man, though. He simply understood when to submit to authority. Those under a leader were no less men than those above. What man had tried so hard to erase, these two men embraced. Their masculinity was unapologetic and it drew her like a magnet.

Randy's clipped words and his “yeah” sounding more like “ja” was endearing. Nicolo's rising and falling cadence when he spoke and occasional hums when he would start to talk was romantic. Could she ever have picked between the two? She couldn't imagine such a choice. She would have to have remained undecided until one or the other had made the choice for her by removing himself and then the pain would have been unbearable. She was attracted to both and wanted both.

Clenching her thighs together, she reached over to his crotch and struggled at his zipper.

“Oh, yeah. Well...” His German accent colored his accent like blood colored a face in blush.

She unleashed his manhood. It swelled and twitched in her grasp as she worked it free of his trousers. She felt the car slow as she felt his pulse quicken. She

wondered what it would be like to feed on a swollen and engorged cock. The thought sent thrills racing through her hips, pussy and clitoris. Settling back against the seat, she pumped his firming erection with slow and seductive strokes. Up and down her hand slid, like a potter working clay with a gentle hand.

*No man has ever been like this to me.*

His cock hardened in her loose grip until it felt fully aroused and anxious. Stopping, she let her hand feel the pulse of blood in his engorged member.

She smiled at him, his cock in her hand, the feel of his blood pulsing in her grip.

“Ach, no! You will not be biting my schwanz.”

She burst out in giggles as they pulled up to her apartment building.

*He is absolutely delightful. I never want to be apart from him.*

“Come, let us get your belongings.” He was zipped and out the door before she could express her sentiment.

*When will I be able to have some time to enjoy this man?*

Sighing, she got out and entered the building. It was small – all of three stories. Somewhere in the past it had been a hotel with a name. Now it was just a seedy apartment building run by an old man who owned it outright.

What felt different about the building? What felt different about the stairs? What would she be taking with her? Clothing? Books? Her angels? Did any of it matter?

What did matter?

Before she got to her door, she resolved that the most important things in her life, if any, were her angels, her Bible, and her photos. The rest was superfluous. The rest was flotsam in a life that had gone nowhere and had been dominated by a man named...

“Joel.” She said the name outside the door. The difference in the apartment

building was Joel. He was here. In fact, she knew he was in his apartment.

In a panic, she bolted back the way she came.

Randy felt something tickling his danger-sense. He knew it coming into the building. He felt it climbing the stairs. He accepted it approaching her door. What he was not ready for was the sudden flight of Leah as she sprinted away from the apartment. Of course, she must feel something.

*Wonderful.*

He launched after her. With a slight focus of his mind, he sped up to her and tackled her to the ground.

“Do not flee.”

“But Joel is in there--”

“Yes--”

“--I can feel it.”

“--I know, Leah. I know.” Holding her to the ground underneath him, he stroked her hair. “You must face him, but I will be with you. I promise.”

“But--”

“No, meine Fräulein. You must face him and defeat his will. When your will is stronger than his, you will have won.”

She stopped struggling under him.

“Yeah?”

“Okay, okay.”

“Good., then let us proceed.”

“Ja, ja, gut,” she mimicked.

“Ach, let me help you meet him and defeat his will.”

“Okay, I said.” Her mutter was sullen. Her mutter was also quivering with fear.

She needed to face this to defeat it. She needed to face this to open to her the panoramas of freedom. She needed to face this for her own sanity.

Following her into the apartment, he resolved to act only if her life was in imminent danger.

Leah led the way into the apartment.

Sitting in the kitchen was Joel. His bulging hulk was... bulging. He scowled at her, threatening, vicious and with a malign intent.

*Why did I ever think he was cute?*

Squaring her shoulders, she prepared her verbal assault. But she never got to launch it.

Her ex-husband came up out of his chair when he saw Randy behind her. “No one takes my woman.”

A cascade of cold fear washed down her body.

“But--”

“Don't back-talk me bitch.”

“I choose where and with who--”

“Shut up!” His yell echoed in the apartment and doubtless the entire floor.

She looked to Randy, who was silent. He nodded to her.

“Does your boy now realize what a world of shit he has gotten himself into?” Joel's sneer was evident in his tone.

“Leave,” she said. Her voice was not very convincing.

Joel blinked. “Fuck you, bitch.”

She cringed, expecting his fist.

Randy cleared his throat. “Leah...”

“Shut the fuck up, you wimp!” Joel thundered. “Do you want me to beat the shit out of you? Do you want the shit beaten out of you? Do you want me to beat the ever-loving shit out of you so far that--”

Randy rolled his eyes. “You do not impress me, little boy, with your talk of shit.”

She looked at Randy and then at Joel. “Leave, Joel.”

“You can mouth-fuck my fist.”

Her ex-husband launched his fist into her face. She didn't move. She couldn't move. Fear paralyzed her. But she saw his fist coming. Her body reacted even if she didn't move. His fist slowed and slowed more. She realized her heart was racing, not just in fear, but something else – preparation. Adrenaline flowed through her body. Blood, strengthening and fortifying, also flowed.

*Is he ever going to hit me?*

The fist finally connected with her mouth. Numbing her whole head, the knuckles slowly pressed her head back. And then the slowness was gone. Her head snapped back and then forward. Pain flared in her mouth, but not as much as her fear said should be there.

“Like that, do you, bitch?” Spittle dripped from his lips. “Well, here's another.”

Randy coughed. “Try not to get hit.”

“What?” She looked over at him. He had taken a seat on the small couch. One leg was crossed over the other, kicking nonchalantly, as if he were inspecting athletes on the field. A coach.

The fist, though slowed, hit her in the cheek as she was distracted by Randy. She saw him roll his eyes as she stumbled backward.

“You see his fist coming, yeah? Then move your head. Or take the hit.” He shrugged.

“Some help you are--” she said.

Another fist impact told her she better pay attention to the beating her face was taking. He was winding up for another punch. She must look all beaten to a bloody pulp after three of Joel's slugs to her delicate skin.

*I'll have to wear sunglasses and a veil for weeks.*

But she wasn't feeling much pain. Her fear receded slightly. Was Randy going to let Joel kill her? Maim her? Cause her to be disfigured for life?

Something started to worm against her fear with which she was unaccustomed: anger.

His fist was coming. She realized he wasn't slow at all, but that her thoughts were faster, causing her perception of time to slow.

*Interesting.*

His fists must be a blur as he swung at her. But here it came, looking slow. She tilted her head out of the way and his fist moved past her face.

*Ha!*

Snarling with more rage, Joel grabbed her around the throat as she wondered at her own ability. Panic flooded her again and her thoughts fled as he choked the air out of her windpipe. His fist connected with her face several times before Randy's voice made an impression on her thoughts.

“Leah, darling, strike his wrist with your hand.” He was still sitting on the couch.

Yes, all she was doing was flailing helplessly.

*Think!*

Randy was tapping his palm against his hand on his own throat, showing her what to do.

Slapping her palm at Joel's wrist, she knocked it away.

*Wow, that was easy; he must have had a really bad grip.*

“Fuck you, whore! Fuck you!” Hysteria entered his voice.

Randy stood up.

Grabbing her throat with both hands, he lifted her and pounded her back against the kitchen wall. She felt the drywall give way when her head connected. He then proceeded to squeeze her neck and pound her head repeatedly into the wall. Drywall dust flew and chunks of wall fell around them.

“Up, between his arms--” Randy's voice.

Anger flooded against her fear and her thoughts coalesced.

*Yes, up between...*

She brought her hands up hard between his corded and bulging arms. His hands flew off her throat and she fell gasping to the floor.

“Cunt!” His huge foot caught her in the ribs. She heard a crack.

“Stand up, Leah,” Randy said.

She did. There was a slight pain in her side.

*Broken rib.*

Anger caused her to snarl back at Joel.

He stopped and looked at her with amazement tinged his hysteria. Reaching back behind him, he pulled a knife he had stashed under his shirt. It was wicked, long, and aimed at her belly.

“Touch her with that and you will die, little man,” Randy's voice was final.

Joel glanced at Randy with his eyes. “You're next, you little fuck.”

As her anger turned to rage against Joel's history of brutality on her person, she

lost track of her thoughts. Her ex-husband's hand shot forward, driving the knife to the hilt in her lower abdomen.

Pain again flared in her and the wet seep of blood began drenching her.

*No! Not like this. Never again will he touch me.*

“How do you like this, bitch?” Joel said. His voice grated on her ears. Twisting the knife, he breathed into her face with gloating satisfaction.

Her scream was not of pain. She screamed in rage.

Randy had started to move forward but stopped. He froze, watching, balanced on the balls of his feet. Murder was in his eyes.

Joel stepped back from Leah, something in his eyes she had never seen before: fear. He released the knife and left it stuck in her.

*How do you like feeling fear?*

Her eyes felt as if they were on fire with the volcanic hatred she felt for him.

With a feral growl, she punched him in the chest to get him away from her. All her fury and hatred were balled into that one slug. Never before had she tried to hurt him; she had always tried to avoid being hurt herself. What could a small woman like herself do to such a giant? His forearms were the size of her thighs.

The man was a mountain of over-pumped muscle. But where her fist connected with his chest, his body broke.

“Yes, Leah, good, good,” Randy's voice was filled with satisfaction.

Her fist kept going. It was wet with blood and something filled it. She saw shock begin to register on Joel's face. Startled she pulled back her hand from the hole in his chest.

*A hole!*

Gripped in her hand was a moving thing, twitching, as if trying to escape her grasp.

*What?*

It was his heart, still beating. It was pumping, bleeding. A hunger stirred in her.

Joel blinked at it in confusion.

“Pull the knife out and show him, Leah,” Randy said.

She flung the heart down in revulsion. No way would she feed from Joel. Gripping the knife, she drew it out. Anger was total: her fear was gone. She held the knife up and let it dangle by two fingers in front of his face. Dropping it, she gave in to her rage and launched a kick between his legs that lifted the mountain of muscle from the floor. There was a wet splatting sound when her foot connected, but Joel was already dying. His body landed in a heap and twitched feebly.

She sobbed in sudden relief. He would never touch her again. The stalking was over. Turning to Randy, she noted he was in arm's reach, just relaxing from his action stance.

“You didn't help.”

“I did. I told you what to do and you did it.”

She looked down at the blood on her hands and her clothing. Her wound was bleeding.

“He could have killed me.”

“No,” he said. “I was about to intervene when I saw in your eyes the fires of retribution. I knew then you had to finish this yourself.”

“It was that easy?” The blood on her revolted her. It was his blood. It was tainted like food that had fallen into an unflushed toilet.

“Because you are a vampire, yes. Now you can live the rest of your days without doubts or fears. If I had killed him, there would always be question.”

Exhilaration coursed through her. The triumph was complete. Her life would never again be ruled by fear of Joel or nightmares of being his victim. Randy

was right; she nodded at him. “I need to get this... filth off of me.”

“We must hurry, yeah? Someone might have called the police.”

“Oh.” She looked around the room. Stepping to the sink, she quickly washed her hands. Joel's strength was such that he had completely destroyed the wall with her body. She blinked.

“Quick, one thing and then we must pack your things.”

“Yes?”

“Your knife wound.”

She looked down and nodded. Already her thoughts were becoming fuzzy. She wasn't bleeding as much as she should have, but how could she be walking around?

“Drink a little from me and then run your finger over the opening of the wound. Focus on closing it.”

She drank from his offered wrist and felt some strength return. She had seen Nicolò swipe his wrist gash and seen it close. She could do that too? Lifting her shirt, she imitated what she had seen, but the wound didn't close.

“Focus,” Randy said.

She tried again and as her finger passed over the wound, she imagined it closing. It did.

“Very good. Quickly now, what do you want to take?”

She smiled at him and he smiled back. Gratitude flooded her and a sense of kinship at the close call of battle and death.

*This man is mine.*

In less than three hours, Norman Roth would be on her trail.

## CHAPTER 12

Nicolo walked away from the freeway on-ramp. He would need to feed. He had buried the van in plain sight, in sight of anyone caring to see, if they had the ability to penetrate his own abilities.

Shielding outward around the van, he had dug a hole to hold it with cars passing by oblivious to his effort. Shielding required concentration, and so did digging, but the shielding part required less effort than shielding the car on a busy road. People didn't generally care what was in the circular grasses and dirt of a freeway on-ramp. It was boring, dead space that would only divert their attention from executing the proper steering curve to follow the ramp. No one cared what could be there because nothing could be there worth anything. It was the perfect place to hide the van and his priceless collection of flags any museum would kill for.

Perhaps they were a vanity. Perhaps they were a reminder of lost causes. He had fought on the losing side in most of those wars. There was a history people saw and believed and then there was a history buried underneath the lies – fought for causes the victors did not care to relate in their books. All too often, the wrong side won. He thought it was an indication of the evil in the world.

But shielding and digging had still drained him. He had to feed. He would need all his powers to assess and understand what the danger was pervading his senses. He would not simply run. If he did not ascertain what caused the feeling, he would always be on the defensive – running. No, he must face this head on, even if at first by stealth.

His thoughts drifted to Leah and his heart began to race. He hoped she was well and adjusting. He hoped Randy was teaching her what she needed to know to exist and survive as a vampire.

He barely remembered his human years – and to what effect? Who would he tell? Certainly not a historian. Most people thought that historians agreed on everything in history and such was most definitely not the case. But most historians based their opinions on certain stimuli provided by indoctrination by

historian professors at university.

He remembered the arguments for the Earth being flat or round. Many thinkers died trying to persuade others of the truth. Flat earth scholars who were certain of the Earth being flat had many put to death who questioned their certainty.

Ignorance is always so much harder to root out.

People claimed the truth always wins, but in Nicolo's experience, the truth almost always lost.

His first victim was a vagrant. Drunk on cheap wine, he was passed out under the overpass. The Italian slashed his wrist and drank. When the man was dead, he broke the bottle and carefully planted a broken piece in the man's fingers with a bit of blood on the edge.

Were the man wealthy, the authorities and coroner would look beyond what appeared to be an apparent suicide. But for a vagrant? No one cared. The police would be happy to think of it as a suicide and the coroner could tag him and move on. Just another casualty in the unseen refuse of society. Best swept under the rug. There wouldn't even be a news article on him.

His second victim was a drug pusher.

Apparently, the pusher thought he could scare off Nicolo with a sharp “Yo.”

He liked taking down drug pushers. They were too easy to explain away. A slash to the throat and the man is just another victim of the drug war. He also gained the satisfaction of removing yet another louse off the ass of society.

Refreshed, he set off to begin watching his former home.

Norman stepped carefully around the chalk line and the tagged bits of evidence. He tried not to look at the body. He had to flash his badge three times to get inside the apartment. On the third officer, he had to explain that it wasn't officially a federal matter, except that the victim was his own brother.

He had been let in.

His brother had not been a small man. Joel had been a mountain. He worked out three times a week trying to get as ripped as possible – hoping to get a photo spot in a muscle mag. But so was every other muscle-head pumping weights until they couldn't wipe their own asses.

*When your arms stick out and you can't clap, you're done weight-lifting.*

But he couldn't tell his brother that. Where Joel was all muscle, Norman had always been the rope. He was almost too skinny to get into the FBI. Barely passing the physicals, he had shone with firearms and he had medals and citations to prove it.

He stepped again around some flagged evidence and into the kitchen. The damage to the wall was astounding. Joel must have killed someone against that wall. No one's head could have survived that pounding. But he saw only the outline around Joel's body. There was no other body.

He shook his head.

“Amazing, ain't it?” an officer said from his squat position on the floor. He had been looking at the trail of blood and smear on the edge of the kitchen sink. “Muscle-jock here beats someone against the wall and stabs them, but this wounded guy somehow manages to karate-punch a hole in his chest and then completely rupture his scrotum with a single kick.”

“Guy?”

“Well, yeah. This apartment belongs to a Leah Parini, this dead guy's ex, but I can't see some woman doing this even with martial arts training. Has to be a guy. Maybe another muscle-head.”

Norman shook his head and pointed to the wall. “Nope, female.”

“How do you come--”

“My brother might be strong and big, but he would have had to lift someone up so the wall damage was above his head? Do you see him doing that to another muscle-head?”

“Your brother?”

“See the damage where the head was smashed into the wall?”

“Sorry, yes.”

“He had to be able to lift whoever it was and repeatedly bash their head into the wall.”

“Crack--”

“No.”

“You're saying his ex-wife did this to him? I ain't buying it.”

The problem was, Norman wasn't buying it, either, but it was the only logical explanation. “The primary footprints here are small. I think that set there--” He pointed. “--is a bystander. A friend, maybe.”

The officer raised an eyebrow. “What friend watches a woman get beat and stabbed to death and doesn't help?”

He frowned. He knew Leah was not any kind of a match for his brother. But that was what appeared to have happened.

*It was almost... supernatural.*

Norman stood abruptly. The heart. The blood on the sink. The lack of another body. Without further discussion, he left the apartment.

Leah listened carefully to Randy's lecture. She grasped at his words with her mind as a sponge soaks water. What were the limits of a vampire? If the mind of such a previously unthinkable being could accomplish so much, was there any practical limit to what could be accomplished?

*I can think and make myself invisible?*

“--can also shield your sound by focusing your thoughts outward around you as if you were imagining a bubble.”

“All of it starting with the mind.”

“Correct, my darling.”

“So the mind originates our abilities--”

“And our bodies provide the outlet.”

“Phenomenal.”

Randy laughed. “Ach, well. It is not so mysterious once you live with it. It is like watching people ride bicycles and you don't know how. It is a wondrous thing to behold until you learn it yourself.”

“Then it becomes mundane?”

“Yeah, so.”

She shook her head. “Invisible?”

They were sitting on a park bench after having purchased a new outfit for her. The bloodied ones were disposed in a trash container.

“Watch,” he said.

She studied him as his eyes lost their focus. Her own eyes began to blur and she blinked. But then she realized she was not suffering from watery eyes but that Randy's form was blurring. “Wow.”

“Yeah, yeah, not done.”

His form wavered and then vanished. She could sense something – someone – sitting there beside her if she reached out, but she couldn't see him.

“You learn fast.”

“Huh?” She tried to figure out the disparity in what she saw and felt. He should be there, but she couldn't see him. Then his form began to waver in front of her.

“Ach! Wonderful.” He solidified.

“What?”

“You were able to penetrate my defense without me telling you how.”

“Is that why you started to become visible?”

“Yeah, it is so.”

“I just tried to figure out the difference between me feeling you sitting there and not seeing you.”

“Oh, well, that is somewhat backwards, but you started to penetrate--”

“Backwards?” She was offended.

“Well... yeah. Trying to feel the difference gives you two things to consider. Focus instead on seeing. If I shield myself and focus inward to shield my essence, then you get nothing. Watch.”

A few seconds later, his form wavered and vanished. But to Leah, he had got up and left, as well. “Is this some sort of trick? You don't want me spoiling your fun so you make me think you left?”

“But I am still here, yeah?” His form materialized very suddenly, and so did the sense he was sitting there.

“That was awful.”

“Only because you knew I was here to begin with. I did not mean to cause you distress.”

She scowled.

“Here, I will do it again and you reach out with your sight to focus on what is there that you might not see.” His form wavered, vanished.

He was gone to her senses. Ignoring his suggestion, she reached with her senses – feeling, feeling. She felt nothing. But then realized she felt a distinct nothing where he had been sitting. There was an absence.

She smiled.

Then she focused on her sight after withdrawing her senses.

*See what isn't there, but is. This is crazy!*

Irritated, she focused on nothing and let her eyes wander. See what isn't there. See.

Once she relaxed and let her gaze wander, but focused on seeing what wasn't seen, his form wavered into solidity. His face was just an inch from hers – his lips parted and tantalizing. She squeaked in surprise.

*You naughty man.*

Their kiss was sweet and chaste enough for a public park.

“I felt you with my other sense, by the way.”

“I could tell. You are a bad girl and might need a spanking.”

“Ooo, promise?”

“Perhaps I will let Nicolo take the first swats.”

She giggled and slapped her knees with her hands.

Nicolo hoped that Randy and Leah were getting on well together. They had the lighter part of the duty for the day. Even with his overwhelming desire to be near her, he felt the need and requirement to divert his attention to survival.

Focused inward and walking toward his recent home, he scanned the street. A white van was parked up a few houses.

*Government.*

He looked around in the gloom of dusk and saw nothing to worry him. Standing in front of his home, he shifted. But where all other vampires shifted into other living things, he shifted into something inanimate. He had mixed success showing Randy. No other vampires he knew could mimic something not living.

Was it his age? His experience? Did his centuries open up to him vistas of abilities others could not grasp? Would he learn even more in another hundred

years assuming he survived?

He didn't know and he shrugged to himself at his own thoughts.

Within seconds, a fire hydrant appeared where he had stood. Assuming an inanimate form took immense concentration and focus. If he could not keep the focus, he would lose form almost immediately. But once in the form, not even another vampire could detect him unless within a few feet.

Would he be able to teach Leah this? Perhaps if she was successful she could share her perspective with Randy and he could perfect his previously failed attempts? Something told him she was instrumental to their survival. Was it because of something she knew? Something of which she was capable? Was it something with which she could help? Or was it that she gave them a reason to survive?

Admittedly, he had to realize that his last few decades were spent without a zest for life. He had heard that many vampires after a few centuries just grow tired of the undeath or whatever it was termed and gave up. Vampires died like any other people, even if the circumstances of their lives were different. Usually, a vampire simply ceased to desire to live and the body died as a result.

Died in his sleep, peaceful. Nothing to see. Move along.

He focused his attention, as much as he could, toward the house. He could tell someone was inside – but just a single person. A man. A man who was searching and looking. Someone taking his time.

*This is not good.*

He thought about entering the house and feeding from the man. He remembered one of his favorite historical men saying that it is better to live one day as a lion than one hundred years as a sheep. Benito had been shot by communists – the very Bolsheviks in Italian form against which he had been fighting in Russia.

But while he might storm in and overcome the man within, to what purpose? He had already fed. He did not need to engage on a whimsical murder spree. And who was this man inside his home? Who was the man searching for clues to... what? Why rush in and kill him? There was no need based on anything available to him for deduction.

So he watched.

*What was Leah doing right now?*

He groaned to himself. Such thoughts were unproductive, even though pleasurable. Was she smiling? Laughing her beautiful tinkle of mirth and joy? Were her eyes shining in wonderment? Was her pulse racing in excitement and curiosity? Was the delicate skin of her kissable neck quivering with the beat of her passionate heart?

A dog trotted along the street.

*Oh how fine.*

The dog stopped and raised his ears at the form of the fire hydrant now sitting where it had not before.

*Why did I have to pick a fire hydrant?*

He could feel the man pausing in the rooms, thinking or looking – he did not know which. But the dog was coming closer. There was no way he would allow a dog to urinate on him, no matter how dire the circumstance.

*Go away.*

His thoughts directed toward the dog, coupled with the intense focus to appear as a fire hydrant, caused him to lose focus on the man inside his house.

The dog stopped and tilted its head. Its ears rose slightly as it considered the hydrant.

*Go home.*

The dog's ears shifted this way and that, unable to comprehend from whence came the voice inside its own head.

*Stupid dog.*

Nicolo could command armies. He could persuade the unshakable. He could convince the most ardent enemy... But could he stop a lowly dog from relieving

himself on the form the animal thought was a target for urination and marking?

*I will not be marked.*

The dog came closer, still. It lowered its head and approached as if sneaking. It was going to urinate on him. It was going to hike its leg and deposit unthinkable substances on the form of a centuries-old Italian who had outlived far prouder men.

*No. This will not happen.*

Not seeing anything else but the dog, he focused his irritation and indignation into one ferocious growl.

*Grrr.*

The dog stopped, its leg half-raised. A canine whine emanated from its throat at the same time as a man emerged from the house he had been watching.

The dog looked almost ready to release.

Nicolo sent an image of feral teeth and blood to the dog in desperation. He was too harsh. The dog whimpered as if beat and scuttled away, its tail between its legs.

The man emerging from the house noticed.

*What is this now?*

The man peered at the dog and then at the hydrant. His gaze shifted beyond Nicolo to something... Another hydrant across the street.

*So?*

The thin man drew a gun from his hip holster and held it government-style.

*Oh, there are only so many hydrants on a block...*

Aggravated, Nicolo waited a few more seconds as the man approached, his gun aiming toward him, but not directly.

*Uh oh, this is not a very good situation...*

Shifting and slamming a shield over his presence, the Italian sprinted away.

Norman saw the dog acting odd at the curb. His suspicions elevated from nothing to maximum in less than a second. A cold sweat oozed from him as he approached the hydrant from which the dog had fled.

There was nothing there but a fire hydrant.

*Except...*

Across the street almost directly in his line of sight was another fire hydrant.

*No city places two hydrants so close together.*

He reached for his gun and drew it.

“Status.” In his ear.

“Hold,” he said. He knew the two men in the van parked a few houses along the street would just watch. He didn't need any embarrassment if this was a false alarm.

In a blur, the hydrant moved. An image of a man appeared that just as quickly vanished.

Without any rational thought, Norman raised his gun and fired off a triple-tap of shots. Three tracer rounds blazed in the night.

Thus began a war between vampires and the governments of many nations. The near extermination of vampires, worldwide, was at hand.

## CHAPTER 13

Nicolo howled in pain as a round pierced his arm. He saw the other two rounds blaze past him. They were what he knew to be tracer rounds from his last war. They burned with a ferocity that was later used in grenades and air-dropped bombs.

His arm felt agony like he had never known.

He had taken a few bullets in the various modern wars, as he liked to term them. A sword cut was pretty painful, but a bullet wound was far worse. The speed of the bullet created a force against tissue that he knew could kill via shock. The fact that this bullet was burning with something that ignited his own skin was not something he wanted to stop and ponder.

With a desperate effort of conscious decision, he left a trail of smoking vampire flesh as he dashed away at his fastest speed.

Norman was astonished.

For a second, he had seen a figure take one of his shots. While the round had not appeared to penetrate anything deadly, he knew that the pain should have stopped any vampire. Every single vampire he had ever seen shot had stopped in excruciating agony at being shot with a tracer-round. They had become paralyzed with pain.

But this one kept going and even went faster.

*An older vampire? One more experienced and powerful?*

Norman felt the stirring of his penis at the thought of defeating an older vampire. Like a hunter clad in plaid and thinking of the points on the rack of a buck, the FBI Section Chief salivated over bringing down something old enough to shake off a tracer round.

*In another world, I would mount his head...*

Engaging the safety on his gun, he stood where the hydrant had been and turned toward the house.

*Vampire. Watching his home.*

He stood tall and looked in the direction the vampire had fled.

*I will defeat you.*

The motel they had rented for the night was just a transition.

But when Leah saw Nicolo stumble into the room, a bloodied wound in his upper arm, she thought her new world was crumbling around her.

“What happened?”

Randy burst into action. He raced for the sink and the towels. Agatha was just a split second behind him.

No one answered her question. But she could see that he was shot.

*Shouldn't he be healing himself?*

Agatha quickly helped Nicolo out of his shirt.

The German watched and examined the wound in his arm. “Tracer, yeah?”

“Yes,” said the Italian.

With a callous disregard for Nicolo's pain, Randy dug the wet towel into the wound.

Leah cringed.

His body quivering dramatically in pain, Nicolo bore the agony in silence.

*How does he do that?*

“You fed already?” Randy asked.

“Yes.”

“Ach, then this should heal when it is cleaned.” He dug the rag in harder and more forcefully than before.

“I hope you aren't taking pleasure in this, my friend.”

“Shut up.”

Nicolo ceased speaking, but Leah doubted it was due to the obedience of Randy's orders.

Agatha dug through her bags and produced a bottle of rubbing alcohol.

*Shouldn't a vampire be able to overcome bacteria and infection?*

Nicolo grimaced, but said nothing.

As Agatha flushed the wound with alcohol, the Italian gritted his teeth.

“Maybe I should drink it, instead.”

“Do not be impertinent.” The old woman had some snap to her spine.

“Are you all mad at each other, or something?” Leah said.

All three looked her way. In that instant, she felt left out, despite the fact Agatha could not lay claim to being a vampire as could the two men.

“Mmm, no, my dear,” Nicolo said. “It is nothing. Just the banter of friends to relieve nervousness. It is very common in war with wounds, no?”

“No, I don't know,” she said helplessly.

“You will learn, yes?” His smile was real.

“Yes, I would like that.”

Shaking his arm after the treatment, he rubbed the wound. “How did the initial

lessons go, my friend?”

Randy dipped his head in a bow of the neck. “Perfect and easier than I had expected. She thinks different but had little trouble grasping what I taught her.”

“Mmm, good. I have a feeling that we shall be teaching her faster than we should.” He shrugged into his shirt, but left it unbuttoned.

*Does he have to do that? Does he know it is sexy as all get out?*

“What happened to get you shot?”

He eyed her, but she eyed him back. Agatha and Randy both eyed him, expectantly. “When I arrived at the house, there was someone inside. Someone government.”

“How do you know?”

“The white van parked up the street.”

“White van?”

“Yes, my dear,” he said. “The government adores using white vans for surveillance. They drive black cars but white vans are their preferred vehicle of choice for being unobtrusive.”

“White?”

“Yes, ever see a black van?”

“Oh...” she said. “I suppose I haven't.”

“Do not worry, your powers of observation and logic will develop well over time. Man is very predictable.”

*Does he know that his voice is making me wet?*

“Why the government now?” Agatha said. “After all these years?”

“Oh...” Leah said. Realization hit her like a sudden sneeze. “My ex-brother-in-law. Joel's brother is in the FBI.”

All three looked at her with varying degrees of pity and understanding.

“He must be here investigating his brother's death. Will I go to prison?”

“No.” Nicolo's one-word answer was singular, all-encompassing and direct.

“But I--”

“You did what you had to do, Leah,” Randy said. “I was there. I saw. If not him dead, then you would be so.”

“But--”

“We will not let you suffer for something necessary. Have no worries, my dear.” Nicolo turned, dismissing that line of thought. “But tell us about this brother-in-law.”

“Creepy.” It was the best she could come up with and all she could come up with.

Agatha's laugh startled her. The two men were quiet.

“Will he give up?” Nicolo said.

“Oh, never.”

The two men stared at each other, both with hands on hips. She expected the two of them to pull out a map and plan an assault on enemy positions any second.

“We need to determine how large a threat is this man,” Randy said.

Nicolo just nodded as if it was already obvious.

“But he's... creepy.” She didn't know how to explain it.

Agatha scowled, but both Randy and Nicolo laughed.

Upside down, inside out, I can't figure these men for nothing. Except they're too handsome to let out of the house alone.

“Engel,” Nicolo said. The air of command breezed across his voice with ease.

Randy stood up straighter and almost clicked his heels. “Ja.”

“First--”

“Ja, I know, my friend. I will go now.” That was said more as an equal.

She knew Randy had outranked Nicolo in the war in which they had met – and she knew Nicolo was the senior vampire. What she didn't know was how they arrived at their pecking order at any given moment. Clearly, Nicolo was the leader of the two. But sometimes Randy asserted his authority of higher rank, no matter how brief, and confused Leah into silence.

Perhaps what she saw was nothing more than the congenial effort of two men with differing references to accommodate the other with good cheer and good sport.

They both applied this odd bit of relationship without a hint of argument or contention. The perfect male-to-male relationship.

*They assured me they weren't gay.*

But no, they did not exhibit anything that would make her think they had lied to her. They weren't hiding homosexual relations. They were both unabashedly heterosexual.

*Did they once have eyes for Agatha?*

She wondered as Randy zipped up his windbreaker and left the room.

Probably not. They're too much the gentlemen.

Randy left the motel and trotted along the streets toward their former home. He kept a combat eye out, looking left and right, and occasionally checking his tail.

Why would the government be looking into them if not for what had happened at Leah's apartment? Certainly they would not be looking for ex-Waffen-SS soldiers. Almost all were dead or in their nineties and one-hundreds. What were they going to do when they were all dead? Hunt the children? Dig up graves and

hold predetermined trials claiming such-and-such Nazi was really a criminal when all he had done was volunteer to fight against Bolshevism?

*How little man today knows of the real history.*

Children and adults schooled today believed Hitler started World War Two. But in fact, the British had started the war, and France declaring right behind them. Lost to history and ignored was the real reason – the ethnic murder of thousands of Germans in Poland at Bromberg by communists. What country would suffer the outrage? What country would not embark on a punitive invasion to remove such a vile threat to their own people? Babies and small children had been shot in the back of the head weeks before Hitler had decided the German people had suffered enough.

*But who today would know the real history? Who today would care?*

Nothing he could say to anyone, even though he knew a different fact from supposedly factual history, was going to make a difference in anyone's mind. Too many were vulnerable and influenced by their peers. While trying to be different, everyone desperately tried to fit in to what their peers expected of them.

Identity was lacking. Man was afraid to be man. The truth was shameful.

*What scheisse.*

He trotted the sidewalk of the boulevard that led to his former street. In other times, he would have a four or five-man recon team with him, armed with Schmeisser MP-40s and the later Sturmgewehr 44 which was the often ignored father of the much more famous AK-47. Most people believed the Russians invented the AK-47 from scratch as the ultimate cheap and efficient weapon of the common soldier. In fact, Mikhail Kalishnikov had copied and simplified the Gewehr 44 into one of the most mass-produced reliable infantry arms in history.

With his squad, he could count on battalion mortar support and divisional artillery if he found targets suitable for the expenditure.

But this night, he had none of that. As his former comrades were all dead or near-death, he was out alone representing the Fifth SS 'Wiking' Division in an action that would go unrecorded.

*What was Leah doing? Was she getting along well with Nicolo?*

He turned on his street and focused inward. The shield slamming down around him made him virtually invisible. Different from the real invisibility he had used on Leah in the park earlier, but covert enough for scouting, he loped ahead like a wolf on the prowl.

The van Nicolo had described was still there.

Scouting the scouters could not have been easier. He walked up to the van, enshrouded as he was, and leaned against the lip of the back door. Pressing his ear to the van, he listened for details.

It was enough.

What he learned would result in the flow of innocent blood at the parking lot of a local grocery store.

## CHAPTER 14

Norman sat in the van, making notes and occasionally glancing at the monitors and listening devices. The man he had shot had escaped...

*The vampire I had shot...*

But it was only a matter of time before the information trail was renewed. As sure as the sun rose in the morning, the information trail was almost mythological in its ability to be obvious.

Most everyday Joes did not understand life. They thought crime and cops were like television. But television was so very carefully packaged to deliver a message – not necessarily what people thought – so that the reality of the situations were often ignored for the want of better storytelling.

Was he going to defuse the bomb in the last three seconds?

The life of an agent was boiled down to that inane Hollywood plot device.

The fact was, the FBI already knew who did what and how they did it. But building a court case was far different and more difficult. Avenues of information that proved the guilt of a criminal often could not be used in court.

Was the criminal guilty of committing the crime as he had, or was he innocent because the police didn't know all the details? Was a criminal who murdered someone really innocent? Innocent only because the investigators could not connect all the pieces of the crime? Or were not allowed to use certain evidence by law?

The FBI paid much lip service to the law. Much effort was applied to making certain any convictions held up in court. If anything was questionable, the agency relied on the tried and true method of media hysteria. Expose the outrageous crimes of the perpetrator. Expose and then surround him in some remote spot and shoot him down.

At that point, the vagaries of the law played no part.

“We had no choice but to shoot him.”

The American audience lapped up this excuse without question. Very innocent men had died and the entire propaganda geared to showing the innocent man as a criminal employed so that not a single man in the American audience deigned to question why.

*Easy.*

Being at or near the top in the FBI was indeed easy. Some might complain of the congressional oversight and the laws and restrictions, but the real players operated well above and beyond the law.

He picked up the phone.

“Agent six-three-two, wrapping surveillance. Ten forty-two, ten seven.”

A squawk that sounded like “ten-four” came from the speakers.

The small satellite dish for communications on the roof of the van was withdrawn through the aperture that looked like an innocent sunroof.

“Drop me off at the motel,” Norman told the driver.

He was busy fabricating a phony report for the day's activities as the van pulled away.

Randy followed.

Leah alternated between complete lack of mental thought and curiosity.

Lust overtook her when she looked at Nicolo. She so much wanted him to take her down, throw her on the bed, and pound her until she was a gibbering mound. But she was also curious.

What would Randy find? What would Nicolo do? Why were they at a motel?  
Couldn't they have stayed in their home?

“Leah, my dear.” A hand grasped hers.

“Huh—whuh?”

“Please, be happy with us and love us as we love you.”

She looked but saw no one. Only then did she realize she had to look down  
because he was on his knees.

*What? Nicolo on his knees? I must be dreaming.*

“We want you to be happy and to share with us all that you are--”

“But--”

“But what? You don't like us? Do we smell funny?”

She laughed. “No--”

“Then why not be with us?”

“I didn't--” Leah said.

“But you don't want to be here? What if I told you to stay?”

*Why were his eyes so intoxicating?*

“But--”

“Do you have some other love out there you wish now to go to?”

“What?”

“Excuse me, did I not ask in good English?”

His earnest look almost made her laugh hysterically.

Vampires thought faster, acted faster and deduced faster. Nicolo had several

centuries of experience on her and she was just now trying to come to terms with out-thinking the events at the speed with which she was accustomed.

On a normal day, she might realize the motel room was decorated back in the nineteen seventies. The cheap greens and oranges grated on her fashion sensibilities. She would have realized this motel was far beneath her and her husband – had she been married to a good one. She might think that meeting here under any circumstance was cheap. But all this registered only a blip on her awareness even as she struggled to digest it all at the speed at which she was familiar.

Once concluding certain aspects of her thought process, she realized she had already arrived at it moments before and was annoyed with herself that she took so long to admit her conclusions.

“I am having trouble thinking--”

“Ah yes,” he said, rising. “In a few days, you will think as fast as you already are and think nothing of it.”

“But--”

“Just a slight period of adjustment.”

*Well, that's a relief.*

Agatha cleared her throat. “I remember Reinhard distinctly disturbed with his never-ending youthful appearance.”

Leah raised her eyebrows in surprise. The old prune had never really addressed her except in the most rudimentary business-sense. The old woman had interviewed and hired her for the pool-cleaning job. In some respects, she viewed the old woman as an adversary. But here, the older woman from a time almost forgotten was genuinely open to her experiences with two vampires she might have called her own over the decades.

Leah felt sorry for Agatha, then. Who was her love? How had he died? In what nameless battle on the Eastern Front had he spilled his blood for the Führer? Was it in some unknown town or on one of the glorious battlefields like Stalingrad or Kursk? Had he been a pilot and shot down over the Reich? Over a far African-

theater oasis in an air-battle no-one remembered?

Tears came to her then at the thought of Agatha's loneliness. She wanted nothing more than to hug the old woman and let her know that someone in the world cared.

As if sensing her thoughts, Nicolo turned to the older woman. "Agatha, have you ever felt as if you were left behind and forgotten?"

"Das macht nichts, mein Herr."

"Have you felt excluded these past several decades--"

"Never!" Her eyes blazed up with life and determination. "There is much I might not understand and life has offered many surprises. But I long to be with my Willi."

He nodded as if he already knew the answer.

Leah looked at the Italian as his piercing and engaging eyes met hers. "Why--"

"I asked her to satisfy you," he said. "Vampires are not emotionless like you see in the movies."

"Well, I--"

"We do not lose that which we know of ourselves. We become more, no?"

"I--"

"We do not become inhuman, just more."

He seemed to know what she was thinking. Releasing her anxiety, her shoulders slumped and she nodded. "I understand."

"Very good, my love."

"Why do you find me--"

Once again, she found her gaze dropped lower as he fell back to his knees. Her hand grasped, she blushed.

“So many years go by – so many decades. So many centuries. The loneliness compounds like an avalanche over time. For many vampires, it becomes too much and we yearn only to die.”

“No...”

“But we do. And we yearn to be rid of the misery of such a long and fruitless life.”

“Fruitless?”

He nodded. “Mmm, yes, quite. What is another year? Or one hundred? More victims. More feeding. More dead poor people.”

“Didn't you say that--”

“Was our purpose, yes. It is so. But even a janitor has a purpose. He sweeps his halls and mops the floors. He lives out his life and dies. But vampires are not subject to death by aging.”

“By loneliness?”

“Mmm, yes and no.” He rose to his feet and led her to sit on the edge of the bed next to him. “If the janitor never died, but swept his halls endlessly--”

“It would be a hell--” she said.

“Yes, exactly. You see it perfectly.”

“Then why me?”

“Oh, my love. You bring to us passion, emotion and meaning without which we would rather just die.”

“Me?”

“You.”

“Why me?”

“Mmm, you are beautiful, no?”

“No.”

“Yes.”

“No.”

“You are, my love.”

She shook her head, but a smile ghosted her lips. She liked hearing it.

“But you are.”

“But why?”

Nicolo stood abruptly and towered over her – not threatening, but displaying his stature. “In all my centuries, throughout all the time I have lived, your beauty inspires me like no other.”

She gaped.

“No other woman will satisfy me now that I have known you. No other woman can touch my heart now that I have felt yours beating against mine.”

Moisture flooded her womanhood.

“No other woman would I ever want to call my own even if I live for another thousand years.”

Moisture flooded her eyes.

“We found you and we found ourselves.”

“Won't you grow tired of me?”

He shook his head. “If I can wake every morning and feel your skin under my touch, I will be happy for eternity.”

“And Randy?”

“He shares with me these feelings.”

“And that is okay with you?”

“Mmm, yes, I know of the propriety and appearances that cloud our thinking. We are all a product of our respective societies. In one society, such a thing is accepted. In another, not.”

“But two men?”

“Why not? The Bible says nothing against--”

“But it does--”

“You show me where.”

She was stunned to silence.

“Well, adultery--”

“But adultery is always the woman having relations with a man outside her commitment and without her husband's knowledge or approval.”

“But more than one--”

“No, even the Bible allows for men to have more than one wife and as many concubines as he wants.”

“But those are men--”

“The Laws of God apply equally to man and woman, alike.”

“But if a man can screw whoever he wants--”

“No no, my dear. Not so. Even a concubine is a commitment”

“What, like me?”

“Even so.”

She had no reason to doubt him. She had never read anything in the Bible that specifically contradicted what Nicolo was saying. But she knew man today would judge her for engaging in anything they felt was wicked.

Was it up to man what was deemed wicked? Or up to God?

The door opened, and Randy came in.

“Okay,” Randy said, “here is the situation.”

Nicolo and Leah sat on the bed. Agatha hovered nearby.

“This FBI agent leads an operation across the nation. It is new and in its initial phases. It is an operation to eradicate and eliminate all vampires. A complete genocide.”

“Norman knows about vampires?” Leah was incredulous.

“Not all, but many government agents know of vampires,” Nicolo said. “He could be one who knows.”

“I thought you had an agreement--” she said.

“We did,” Randy said, “but agreements can be broken.”

“What else did you find?” The Italian had turned serious.

“Well, he views this situation with his dead brother as part of his operation against vampires. Whether he suspects us or not, I don't know. He could be trying to disguise an interest in his brother's death as part of his operation so he can be personally involved.”

“Mmm,” Nicolo said. He nodded in thought.

“I think it is important to repeat, he means to exterminate vampires.”

The Italian looked up at Randy and nodded. “Yes... a grave development, no?”

“Hunted,” Agatha said. Her bitterness was sharp. “Hunted and hunted and hunted some more.”

Leah nodded slowly. Living as a hunted being was not a life, but a tragedy. “We can't let this go on.”

“But what would you suggest?” Nicolo's tone suggested he knew better.

“I don't want to live my life on the run because of Joel's death or because I became a vampire.”

Randy peered at her. “Are you able to handle facing such a crisis?”

“Well, I am, aren't I?”

“Yes, but are you willing to remove the enemy from before us?”

She had to pause on that. This required thought. Was she able to remove Norman from the picture using whatever means? Even if she didn't bite his neck? Would she be able to look Nicolo or Randy in the eyes knowing they had done something about Norman? If they killed him? But what was the alternative? Live their lives on the run? For what? Run because she had been close to being Joel's murder-victim? Was her life less than Joel's that his mattered so much she would be hunted until Norman died of old age? Was Joel's intent to murder her right? Would the law and government support his right to murder her?

Did he really have that right? Did she not have rather a right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? Did her ex-husband's murderous intent give her ex-brother-in-law the right to exact any and every vengeance upon her even though she had done no wrong?

*Joel certainly thinks so.*

Anger flared.

Why did her life always have to be the lesser of others? Would her life ever become as valuable as theirs? And then she understood. Norman would never stop because his value was selfish. No life was less value than another. Her life was no less a value than Norman's, who was trying to find her to finish what her ex-husband had started. She knew it beyond a shadow of any doubt.

Her life was as valuable as Norman's. Her life was her own, and not subject to the laws of man where she did not violate those laws. She had acted against Joel in self-defense and now that man's brother was after her. Investigating her. Seeking her out.

She knew why.

“I am willing to remove my enemies, because I am right.”

One, short, curt nod from Randy bolstered her resolve.

Nicolo nodded slower, but as deep. “Where is this man?”

“A hotel, about two miles from here.” Randy already had details mapped out in his mind.

“Inform me of the other details...” Nicolo sat forward.

Their discussion was going to lead to many innocent deaths.

## CHAPTER 15

Leah called the Grand Maple Hotel and asked to be rung through to Mister Roth's room. She glanced out the window of the phone booth at Randy and Nicolo. Across the street was the supermarket they had chosen.

“Roth,” the voice said.

Norman.

“Norman, it's me and I'm scared--”

“Leah?”

She heard movement and shuffling. A click and a sigh.

“Yes.”

“What's wrong, why are you scared? Where are you?”

She heard an excitement in his voice. Whatever he had clicked gave him her phone number and within seconds he would have the address of the booth.

“I'm being followed by a strange man. I think he killed Joel and now he's after me.”

“Slow down--”

“I can't; he's seen me! There's a grocery store – the Fruit Hill Supermarket on Dawson.”

“Yes, go there and get among other people. I'm on my way.”

The line went dead.

Norman felt alive with nerves and adrenaline. But, everything in his experience screamed at him that this was a setup. It was too neat, too fast, and all on her terms. Panicked people couldn't think right. They couldn't plan beyond fight or flight.

But here she was, and ready to meet him on whatever she thought she could pull.

He glared at the male prostitute. "Get out."

He would need the room alone with her later. He intended to rape her and kill her, and then have the body neatly cleaned up. Use her and throw the body away like so much trash.

It made him hard anticipating it.

A click on his cell. "Tenney, meet me downstairs and bring your rifle."

"Now?"

"Now." He clicked the End Call button.

Hopefully, he wouldn't be needed.

"Are you sure it's a good idea that I'm the bait?" Leah asked again.

"Yes, shut up." Randy was deep in concentration.

She slapped him in the arm.

"We have fed and so has she," Nicolo said. "We can do this."

She didn't want to remember the look of horror on the mugger's face as she had shifted her fingernails into razors and gashed at his neck. "Do you have to remind me?"

"The first is always a little rough," Randy said.

The Italian nodded. "But you felt the need and the satisfaction--"

“Yes, yes, I did. I just haven't had to kill anyone for nourishment before.”

“View it as justice delivered on the streets and approved by the highest levels of your government.”

She had to admit, though she had been repulsed at first, she had been invigorated and hungered to do it again. “Criminals and poor people, right?”

“Ja, it is so,” Randy said, his affection of an English accent falling away now that battle-adrenaline was pumping through his system. “We call the police. We let him grab you. We intervene until the police arrive. Then Nicolo becomes the bait. But we will have to be fast at that point. Law Enforcement nowadays can be notified and alerted quickly to different department agents on the scene.”

Nicolo nodded. “It is a good ruse. Hopefully we can get the police to shoot him and cover our involvement. In the event the police do not shoot, one of us will have to gash his neck open.”

Leah rolled her eyes. “I love how you say that.”

“Eh?” The Italian looked confused.

“Oh, we need to rent a car, and get some gas, and buy a coffee filter and gash his neck.”

Nicolo laughed and so did Randy.

Randy peered at Nicolo. “Are you sure you fed enough? Can you move that fast?”

“What?”

“Being so old, you know--”

Nicolo punched him in the jaw.

“Ach,” said Randy. “We don't want you hurting yourself--”

The Italian socked him again.

“Stop it, you two!” Leah scowled.

Both froze where they stood and looked at her, a twinkle in both their eyes.

Randy grinned. "It is nothing. Just banter before battle."

"A way to relieve stress and focus the spirits," Nicolo said.

The German eyed Leah. "I think I should have her first since you will be exerting yourself--"

"Pah!"

She placed both fists on her hips. "Maybe I will have a quiet dinner with Agatha and leave you two--"

"Ach, now," Randy said.

"See, my friend?" The Italian chuckled.

"Already she is against us."

"She probably has a Frenchman tucked away somewhere--"

"Gott im Himmel."

"God in heaven, yes. Whatever will we do?"

Leah fumed in frustration.

*Why were these two men so unique? So sexy? So devastating?*

Randy looked at his watch. He patted his pocket where his cell phone rested. He patted the other where his P-38 9mm pistol hid. He nodded to Leah. "Time for you to get in position."

She looked at each and glanced to the black Mercedes with Agatha at the wheel. She could do this. "Right."

Things were about to go horribly wrong.

## CHAPTER 16

Roth pulled the car to a stop behind a black Mercedes across the street from the supermarket.

Tenney cradled the short suitcase in his arms.

“See if you can get access to the roof of the market. Flash your badge and cover me.”

The agent nodded. Without a word, he opened the door and hurried across the street.

Norman noted he skirted the store's property line and thus stayed out of the lights. He watched him cut across to the front of the store and toss his case into a cart. Wheeling it inside like any other shopper, he was on his way.

*Three minutes, max.*

Norman checked his watch. 11:10 pm.

Scanning the parking lot, he thought he saw a female figure there. Brunette. Short with sexy flaring hips. He would make an exception to his usual male-to-male dalliances this evening. He would brutalize her. Rape her. Beat her. And choke the life from her with his bare hands.

His penis stirred and hardened.

*Be patient and you will pound the little Catholic woman's cunt, my sex-toy.*

Starting the car, he turned across the street and into the parking lot of the market. She was standing behind a car, arms folded, and parking spaces all around her. He drove to and down her aisle and pulled into a spot close by.

Stepping out, he eyed her.

“Norman,” she said.

“Leah,” he said. The note of finality in his voice stopped her in her tracks.

“Go go go,” Randy said.

Nicolo started off at a trot.

The German pressed send on 911 and waited. “Yes, there is a man who is trying to abduct a woman at the Fruit Hill Supermarket on Dawson. He has a gun. Come quick!”

Dropping the phone to the ground, he called out, “Stop that madman. He's going to kill her!”

He knew the dropped cell picked up his extraneous shout. The operator would be immediately alerting local units to the situation. Even now, he wagered, sirens were flipped on, cars were making desperate, tire-screeching u-turns and gasoline expended at a prodigious rate to get to the parking lot before an innocent woman could be harmed.

Nicolo slowed his approach to the parking lot. His was the primary role tonight – the most active. Randy existed only as a backup. He recalled the daring of the Italian frogmen when everyone thought them weak and toothless – modern day centurions tasked to do something and doing it well.

Discipline high. Morale high. Certain of purpose.

A wise Roman once said that in doing what we ought, we deserve no praise, because it is our duty.

*And so we shall.*

He saw Leah, grabbed and struggling.

“You're coming with me—”

“No!”

“Your life ends tonight, cunt. I am going to fuck you and kill you. No one will ever find the body.”

Nicolo judged he had enough time to approach before the man got her to the car. He heard sirens.

The time was at hand.

Things went wrong.

Someone shouted an aisle over in the parking lot. “Hey!”

Norman looked.

Nicolo looked.

A man wearing neat and efficient clothing was pulling a gun from concealment. Just some citizen, licensed to carry a concealed handgun.

“Oh no, my friend,” he said to the man who was too far to hear. “You don't need-”

The man raised his licensed gun and fired at Norman. The shot caught the FBI Chief as he was drawing his own gun. Blood spurted from his left shoulder in a dark spray.

Nicolo went into a sprint. He would knock the arm slightly to stop Norman from shooting the man.

But he was too late. Or not.

He knocked the arm and a shot rang out.

He whipped around, too fast for Norman to register and saw the innocent man fall, his head missing. The shot, though, had come from elsewhere. Without any thought about it, he blurred into movement. He focused within and minimized his essence. But he stayed close, circling the pair as Norman looked up to the roof of the market.

*So, he has a friend up there.*

“Randy, sniper. Roof.” He called out to the German.

“Ja.”

Cars screeched into the parking lot, lights flashing.

*Yes, good time to get him shooting.*

Coming to a stop far enough away to be a threat, but not within too easy a reach to stop Norman, the Italian came into focus for the wounded FBI man. “I will stop you.”

“Nicolo, move!” Randy's shout came from above.

Two tracer rounds from the roof impacted the pavement where he had just stood. He was a blur again.

People began to rush toward the scene, eager to see the gruesome event unfolding.

“No,” said Norman. His hoarse voice was tinged with pain from the shoulder wound. And perhaps a touch of hysteria. His gun followed the blur, shooting.

*He has tracer rounds in his pistol.*

Shouts sounded in the parking lot. “Drop it!”

Norman did not stop shooting.

Nicolo knew as Randy did that this was the critical moment. The second of crisis. The agent on the roof was even now frantically phoning and alerting the locals that an FBI agent was on the ground and under police target.

The Italian made a lunge that was purposely short. “I will stop you.”

Spittle flew from Norman Roth's lips. “I will kill you!”

Nicolo dodged to the side in a blur as the tracer-shot rang out. But screams greeted his move.

*Something is wrong.*

More shots rang out. Tracer rounds from the roof, from Norman and normal shots from the police. And more screams.

The tracers from the roof ended abruptly.

Knowing that the end of reason on all sides had already passed, and that the time for reaction was now, he rushed at Leah and bore her out of the way. He felt the impact of many bullets into Norman's body by virtue of the shock waves in the air.

But he didn't want to see the aftermath.

He carried Leah to safety, blurring their images and reducing their essence with his focus.

Wrapped in his arms, she watched a bloodied Norman fall to the ground as the Italian bore her away.

Leah was safe.

The police were still shooting the body of her ex-brother-in-law as it fell. The coroner would register twenty-eight different bullet wounds.

Norman's wild shooting and his agent sniper accounted for the lives of five innocents, with another two wounded. The police would find the agent on the roof, his wrists slashed with his own knife – an apparent suicide.

But the FBI was stirred and knew there to be more to the official story. Their own careful investigation revealed at least two supposed-vampires working in tandem to eliminate the lead of Operation Cyclone – the elimination of all vampires.

Several witnesses said a long-haired man who moved faster than they could follow saved the woman. Their best guess from the description of the woman was that it was his former sister-in-law. The cuts on the wrist of Agent Tenney

were at a peculiar angle for self-infliction. Their guess was a vampire slash-attack.

The Vampire Wars had begun.

## CHAPTER 17

Their flight had been precipitous. They crossed over state lines and nestled into the next large city to which they came.

Months passed and FBI operations all over the country were termed as anti-terrorist exercises. But eventually they died away. Troubles cropped up in certain places and overseas in many countries. Was it terrorist activity?

Leah didn't know.

But Randy and Nicolo both watched the news with a keen interest. Government agents were being killed everywhere. That didn't seem all too logical to her, though. Didn't terrorists like to strike civilian targets to create “terror”?

She suspected that vampires were behind the attacks and reacting to the sudden shift in the agreement they had held with governments the world over for centuries.

But quiet came, and with it a return to normalcy. They settled on a Victorian home, overgrown and secluded, though in the middle of the bustle. The real estate agent offered hope they would renovate and clean the place up so as to raise its stature in the neighborhood. They bought the place and had workers immediately set to work – on the inside. The outside remained a foreboding presence to the rest of the neighborhood. Vines covered the facade. A rusted iron gate kept out all but the most adventurous door-to-door salesmen.

Their first day moving into their superbly refurbished home was like a new life for Leah. It was a transition from the between-life she felt she had undergone in her transformation from human to vampire.

*How easily I think of it now.*

She had claimed many victims in feeding and understood the necessity of culling the human herd, so to speak. She also understood it as a source of not just their lives but livelihood as well. Nicolo and Randy had certain investments of which

they were careful, but the primary mode of income was taking the cash from those upon which they had fed. She even began to target drug dealers for the mountains of money they provided.

A drug deal gone sour was likely a vampire attack, she now realized. The cash was better used for purposes that were good than spreading any more of the never-ending drug-disease. There was more than enough of that even if she had taken it as a cause to stamp out drug use. The problem was huge. Too huge. So she learned to feed on it.

Nicolo had returned the previous week with his van.

*Men and their toys.*

His stash of priceless flags and medals were safely moved into the garage of the house while the finishing touches were applied.

“Come, my darling,” Nicolo said, holding his hand out to her.

She took his hand, with a smile. Randy was close behind her.

The Italian gestured to the vine-covered Victorian behind him. “Mmm, we will make our home here. Quietly, no?”

“I will follow wherever you go.”

His smile elicited hers.

The inside of the house was bare. A few furnishings were in evidence, but not much. Agatha had been busy making sure certain necessities were met before bothering with furniture.

Would they be able to stay? Would they go unnoticed? Did the fact that the focus of terrorism had moved overseas mean the FBI had considered America cleansed? There were a few spots in the country still where the media reported terrorist cells.

*Vampire holdouts.*

She wished them well.

The Italian's eyes penetrated hers and filled her soul with desire. She still found his gaze disconcerting.

*How could he be so desirable? So manly? So captivating?*

But it was her he had said with whom he was captivated. He assured her she was the delight in a world of indifference and animosity. Such filled her with a wonder she had never known.

Grasping her hand, he led her upstairs to the master suite. It was lavishly appointed with wallpaper and velvet. A single bed dominated the room. The headboard looked antique, but the mattress looked new. No sheets or blankets adorned it yet. Almost nothing else was in the house; this was their initial move-in and the search to furnish the home had not yet begun.

Her insides seemed to melt as she was led into that bedroom – and she felt nasty. Close behind her was Randy. She would have her own room, as would Randy, but this room, as all the other rooms, was open for times of sharing.

Nicolo released her hand and turned to face her. “Remove your clothing.”

“But--”

“Do it now,” he said. The fever in his voice was apparent. “I have awaited our own privacy for too long. I will have you, now.”

“But--”

“Do as he says,” Randy said into her ear. “or I will remove your clothing by tearing them off you.”

Her giggle was a tinkle of merriment in a room full of testosterone. She slowly removed her clothing to the growing impatient stares of the two men.

*They're going to burst.*

They didn't wait. They couldn't. As she was beginning to pull down her panties, Nicolo seized her and threw her onto the bed. Randy gripped and ripped the

panties from her in shreds.

Moisture flooded her womanhood.

The Italian's mouth descended on one of her breasts as he fumbled at his clothing. Sensations twirled through her at the hot and wet feel of his tongue on her nipple. Her sigh was muffled by the press of German lips against her own. Spinning dizzily, she kissed him back. Fingers found her sex, but she knew not whose.

She parted her legs and gasped into Randy's mouth. Their tongues made a quick exploration, but thorough, that left her gasping for breath. Her eyes closed in pleasure at the feel of four man-hands caressing her body. When a tongue found her clit, she opened her eyes in surprise and sudden excitement. Randy was down there, she saw. Nicolo was stripping off the last of his clothes – his erection standing out proud and throbbing with lust.

She raised her hips to Randy's attention as she eyed the Italian's cock. Reaching for it, he moved closer until she could grasp it. The shaft was hot and smooth in her hand, but hard and pulsing with lusty blood.

*Too much. Too hot. Too sexy.*

Her body wilted and she surrendered.

When she felt Randy shift upward and press his erection to her very willing pussy, she moaned in anticipation.

The pressure against her was relieved and began to fill her when her lips parted and he found entrance. His mouth descended again on hers and she tasted her own juices on his tongue as he slid all the way into her. She was filled. Nicolo's erection twitched in her hand and she felt a flood of juice moisten her insides.

She stroked the Italian's cock with a desperation borne of her lust. His groans filled her soul as Randy's erection filled her hole.

*More.*

She felt the German thrust deep and slow. It felt so good, but she wanted it fast and hard.

*More. Now.*

She shifted her hips to urge him on, but his slow penetration and pumping did not change. She moaned in sexual tension. She wanted to feel that tool working her and bringing her to pleasure. The ache inside her, instead of being satisfied, began to increase. She began to pant with lust.

Pulling Nicolo closer, she took his manhood into her mouth. She wanted to bite it in frustration. She wanted to devour it in desire. She stroked his shaft and sucked on the head while Randy slowly worked his erection in and out of her.

Her lust unsatisfied by the German's slow assault, she took to attacking the Italian's shaft. Sucking and stroking that throbbing pillar of flesh, she felt her head begin to spin.

*Finally.*

A coiling tension began to tighten inside her, pushing her toward an abyss of pleasure and relief.

*He knows, too, that German bastard.*

Randy sped his thrusts and started plowing her harder. Her coils tightened. Her nerves began to quiver.

*He's going to do it again.*

Forcing himself as deep as he could, he spurted his hot seed into her. She was almost there.

He pulled out, leaving her tottering at the very edge. But she slowly calmed down, the sensation of orgasm receding.

Growling, she came up off the bed at him with her fingers clawlike.

His laughter did nothing to alleviate her pent-up almost-orgasm. But it was not cruel laughter. "Next time," he said. "This time Nicolo gets to play you."

*What am I? A person or a violin?*

The Italian sat on the bed as she knelt there, her claws still extended toward Randy.

*One of these days, I will bite his penis and suck it. See how he likes being tortured...*

“Leah,” said Nicolo.

She looked back to him. He was stroking his shaft as he laid there watching them. He removed his hand and pointed.

“Get on and show me your passion.”

“Oh, I'll do that alright--”

“Shush, I want you on me.”

Sighing, she realized he was right and that is how this sometimes went. Randy would make love to her and get her worked up. Then Nicolo would extract her pent-up passion. Sometimes it went the other way, too.

Sometimes she teased them.

Straddling him, she gripped his length and placed it at her opening. She used gravity to sit all the way down on him in one stroke.

His groan brought glee to her lust.

Yes, I am riding his pole once again and it is mine.

She raised up and slammed down on his shaft. Her hips curved and arced as she rode him up and down. She controlled her lust. She worked her body into a passion of tension. She used her riding to massage her pussy with his stationary cock.

*Feels so good...*

She sat all the way down and rotated her hips. That brought a moan from Nicolo and he took her hips in his hands. Ever so slightly, and then gaining force, his own hips began to buck up to meet her downward thrusts. He did it like an artist.

Or a musician playing the violin.

It was perfect. The build-up of passion deepened and she began to tremble. She savored his thrusts and they both applied more force to their fucking.

Randy knelt beside her and she gripped his penis. She stroked it in time with her thrusts and relished the feel of his hot manhood in her hand.

The grunting and the gasps brought her to a place of peace. Spinning out of control, she toppled over like an enormous tree struck by lightning. Her gasps and wails of pleasure mixed together in a puzzle of pure gibberish. The convulsions that wracked her body sent waves of pleasure and release crashing through her.

Underneath her, she felt the Italian's cock swell in her and thrust deep. Hot waves of wetness flooded her already filled pussy. His cum added to Randy's and the juices began to leak out of her. She was filled. And she was fulfilled.

The Vampire Wars raged on. Vampire fought vampire – those who supported the government against those who tried to warn the others that the government would use them and kill them. The government pretended to honor its age-old agreement, pitting vampires against each other and then moving in later to clean up the remains. Operation Cyclone, meant only for the shores of America, erupted all over the globe. Vampires rose in indignation at the betrayal and struck out at government everywhere. Foreign governments reacted, though they had not been a party to the American operation.

The vampires lost the war before it ever begun. Yet in the fires of their destruction were the seeds of their return.