

THE EAST PACIFIC
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

The
Orphan
Hunter

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MCCARTHY

The Draculan Hunter

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Chapter 1

Kelly Harper wanted to find a special guy, but it was the creepy ones who she tended to date. She was a sucker for a sad story, and she lent out money too. She saw a loser sitting at the bar stool nursing the same drink for three hours and she told herself she would resist the urge to pay for his drink. He seemed nice. But her sister told her they all start out nice and then they end up being rotten so you have to end it. What did Leola know anyway? She divorced her second husband for the second time and was dancing with a guy wearing a cowboy hat in eighty-five-degree weather.

It was a hot night for September. The bar would be closing soon. She decided the stranger at the bar might be an accountant, or some other decent guy so she decided instead of buying him a drink she'd strike up a conversation.

Kelly pulled her hair back for a minute then she adjusted her dress. She licked her lips. It wasn't like she was getting any younger so why not speak to him? It wasn't her modus operandi. She hated going out. The soup kitchen where she worked drained all her energy and only when her sister needed her company did she go out.

The stranger was hunched over. She glanced back at the dance floor and Leola and Mr. Cowboy were kissing. She guessed she'd take a taxi home. Then she glanced back at the man. He looked sideways as she approached the bar.

"What'll you have?"

"Sloe Gin Fizz."

"Seriously? You're like thirty something."

"Just get me a drink!"

"Okay."

The bartender grabbed a bottle off the top shelf. The stranger smiled and Kelly thought it was the perfect time to say something. He was good looking in a Kirk Douglas sort of way. He was medium build but she thought he had more muscles than normal. Maybe he was an athlete.

The bartender approached. "Here you go. Seven fifty-six."

"Keep the change."

"Thanks."

Kelly sipped the drink as she decided what to say. Then she moved past three women who were ordering drinks and sat down in the empty stool next to the stranger.

"Kind of hot weather," Kelly said.

"Yes it is."

"I think it will be a disappointment when the heat finally breaks."

"Probably."

"I'm Kelly."

"Hello. I'm Liam. Liam Abraham."

"Nice to meet you. It's almost closing and I must confess that I'm a people watcher. I noticed that you seemed lost in thought most of the night."

He smiled.

"Oh. Forgive me if I've intruded on your privacy."

"No, It's quite all right." He rubbed his fingers over the rim of his glass. "I'm a bit preoccupied by my profession at the moment."

"Are you an Accountant?"

"No. I'm an... Insurance Agent."

Kelly brightened at the news. He had a job.

"Listen, I don't mean to be forward, but I like you. Is it too weird to think it so soon after meeting someone?" Kelly said.

"Not at all. I was thinking that I like you too. You have a straight forward quality about you..."

Kelly looked towards the door and glanced to her sister who was about to leave. Leola motioned to her. "Excuse me please."

She went over to Leola and the anger flared. The dance music drummed on as her feet stuck to the beer soaked floor.

"Hey. Jake is taking me back to his place. Will you be okay?" Leola said.

"You met him yesterday. Don't you think you should wait until the judge signs the paper before you start with another man?"

"I divorced Jim twice. He doesn't care. I mean his girlfriend would be thrilled that I'm not calling him up and asking him to come home."

"You're not really at the best place right now. Are you sure about this cowboy?"

"He is just so sweet. Are you okay? I see you're talking to Red."

"His name is Liam."

"Great. Does he work a real job?"

"Yes, Insurance."

"Good enough. So, we're square?"

Kelly glanced at the door where her sister's date was waiting. "Yes."

Leola kissed her.

Kelly watched them leave. Then she took out her phone and called a taxi. The sweat was collecting on her forehead and so she wiped it away.

She turned to see Liam Abraham standing next to her.

“Listen, Kelly. It was good to meet you. I'm giving you my business card.” Liam took out of his wallet a card and handed it to her. “If you'd like, we could set up an appointment and talk over your insurance needs.”

Kelly glanced down and scanned the card. “Sure. What type of insurance do you sell?”

“Life. Nice to meet you.”

She watched him exit right behind her sister and the cowboy. She was sure she'd be alone for the rest of her life.

Chapter 2

"A witching hour a witching hour so many mouths to feed and death relieves the hunger," Amwolf Van Horn said.

Sigman Van Horn answered, "Do you have to say it? It's so 1350's. I mean get with the twenty-first century."

"You think we're the only Draculans who survived the middle ages? Everybody learned that nursery rhyme," Amwolf said.

"Yes, because it's stupid. It takes three bites before a human becomes a Draculan, so it's a myth about there being too many of us...well after the black plague there was those hundred years when we had to ration how much blood we drank...but then again, I thought that was a legend," Sigman said.

"Don't get me started with our kind's history," Amwolf complained.

"Tell me that story--"

"No brother dear. You never paid attention to anything Father told you. Vampires legends were spread to protect us." Amwolf began to tap his foot.

"It's such a slur to use that term, don't," Sigman said.

"I forgot you cared so much about it. Okay, okay, Draculans," Amwolf said.

"Thank you."

"Oh, here's a group now. Time for dinner."

"I hate Philadelphia girls, south side. They taste like garlic," Sigman complained.

"Now, now, talk about stereotypes...it's a healthy thing, you tend to pack on the pounds anyway. Remember Atlanta?" Amwolf said.

"Oh yeah. Twenty girls on Friday the thirteenth. Wow. I had to diet for six weeks to fit into my pants," Sigman complained.

"I'm telling you. You should try men. It's less fattening," Amwolf said.

"Lean muscles. But I'm saying the girls taste better."

"I'm just telling you...oh, time to party."

A group of four girls walked along the buildings outside the club.

"You mean pig out," Sigman said.

Sigman wiped his mouth. It was refreshing to be satisfied again. The girls, lying on the grimy ground, were nearly dead.

Amwolf pulled a man from the sidewalk and dragged him to the back corner of the alley. Sigman watched his brother for a minute and heard the man pleading for him to let go of his neck. He knew Amwolf's meals would not suffer because his brother was a compassionate Draculan. He, on the other hand, liked the hunt almost as much as the meal.

The girl Sigman spied standing at the corner was thin. He supposed even after his second one, a thin one wouldn't make him pack on the pounds. He left the shadows of the alley and walked along the boulevard.

It was late and the crowds were beginning to fizzle out. If he wanted the girl, he better hurry. He walked up to her. He stood six feet and his dark hair and hypnotic dark eyes alone didn't attract the ladies. Usually he took off his shirt to show off his six-pack abs. It was hot enough so he peeled off his shirt. He walked up behind her.

"You seem lost. May I help you?" Sigman said.

Kelly Harper turned around and saw the great looking shirtless man. She laughed.

Sigman didn't expect that response.

Kelly put her hand over her mouth. She said, "I'm sorry, it's been one of those nights. I suppose there's a reason you're walking around half-naked?"

"Yes, it's hot. Would you like a ride home?"

"No thanks, buddy. My cab will be here any minute so move along," Kelly said.

Sigman was angry. He said, "If you only knew who I am you'd treat me with greater care. I could make it painless for you or make it hurt for days before I put an end to you."

Kelly moved away from him and turned toward the club. She began to run but the shirtless man appeared right in front of her as if by magic. She screamed and he pulled her close. She looked at him as he kissed her. Kelly wanted to resist but his kiss was intoxicating. She knew she should run, yet she felt powerless. Kelly knew she wouldn't make it out alive if she went with him, and yet he kissed her again and she stopped struggling.

"Come with me, and we will share a wonderful memory," Sigman said.

Kelly nodded. They walked together down the alley and he continued his advances as she was too hypnotized to think clearly. Kelly was too weakened by some power he had over her. She was sure he would take advantage of her, but instead he touched her neck. He massaged it and she bent back as if she weren't in control of herself. He kissed her neck as she thought that she should scream. No sound came out as he put something sharp into it. If she could move she would have, but her body felt paralyzed. Did he cut her? It was razor sharp only the pain was dull. She felt him suck on her neck and then she heard another voice.

"Let me try! She looks so yummy! Don't drain her. Leave me some!" Amwolf said.

Sigman looked up at his brother, wiped his mouth and said, "You always were a selfish brat that Mother spoiled rotten. Can't I have a meal in peace?"

"No. I can tell the way you're slurping like a pig she's good. I want her too."

"I'm keeping her for myself. You've had three and she's my third. Go find another guy," Sigman said.

"Hello?" A male voice echoed down the alleyway.

Amwolf looked at the man who was getting close to Kelly.

"This is too easy. Hello yourself," Amwolf said.

The man looked familiar to Kelly. He was the insurance salesman. Kelly felt her neck as the man who bit her looked at the insurance salesman. She felt wetness and she couldn't move. She was a rag doll in the stranger's arms.

"I think you should let go of the girl," the insurance man said.

Amwolf laughed hard.

Sigman said, "Why would I listen to you?"

The man named Liam lunged at Amwolf and slashed his arm. Kelly felt herself being let go and she felt her body crumple to the ground. She was a dropped rag doll on the side of a cement alleyway. She knew the blood was draining from her wounds on her neck and she was blacking out.

Chapter 3

Kelly opened her eyes and she saw a hospital room. She looked at the IV bag. She recalled feeling like she would perish somehow, but she couldn't recall why she was so afraid. Kelly rang for the nurse. The white walls and machines with tubes streaming out made her nervous. She hated hospitals. The ammonia smell and the starchy pillow were the least of her problems as she felt a sharp pain in her neck. Her hand trembled as she touched the bandage.

A stout woman with dark hair knocked on her door. "You're awake."

"Yes, but I don't know what happened. Why am I here?"

The nurse took her blood pressure. The squeezing of her arm made her nervous.

"Don't you remember the attack? You're the only survivor."

"No, I don't remember anything. All I can recall is that I went with my sister to the bar and then took a cab home."

"Ms. Harper, you were slashed with a razor on your right carotid artery and right internal jugular vein. You're lucky to be alive. It was a precise nick and had you not been rushed here, you would have bled to death. It was touch-and-go for a while. You're type O blood, and we had to scramble to get you enough blood so fast," the nurse said.

"How long have I been here?" Kelly asked.

"Two days. You were unconscious when the gentleman brought you to the hospital."

"Wait a minute, tell me again?"

"Your friend. He stayed with you for hours before he left. I assumed...is he your boyfriend?"

"No, I just met him."

"He carried you into the emergency room. The police showed up to interview him, and he gave a statement. He was the reason you survived -- the fact that he got you to us so quickly. I don't know how he did it, maybe he had an adrenaline rush or something to be strong enough to carry you. Five people died in the attack. The police think it was ritualistic slayings."

"Devil worship?"

"Something like it."

"And I'm the only survivor?" Kelly asked.

"Yes. I'm sure the police will want to talk to you about what you know."

"I can't remember anything."

Amwolf Van Horn pulled the shades of the one room studio apartment. Sirens echoed through the alley. The studio apartment had a brick wall that highlighted the old building's past. A bike

was parked between the television and the couch. The hour was very late, and the breaking daylight was completely blocked by the room darkening shade.

Sigman Van Horn pulled the beds down from the wall. He stretched and yawned.

"I'm beat. I think I could sleep for at least a week," Sigman said. He lay on his twin bed as his brother sat down on the other. "I wish the apartment was larger. I miss my coffin."

"It would never fit in the apartment...the bed isn't so bad," Amwolf said.

"It's just so open. I miss the comfort of a confined space. I barely sleep," Sigman said.

"I hear you snoring. You must be getting some sleep," Amwolf said. "You really messed up. We were almost cut."

"I don't want to hear it. We got out of the alley. End of story," Sigman said.

"How do you think that man found us?"

"He's a Draculan hunter. It happens," Sigman said.

"He's better than the others. He got a nick on me." Amwolf held up his left arm. A wide gash from his elbow down to his wrist had been glued together.

"So fix it."

"I may be a doctor, but I'm also a Draculan. The wound weakened me. You'll have to bring the game here," Amwolf said.

"Here? No. It's too dangerous."

"Just for a couple days. You're good at it. Go to a bar meet a girl, bring her back."

"It isn't easy to turn on the charm all the time."

"Oh, come now. You're a New Yorker at heart. You ooze charm and sophistication. Remember, I think it was '02."

"No, 1903. Those were the nights! Too bad Mommy and Dad moved there," Sigman said.

"Well, they had no choice."

"Those locals have no idea how much our family did for them. All the charity organizations Mom chaired...well, before Dad turned her into a Draculan," Sigman said.

"And he was lucky to find her. Out of five hundred and seventy wives, only Mom gave him an heir," Amwolf said.

"Twins. Why don't we have more brothers and sisters?"

"As I've explained before a hundred times only you don't listen." Amwolf smacked Sigman on the head.

"Stop it," Sigman said as he touched his head, "that hurts."

"Only type O blood born under a full moon can give Draculans heirs."

"I thought that was just a myth."

"It's not I'm afraid. My poor, simple brother," Amwolf said.

"Well, now that the parents are living in my apartment, it's not fun anymore. Mom has such outdated ideas about women. She thinks we should settle down and get a few hundred wives – all for her to be a grandmother! I wish she'd have stayed in Romania."

"Sigman! Shame! Our mother is only looking out for your best interest. You tend to want it all. Settling down wouldn't kill you. Maybe you'd stop all that partying. I mean remember all the girls in Vegas? It was well over a hundred. That was quite the binge."

"I was humiliated when she sent Dad after me. And the fact that he cut off the money...I won't forgive them."

Amwolf said, "Stop being so selfish, they had to get out of Romania. Poor Mom and Dad woke up inflamed with a stake through their hearts."

"It was my apartment!" Sigman said.

"They paid for it. You should have made something of yourself. Now you're a washed-up actor."

"I'm not washed up. I'm between gigs," Sigman added.

"Please! You can't go out in the daytime. You weren't seriously an actor."

"I would bleed for the theatre!"

"Well, that Draculan Hunter took a pint of mine last night. I must stay indoors. Will you get me a few girls, or guys, and bring them here? Remember how I took you in after Dad kicked you out. I do too much for you," Amwolf said.

"Thank you."

"Dad shouldn't have kicked me out."

"You're not a child anymore, you are six hundred and ninety-six years old," Amwolf said.

"Do you think they'll trace that attack to us? Which hospital is that girl in?"

"Temple."

"What if..."

"No, way. It's too dangerous if I admit you. I need to work. It keeps us afloat and you'd go nuts with all that blood at the hospital. You have no self-control. The girl doesn't remember anything. Maybe you should go to bars outside the city to get the cops off our backs."

"Or maybe we should fly to Texas for a few weeks. I love all those spunky gals! And it's college football season. Those cheerleaders!" Sigman rubbed his hands together.

"Next week, when I recover. We can go then. But no binge drinking. Promise?"

"You have my word."

“Until then, maybe we should stick to the homeless?”

“No, I'm not eating fast food! You should know what that does to us. I just worked too hard on my body to get it trim to pack on the weight by eating--”

“Now now! You can pick up prostitutes then.”

“Please, we can't be at that point yet.”

“We are, thanks to that hunter.”

“I'm going to enjoy taking him out.”

“No, we're playing it smart. Lay low. He's the best hunter I've seen in three hundred years. Remember, if you draw attention to yourself, you'll have to find another place to crash. Understand?”

“Yes, Amwolf.”

Chapter 4

Sigman waited until dark to go to St Agnes' Soup Kitchen. The homeless ate their late-night dinner as Sigman looked inside the window. He waited for them to leave. The hall had fluorescent lights overhead and he couldn't stand them, although they weren't strong enough to kill him. The LED lights might. How he missed the good old days of the incandescent light bulbs.

The door swung open and a woman exited. Sigman had thought he'd be stuck with homeless men, but the girl was pleasing. He might even toy with her for a time before he finished her off. He realized it was that girl at the alley. He couldn't believe his good fortune. Here was the opportunity he awaited. He could just bite her for the second time and be rid of her. She was a good bite he recalled. One of his better bites. Maybe it would be worth it to turn her into one of his kind. Then he thought better of it, once she became a vampire, the nagging would begin: "You never look into my eyes like you did when I was human." Sigman sighed.

She would have no memory of their first encounter. Such was the ways of his kind. Hypnotic powers, super strength, serial seducer, these were the ways of the sons and daughters of Dracula. Sigman hated needing such inferior beings. His constant lust for blood forced him to rely on humans. He was a rare phenomenon. He was born, not made. His nature was immortal. He would live forever as Lord of the World.

The curse of his kind was the need for blood in order to remain strong. The lack of blood in him had to be filled by his prey. His sharp teeth were so precise he could do surgery on his victims, drinking any amount of their blood, hence deciding if they lived or died. If he bit the same human once, there was a good chance they would recover none the wiser. If he took a second, then the prey would die quickly. He usually chose this for his game. The draining of one human took care of his hunger for weeks. If he took just one bite, he would be hungry a few days later. It was too dangerous to hunt that often. After his personal experiences, he had learned to avoid the third bite.

His took his first bride in his youth just after he learned to feed on his own. If he had more control, he wouldn't have Victoria nagging him, something he had to live with for all of eternity. Lately, Victoria, who would never leave her hometown and travel, sent him constant texts. Whoever said technology was a good thing lied. Before the internet he could avoid her for centuries. Now he had to make up excuses like he dropped the phone in the sink. Yes, he learned to avoid the third bite.

"Pardon me, Miss. I have a donation to make for the shelter." Sigman handed her a twenty-dollar bill.

Kelly Harper jumped as he handed her the money. She touched the bandage on the right side of her neck.

"Thanks, I'll give this to Sister Maryann tomorrow," Kelly said.

"Are you okay?" Sigman pointed to her neck.

"Oh, yeah, just an accident. I'm okay now. This is my first day back. I'm a bit jumpy."

"I can imagine."

Kelly said, "You seem very familiar. Have we met?"

"I don't believe so. I am Sigman Van Horn." He bowed.

"I'm Kelly Harper. Thanks for the donation. As Sister Maryann says, God Bless you."

Sigman scowled at the mention of God, but the woman didn't notice. "You do such noble work. I should offer thanks to you."

"I like it. I think it's the best job in the world. Helping people who are at the lowest point of their lives, it helps me remember why we're on this earth. Forgive me, I didn't mean to go on like that. I just get excited when I talk about my work."

"As I do talking about mine," Sigman said.

They arrived at the street corner and Kelly flagged down a taxi.

"What do you do?"

"I'm an actor."

Kelly said, "How lovely."

"Well, an out of work one right now. But I'm staying with my brother. He's a doctor and I'm working for him right now until I find an acting job."

"Oh, what do you do for him?"

"Patient referrals at the present."

"It sounds like a good line of work, if the acting doesn't come through that is."

"Yes. It was nice to meet you."

She opened the cab door.

The wind whipped through the buildings and Kelly's hair flew up. She said, "Whoa! Not a good night. I think there's a storm coming."

"Probably. See you around." He put his hands in his jean pockets.

She got into the cab and before she closed the door, she looked at him as the wind blew his coat. She hesitated. "Do you need a ride? We can share the cab."

"Really? That's so nice of you." Sigman had calculated it right. The girl would be too easy. He was almost disappointed.

The cabbie pulled out. Kelly told Sigman about her work with the homeless as he looked into her eyes. It was difficult to get her to look back into them. He moved his head to match hers, right then left. She looked down instead of into his eyes. He felt like he was doing a chicken dance.

"Excuse me, Sigman, but why are you mimicking me?"

“Oh, that. I'm trying to get you to look into my eyes.”

“Why?”

Sigman kissed her hard. She pushed him away. “What do you think you're doing?”

She looked into his eyes and she was hypnotized. He began to kiss her again and she offered him no resistance. “Kelly, you're coming back to my apartment.”

Kelly said, “I'm coming back to your apartment.”

Sigman said, “Driver, skip the first address.”

Chapter 5

“Hey, is she all right?” The cab driver said as he turned his head.

Sigman bared his fangs and the man turned the wheel quickly and hit into a motorcycle parked on the side of the street. Sigman looked fierce, and the cabbie stopped the taxi and ran out of the car.

Now that they were alone in the cab, Sigman took his time. He wouldn't need to take her back to the apartment. He could finish her off first, and then stop again and pick something up for Amwolf on the way home. Amwolf was such a health nut anyway. The girl was too good to waste on his brother. He licked her neck. A good meal should never be hurried. She was attractive. It was lonely in Philly and his brother was working most nights. Amwolf's work must be a distraction for him. His parents had each other. He realized how alone he was.

Sigman hadn't thought of it, but perhaps the cycle of hunting was getting old. If he had someone to come home to, wouldn't that be better than all the games he was so good at playing? Maybe he'd turn her. What would it hurt to take another bride?

Then he thought of Victoria and he paused. Vampires never got headaches, but Victoria gave him a pretty good idea of what it must be like to suffer from them.

Kelly moaned and he thought that he better end her after all. He drew out his back fangs and his mouth grew wider. He was ready to strike. Then he heard a rapping. It was so annoying to be in the middle of something and to hear such a loud sound.

Sigman looked up as the glass of the back window shattered, scattering bits and pieces everywhere.

Sigman felt a prick against his shoulder. He realized that he had been cut. He let out a howl that caused the dogs throughout the neighborhood to bark and yelp. Then he saw the door next to where Kelly was slumped over open and a man grabbed her and yanked. Sigman grabbed her feet. The man tugged harder and Sigman pulled her back inside the cab. Kelly woke up and screamed.

It didn't look like it was so easy now. She kicked Sigman and he became off balanced and he let go as she kicked. Then Kelly was pulled free. Sigman was so angry he tore the roof off the cab. Embarrassed, he realized too late he could have merely opened the door next to him. He got out of the cab through the door. He would remain the civilized gentlemen he had been for centuries. Then he would kill them both. No humans should be so much trouble.

The man carried her with ease, and Sigman realized he was very strong as he felt the wound and cupped his hand over the spot. Then his anger overtook the injury and he ran. He reached the man carrying Kelly.

“Give her to me and I'll let you live, Draculan Hunter!”

“What a fool you think I am!” The man took out his dagger and slashed at Sigman.

Sigman evaded the blade and slowed down. The man picked up his pace and then Sigman

noticed the building in front of them. It was a church.

Liam Abraham pulled open the doors to St. Mary's. The woman he was carrying hung on to his neck, almost choking him. He reached for her hand to loosen it.

"Sorry," Kelly said as she put her hand on his shoulders.

Liam raced to the altar, genuflected and set her down on the carpeting. Darkness made the church ominous.

"Do you know where the light switch is?" Liam asked.

"The back of the church. Wait, the flood lights. Over by the sacristy, to your right. It should be there somewhere."

Liam walked through the darkness with an outstretched hand to feel for the lights. He found a switch and turned on the lights of the side room. Then he saw another set above them and turned on lights over the altar. The pews in front of them cast shadows onto the walls. The statues of bygone saints lined the walls and seemed to hover over the pair.

Kelly stood up as a howling voice spoke to them from the back doors.

"She is mine, Draculan Hunter! She came willingly with me and I claim her!"

"If you want her, come and get her!" Liam shouted.

"Wait just a minute," Kelly said as she stood up. "Why would you say that?"

Liam glanced at her. He whispered into her ear, "He can't come into a church. Draculans were excommunicated millenniums ago. If you're going to keep hanging out with vampires, don't you think you should at least learn the ground rules?"

"He's a vampire? And for your information I didn't go off with him! He came to the Soup Kitchen and gave me twenty dollars."

"Twenty seems a little cheap."

"It's for the charity, you dim wit!"

"Can't you take a joke?"

The silence was more threatening than the howling. "Shh!" Liam said.

"Shh yourself!"

"Just be silent so I can hear him."

Kelly looked up at the massive crucifix hanging over them and the altar. The painted-on blood streaked the sculpture's depiction of Christ. An anguished expression on the work made Kelly shiver. The banging made her back up against the stone altar.

"He's here somewhere. He won't enter this part. Stay here. He must be in the rafters or he's hiding in the back. Oh, I wish I thought to grab some holy water as we entered this place."

"What about the baptismal font?"

“Good thinking. Do you see it?”

“It's to your left, right off the altar.”

“Stay put. He'll kill you if he gets to you.”

Liam tipped-toed off the altar to the font. He took out a plastic baggie and dipped it into the font collecting the water. He turned towards Kelly. The flooring where he was standing gave out and he fell violently into the basement below. Kelly screamed and began to move until she remembered she must stay at the altar. She wasn't sure if what the Insurance Salesman told her was correct, but she had no other options left, so she stayed there and listened.

Liam's bottom hit down hard onto the flooring of the basement. He stood up and realized he was in a social hall. There must be a light switch. He thought of the stairs, there must be a switch there. Before he could run to the stairwell and turn them on, he was punched multiple times with such force he was knocked back down to the floor. He felt more kicks and punches.

Sigman lifted Liam and he went for the neck artery.

Liam put up his arm to deflect the vampire and felt a trickle of blood pour as he shielded himself from the onslaught. The strength of this particular Draculan was a marvel. Liam hadn't struggled like this for years and for a moment he wasn't sure if he would survive. His adrenaline surged as he worked to overcome the vampire. He pushed with all his considerable strength, keeping the creature away from his neck.

With his free hand, Liam reached inside his jacket's pocket looking for his dagger. The dagger wasn't in the pocket, but he felt the baggie with holy water.

Sigman's sharpest tooth hit the side of the Insurance Salesman's face, drawing blood from a thin red line etched in flesh. Sigman began to move his fang down to Liam's jaw. The taste of fresh blood excited the vampire and a screeching sound came from his throat indicating his pleasure.

Liam finally managed to open the plastic's zip lock as he struggled with the Draculan and flung the holy water on towards the attacker. Liam knew he hit some part of the vampire. In the complete darkness, it wasn't possible to know how much damage he had done to it.

The attack stopped and screams could be heard moving away from him. He stumbled to his feet and ran to the back stairs. He reached the light switch and turned on the lights. He saw Sigman Van Horn, fangs bared, frozen by the lights as if he stepped out of a horror movie. The momentary paralysis ended and Sigman Van Horn fled the basement.

Chapter 6

Liam went up the stairs as fast as he could and burst through the door to the main part of the church. He couldn't see and so he yelled, "Kelly, are you all right?"

"Yes, are you?"

"Yes."

Liam ran to her and she threw her arms around him. He hadn't expected it. Her perfume smelled like summertime mornings when dewy flowers bloomed in glory.

"Did you kill it?" Kelly asked.

Another voice strong and defiant answered her.

"No," Sigman said as he made his presence known while he stood in the shadows of the back pews.

Kelly screamed and Liam stepped in front of her as if to shield her.

"I'm going to kill all of you vampires!" Liam said, his voice rising as he spoke loud and clear.

"Don't you dare hurl slurs at me! I will end you soon enough!" Sigman said.

"Come and get me you SOB!" Liam said.

"Yet, is not your weakness beside you?" Sigman said.

"How many of your brides have I killed?"

"You flatter me, but your weakness is not mine. There are so many new girls I may or may not pluck out of obscurity... my sweet Kelly, I must say adieu for the present moment." Sigman bowed. "Remember the sweet seduction we began will continue very soon. When I take you for myself you will understand the pleasures of my kind."

"You'll never take me alive," Kelly shouted.

"Technically you'll be dead, dear."

The vampire moved so quickly it was as if he disappeared before their eyes. In a flash, the battle was over and a quiet strangeness of normalcy overtook the church.

Kelly sat down, her teeth chattering. "Look at me, I'm a nervous wreck."

"As well you should be. It must be terrible to think of how he plans to hunt you down...and worse to think of how he wants you for his bride..."

"Stop! Just stop talking! And you're an Insurance Salesman? Don't you guys usually know how to sell to somebody? Why don't you cut a deal?"

Liam sat down beside her. "I'm afraid there aren't any deals to be made with his kind. Not any they'd keep. I'm not really a Life Insurance Salesman."

“No?” Kelly mocked him.

“I guess I deserve a little chastisement from you.”

Kelly cupped her head in her hands for a moment, and then turned to Liam.

“No, no. Thanks for saving me. I would have been a goner if it weren't for you.”

“No need to thank me for doing my job,” Liam said.

“Your job? Who are you?”

“Liam Abra --”

“Don't!” Kelly rubbed her face as if to think things over. “I mean *what* are you?”

“Who is much easier to answer,” Liam said.

“Why?”

Liam sat down next to Kelly. “*What* am I is a long story.”

“So, you're some sort of secret agent?”

“No.”

“An angel?”

“You'd think, after all Dracula was the son of the Devil.”

“Then what are you?”

“I'd like to tell you...”

“Liam, we've faced down vampires, what could be more unbelievable than that? Who'm I gonna tell?”

He laughed, then answered, “You're right. Nobody would believe the truth. Have you ever heard of Jasminua?”

“Is that a flower?”

“No, it's a planet.”

“You're an alien from another planet?”

“Yes I am.”

“What do you look like?”

“Like this!” Liam moved his hands from his face down to his feet with his palms out.

“Where are your ten tentacles and five legs?”

“Boy, where are you getting your information?”

“So, you look like a man?”

"I am a man...believe me...if I could show you..."

"Save it! I meant why do you look like an earthling?"

"I think the earth spun off from our planet."

"I can't believe that is true," Kelly said.

"People from my planet have traveled for thousands of years. It was for leisure at first, but there was an accident when our supreme leader was celebrating his birthday and mistakenly set off a stockpile of weapons. It should take about 10,000 more years to get everything mopped up completely. A lot of people stayed of course, but my parents went planet shopping. Earth seemed nice enough, although a bit backwards...sorry." Liam smiled at her. "Soon they had my brother and me and found a nice school..."

"Okay, I got it, like Superman without the adoption side story."

"No, not like that at all."

"Then how do you manage to kill vampires?"

"Funny you should ask. I lost something important."

"What? The only weapon that kills vampires?"

"Draculans."

"Pardon?" Kelly said.

"Their preferred name. And yes, I lost the dagger that kills them. It's a special one made from a material we had back on Jasminua."

"And let me guess, there's only one of them." Kelly folded her arms.

"No, my parents have five, but I only have the one. And they live way out in Indiana."

"So how does this dagger kill them? I thought it took a stake through the heart..."

"No, that's a myth. The dagger is made from material from Jasminua and it cuts through steel. It never rusts and as a side benefit, it kills vampires."

"I'm not even going to ask you how you found out it could kill vampires."

"That's simple. They're from my planet."

"Really?"

"Yes, they're a nasty breed. Mercenaries all of them. They came here a long time ago when they were contracted to build the pyramids," Liam said.

"But of course," Kelly said.

"I think it's dawn now. It's probably safe. I mean safe to leave the church." Liam said, "I don't know why sunlight damages them. They are a different form of creature, violent and eternal. There aren't many of them left on Jasminua. I think that's why they like it here, no natural predators."

Kelly said, "Until you came along?"

"My people are a lot like those on earth. That's why we moved here. We're peaceful. I know it's hard to believe."

"Yes, it is. You realize that if I haven't had my neck practically bitten off, I wouldn't believe anything you're telling me."

"Listen, I need to find that dagger before tonight when that vampire will be back. If I know anything about Draculans, it's they're persistent."

"Where do you think you lost it?"

"I believe it fell out when I went through the floor the vampire broke," Liam said.

"The floor! What a disaster! How am I going to explain what happened?" Kelly said.

"Not with the truth I'm afraid. Maybe we can find my weapon and get out of here before anybody sees us."

The pair walked to the back of the church and down the stairs. The brightness of the morning sunshine through the windows made the shiny dagger visible.

"Thank God it's here!" Liam hurried to pick it up from the spot under the hole.

"Why does the dagger work?"

"The mineral isn't just a mineral. It detects enzymes inside a person's tissue that indicated if they are a murderer. Every time a creature murders another, the killer's body changes. The blade's material releases counter enzymes and acts like poison, but enough of it must reach the brain quickly or it just weakens Draculans."

"So how do you kill them?"

"I go for the neck. I've killed hundreds of them," Liam said.

"I'm glad you found me, Liam."

"I'm glad that cabbie made that call to 911 and my scanner caught it. Usually I get there after the victim is dead."

"That's got to be awful."

"Yeah...I've been trying to trace down this pair of vampires for months."

"Pair?" Kelly asked.

"Twins."

Chapter 7

The shades were pulled because if the light broke through, penetrating the mounds of materials built to block it, then the Van Horns would lose their immortality. Legend had it that Draculans were descendants of Prince Dracula, known to worship Lucifer. As for Draculans, they ruled the darkness yet wouldn't last once light shredded their grip on nature.

Sigman Van Horn walked into his brother's apartment and closed the door right as the sunrise filled the cracks around the buildings. He was anxious to tell Amwolf about the hunter and the girl, but his brother had an old woman sitting in a reclining chair as he examined her leg. Amwolf was performing an early morning exam on one of his patients.

"This went very well. Everything looks good," Amwolf said.

"Thank you, Dr. Van Horn."

Sigman motioned to his brother, who was facing him. Amwolf shook his head and so Sigman went into the kitchen and poured himself a glass of blood.

It was disgusting to drink blood from a bag, and he missed the taste of flesh. It was a poor substitute he complained to Amwolf, but since hunting while weakened couldn't be attempted, he would drink it for convenience, just this once.

Sigman heard Amwolf address the woman at front door. He was glad she was leaving.

"Now, do you have a ride home, Mrs. Parker?"

"Yes, my son is downstairs in the lobby waiting."

Amwolf said, "Thank you for coming here."

"Thank you for seeing me on such short notice. I just love your bedside manner, Dr. Van Horn. When the hospital told me you'd be out for four weeks, I panicked. I didn't want to reschedule. You're an angel to see me!"

"Well, ah, thank you."

Sigman heard the door close and he popped out of the kitchen, "What was that?"

"Just easy money. And I banked some extra blood from her and her son too." Amwolf finished packing up his medical bag.

"Good thinking. We might be holed up here for a while. That hunter cut me last night."

"What happened?" A look of shock crossed his face.

Sigman sat down at the nook set. His hands rested on the table. "It was awful. I was ready to take the second bite of that girl, the one from the alley, and he grabbed her out of the taxi. Then he ran into a church."

"That can't be good," Amwolf said.

"It wasn't. He had that blade on him and he got my shoulder. Then I got a dose of Holy Water!"

“Ouch!”

“Exactly. I couldn't finish him off. Why is that, do you think? Am I getting too old?”

“No. I've seen that Hunter in action. He's just that good. Let me look at your shoulder.” Amwolf got up. Sigman took off his shirt and winced in pain. Amwolf touched his shoulder. “I'll going to stitch it up.”

“Why do you have to stitch me and you get to glue your wound?”

“It's too deep for glue. What a baby! It won't hurt.”

“You always say that and it always hurts.”

“We can't feel pain, at least not as severely as humans.”

“I hate needles.”

“You're a vampire, get over it.”

“Again, with the slur.”

“Just relax. This is so minor...”

“Save it for your paying patients.”

Amwolf opened his medical bag and gave his brother a shot of pain medicine, then he began to close the wound. “You realize that you're in a weakened state now, so you'll need a few days of rest before you can hunt.”

“Well that hunter won't rest, believe me.”

“Did he follow you?”

“Ouch!”

“Sorry,” Amwolf said.

“Nobody followed me, but he rescued that Kelly girl.”

“So, she's alive!” Amwolf said.

“Yes, why do you care?”

“I was at the hospital last night to check up on a patient, and I pulled her records. I read her surgeon's notes and he is a genius--”

“Don't want to hear it,” Sigman said.

“Anyway, the girl's name is Kelly Harper and she's thirty-two years old, single, and--”

“I don't care. Are you done?” Sigman looked over at his shoulder.

“All finished. Don't interrupt. She's a type O.”

“A typo?”

“Isn't that exciting; the possibilities.”

“She's a mistake?”

“Type O blood. Her blood type, stupid.”

“Who cares? A good bite is a good bite, no matter what the blood type.”

“You're not listening, are you? She was born under a full moon. I checked. You could change her, take her for your bride. Think of it, you could have Draculans born not made!”

“Turn her yourself. I'm through with women.”

“You know I have too much going on with my work to settle down right now and start a family. But you...you have nothing to do. It would give Mother so much satisfaction if you'd take another bride, and to find one with type O, that might give her a granddraculan. Why, she'd probably talk Dad into putting you back into his will.”

“You raise a good point. Dad's not getting any younger, one day a hunter or sunlight is bound to catch up with him and if I'm out of the will, I'll be stuck with homeless men for centuries.”

“Touché!”

“But I don't want another bride, I keep thinking of Victoria.”

“What about the other ninety-nine? There must have been a few that were worth taking?”

“Maybe one. Bambi. Now that was a fun trip to Vegas. Too bad that hunter found her in Beverly Hills.”

Amwolf nodded.

“Those Draculan hunters saved me a ton of money by killing off ninety-eight of my brides.”

Amwolf put away his equipment again.

Sigman offered, “May I help?”

“No, it's done. I'm tired. I think I'll get some rest.”

“Me too. It was the worst night of my life.”

“Worse than Salem?”

“Please! That was a walk in the park compared to last night. The only thing that would have been worse is a visit from Mother.” Sigman began to laugh. “If Mother found out a girl that could give her granddraculans is available and I didn't turn her, could you imagine? She'd tear me up.” Sigman laughed so hard, tears rolled down his cheeks. “Thank the Devil she won't ever find out!”

“Umm, Sig.”

“Yes, what is it?”

“I told Mommy about her.”

“You didn't!”

“Yes, I let it slip out.”

“You did it on purpose to punish me! I won't take another bride, I won't!”

“Well, you don't have to, Mom suggested I take one.”

“Oh sure, her favorite son would give her granddraculans!”

“Now, now. I told her I thought it would be a better option for you. See I do care, Sigman. I hope this will make amends and then you'll get your trust fund back.”

“So I can get out of your apartment!”

“No. The money would be a good thing, but you need direction and purpose to your existence. Staying up all night, binging, all those things, you need direction.”

“If only I could get an acting job. I'd have purpose in spades!”

Chapter 8

Kelly dragged herself across the street to St. Agnes' Soup Kitchen. She knew Sister would be preparing for the lunch crowd at this hour in the morning and she headed directly to the back kitchen.

Sister Maryann stirred the pots on the stove-top, and then set the spoon on a large platter sitting on a counter next to the stove. Her navy-blue dress and veil not only hid her body, but acted as a shield from her initial reaction over the hard luck stories she became used to hearing.

Kelly recalled how bright and happy she was her first week at the mission, only to be hardened to the plight of the downtrodden after weeks of stories. She found the reasons for the clients' conditions similar, and her own heart turned cold.

Sister Maryann took her aside a few weeks into the job and advised her to pray every morning for compassion. Kelly found that it worked on most mornings, until she met a vampire. What would she tell Sister? Liam instructed her to say as little as possible, only that she needed a few weeks off for a family emergency. Was it a lie? How would she lie to a nun? Kelly usually followed Sister's orders, and the Soup Kitchen went on with its business of feeding the masses of poor, broken individuals.

Kelly stated bluntly, "Sister, I need to take a few weeks off from work. I have a family emergency."

"Oh dear. I hope that it's not serious. A few weeks?" She paused, and studied Kelly. "We can manage it without you for that amount of time."

"Thank you, Sister. And thanks for not asking me..."

"If you wanted to tell me, you would have told me. I'll pray for you, my dear. And, do you need anything?"

Kelly knew Sister had a sense about people in trouble. "No, no. I'm fine. It's...thank you for the prayers."

Liam waited for Kelly in the taxi.

When she returned, she shook a little, a residual reaction to the lack of sleep and life-threatening night they shared. Kelly wasn't sure how this would end, probably badly. She glanced at Liam, and felt grateful.

The cab took off for Liam's apartment. Finally, the cab pulled up in front of his apartment complex which was walking distance to downtown. His home was on the seventh floor. She wondered how he could afford it. They didn't speak as they took the elevator up, he glanced at her and smiled. The apartment was well-appointed and his art collection was inspiring. She looked at him. He was a surprise.

"I must say your apartment is stunning."

“Thank you. I suppose you're wondering--”

“Listen, you told me you're an alien, is it a stretch to believe you're a rich alien?”

“I knew I liked you. Would you like to sleep? It's been a long night, and I have a guest bedroom.” Liam said.

“No, I'm not tired. I would like to shower though.”

“I understand. The bathroom is off the bedroom. This way.” Liam led her down a long hallway. The bedroom was large and the double bed was covered with a thick, white quilt. “If you'd like I could give you a bathrobe.”

“Thanks. I suppose I'll have to grab some clothes from my apartment later.”

Liam said, “No. You can't go back. It's too dangerous. Vampires are cunning hunters. I'm positive they've found out all about you already. You can go shopping later.”

“I didn't think of that. Thanks for helping me. It's beyond the scope of noble.”

Liam sat on the bed. He put his head down. “I'm not noble. I should tell you about me before you stay here.”

Kelly sat down. She braced herself for the story, no matter how disturbing it might be. She put her hand on his shoulder and then she gently stroked his back. “It can't be that bad.”

He looked at her. “I guess since I told you about my planet, it wouldn't be too much to tell you about my family's sordid history. The reason I hunt vampires, the reason my family can kill them, we used to be them. I mean the history of my family, not me personally. I have an uncle who is a Draculan. Not only was he violently attacked, but after, he roamed our planet killing others. I don't want anybody to suffer his fate.”

“I'm sorry,” Kelly said.

“So am I.”

“I'm happy that you told me about your uncle. I think I understand you better. Why you hunt them,” Kelly said.

“If I stop to think about what I do, it's insane. All my life I've been conditioned to fight. I think it was because of my uncle. He was notorious. He's kill hundreds of people. I'm afraid I'll become a Draculan like him, destined to kill to survive. And they enjoy it. I don't want to be turned into a monster,” Liam said.

“Me too. I'm really frightened. What if they get to me? I'm not afraid to die as much as I'm afraid...I'm afraid of being tied to that thing. I don't want it to turn me into it's...” She stood up.

“I want to give you my dagger.”

“No. I couldn't. I couldn't kill it.”

“You won't be afraid if you carry it. You'll have a way to protect yourself.”

“I don't think I could resist it. He has a power over me and I can't fight. I need you to promise you'll kill it.”

“You know I'll do my best.”

“What's your plan?”

“The plan? All I know is Draculans find you. I don't need a plan.”

“How?”

“It's as easy as finding out your name. Where you work. Your relatives.”

“Your relatives? My sister!”

Chapter 9

Kelly got out of the shower and slipped on a robe. She tucked it around her and tied the belt. Her sister hadn't picked up the phone.

Kelly opened the bedroom door. She walked down the hall and into the living room. The sounds of a whirling vacuum filled the apartment and Kelly saw a maid vacuuming the carpet. The woman turned the vacuum towards Kelly and looked at her with a surprised expression. The maid turned off the machine and began to yell at her in a language Kelly didn't understand. She did understand the finger in her face meant that the maid was upset with her.

Liam came down the hallway, wearing shorts, and asked, "What's the problem?"

The woman turned to him, looked at how he was dressed, then back at Kelly, wagged her finger at Liam and then pointed at Kelly. Her hands flew wildly and then Liam soothed her by speaking to her in her native tongue and the maid calmed down, then gave a "humph" in Kelly's direction, and wheeled the vacuum cleaner out back to the laundry room off the kitchen.

Kelly said, "What was that about?"

Liam smiled. He said, "I think she thinks you and I are -- romantically involved. That robe doesn't quite cover all of you,"

Kelly grabbed the robe and pulled it tightly up to her neck. "You are no gentlemen to point that out."

"No, on the contrary, I'd be less a gentleman if I didn't tell you."

The maid came back and asked Liam in broken English, "Okay then?"

"Yes, Mrs. Clerlin."

She turned to Kelly, who said to the maid, "I'm his friend. Just a friend."

"I'm not born yesterday."

A bemused Liam sat down on his couch.

Leola Harper was confused when she got her sister's urgent message which made her curious enough that she hauled herself to the address she was given. She thought the apartment meant the Insurance Man must have collected some sort of payout himself.

Kelly opened the door and flung her arms around her sister. "Thank goodness you're all right."

Leola said, "Why wouldn't I be all right?"

"Come inside, it will be dark soon. Did you bring a suitcase?"

"Yeah. It's a pretty odd request. But seeing how you're dressed, a good one."

Liam Abraham appeared in the living room. "Leola, I'm glad you're here."

Leola whispered to Kelly, "So you snagged the Insurance Guy from the bar, nice going. I didn't think you'd ever land a guy with a job, let alone a million-dollar apartment. Get pregnant, quick!"

"Just stop talking and listen! We're in great danger!" Kelly's eyes grew wide.

Leola laughed at her sister.

"I'll tell you that our lives are in danger! There's something hunting me, and because of that, you're in danger too!" Kelly shook her sister's shoulders to make her point.

Liam said, "It's true. I know it's hard to believe. I'm afraid we all might be killed if we travel in the dark."

"What are you saying?" Leola said.

"Leola, I wasn't just attacked three weeks ago; I was nearly killed by the Son of the Devil."

"Call that maniac anything you want, Sis."

Liam said, "She was attacked by Draculans. Vampires. Think about her wounds. Weren't they strange?"

"Yeah, but the police said --" Leola said.

"The police are wrong, I've seen these things up close. We can't go out in the dark. You need to stay here," Liam said.

"For how long?" Leola asked.

"As long as it takes me to kill them," Liam said.

"You're going to kill them? Why not just wear garlic and throw holy water at them if they attack?" Leola said.

"Tried it." Kelly folded her arms.

Liam said, "I know this sounds strange."

"Oh, you betcha. So, there are vampires in downtown Philadelphia. What am I supposed to say to that? And now you're telling me wearing garlic for protection doesn't work," Leola said.

"I'm afraid not much kills them. Except Liam, he's killed hundreds," Kelly glanced at Abraham with admiration.

"Your boyfriend is a Vampire Hunter? Can you explain how?"

"I'm an alien," Liam said.

"I don't care about your undocumented status, this is America for crying out loud."

Kelly said, "A bona fide alien from another planet!"

"I need a drink," Leola said.

“I'll get you a martini,” Liam said.

“Make it a double,” Leola said.

Abraham went into the kitchen. Leola said, “I don't care how rich he is, I'm getting you out of here.” She took Kelly's arm.

“There are two vampires after me, and they almost killed the both of us last night. If you leave this apartment, I can't protect you. Liam can. Please, stay the night.”

“For you sweetie, I'll stay.”

Chapter 10

Sigman Van Horn looked in the mirror of the bathroom as he shaved. The foamy cream guided his razor because the rest of him was invisible. It was okay as he started, but by the end he was just guessing. The candles were lit and while they gave the apartment a romantic ambiance, it was a necessity too. He pulled on his black slacks, dress shirt and shoes and imagined his date would look into his eyes rather soon into the evening. His brother, Amwolf, knocked on the bathroom door, and Sigman opened it. His brother had on scrubs and was headed for work.

“So, you have a date?” Amwolf asked.

“How else will I get a meal now that I've lost my strength? You've gotten back yours, two last night, you're back in action.”

Amwolf smiled. “It feels so good to be back in full form.”

“I wish I could hunt rather than date my game. It loses that pizzazz when I have to talk to my meal.”

Amwolf said, “Yes, well I think this will be the last week you're on a restricted diet.”

“You're lifting it?”

“After tonight, yes.”

“I could kiss you!”

Amwolf said, “Don't you dare!”

The doorbell rang.

“How do I look?” asked Sigman.

“Like a tiger,” Amwolf said.

“Growl!”

The windless day worried Liam Abraham. He offered shelter for the two frightened sisters for a week and still the twin vampires were quiet. Why hadn't they come out of hiding? He was glad for Kelly's sake and her nerves were finally calm as the nightmare she endured seemed to be ending. Yet Liam wondered.

The police log offered no real hints, but then again, it was likely that the city was hiding the killings. The tourists took pictures of the Liberty Bell and the cobbled streets were filled after the panic of the previous month quieted. Men, women, and children strolled through the fallen leaves covering the ground and many had taken off their jackets that balmy October day.

Blades of grass poked out between bricks and leaves along the street and the sun beat down imposing its dominance on the inhabitants of the city. Sunlight meant no Draculan would be

lurking down alleyways or in shadows of building. Philly was a sunny place, a peculiar choice for vampires. If he'd guess, the pair must have jobs somewhere in the city, and somewhere not too far from the attacks, otherwise it was too risky to live there. He made his way back from his insurance office to his apartment.

Kelly promised to cook for him. Liam smiled. It was different for him, unusual to find somebody there at the end of the day. It had been that way once a long time ago for a time, but when he flew off to find Draculans, he returned to discover her belongings were gone and she had left town. It was the way it was and he was used to keeping his life quiet, even if it meant he would remain alone.

Keeping secrets wasn't a way to win somebody's love, or trust. Yet now he had no secrets from Kelly. He looked forward to the end of the day, to her smile, to her soft voice full of interest at what he said. Liam smiled to himself.

He got to his door and when he opened it, instead of a smiling Kelly, he found a note. She wrote that she had been called to the Soup Kitchen by Sister Maryann who needed her help to process ten new clients. Sister had a meeting that couldn't wait, and the homeless men needed dinner.

Sweat began to collect on the small of his back. She was out at dusk. He raced back to his bedroom, grabbed his dagger, ran out of the apartment, and past a bewildered Leola who was getting off the elevator.

"Hold that elevator!" Liam shouted.

"What's wrong?" Leola asked as she held the door.

"I got to go to the shelter. I've got to hurry," Liam said.

"Stupid Kelly! I'm coming too."

Kelly checked her phone and then she stepped out of the cab. Leola texted her to say wait for her inside the mission. The sun was setting and the buildings' long shadows filled the space of the alleys. Kelly thought of her attack inside the alley, one like this one, dumpsters ready and available to collect death before light cast the deeds into the conscience of mankind.

A homeless man whose body odor made him unbearable to stand near opened the door for her. The dirty and broken pockets hanging off his jacket worked double time as gloves for poverty was the father of invention.

"Good evening, Kelly. We haven't seen you here for a spell."

"Hey Jack. I'm glad to see you're doing okay." Kelly said. "Be careful tonight. Make sure you stay away from the alleys, okay? Sleep near the church or the shelter."

Jack smiled at her with his broken teeth giving him a jack-o-lantern aura.

"Sure, I'll stay near the shelter."

"I mean it. No alleys. Promise? There are dangers there..."

“Sure, can do.”

“Good.” Kelly shook his hand. “I don't want anything bad to happen to you. Understand?”

“Bad? Like living on the streets?” He let out a roaring laugh.

“Like dying in the alley,” Kelly said in a quiet voice.

“Dying ain't the worst thing to happen to a soul. You and the good nun know it better than most. The worst thing is never lovin' somebody.”

Kelly looked at old, broken Jack. How was it wisdom lived where nobody thought to look?

Chapter 11

Kelly walked along the left side of the room. The lights were bright and she waited for Liam and Leola. Somebody tapped her on her back and she turned to see a man she couldn't place.

“Ms. Kelly. Sister Maryann asked me to fetch you.”

“She did? She called and told me she was at a meeting.” Kelly was angry at her. How could she be so thoughtless?

“She told me to send you to the back room.”

“Thanks.”

Kelly went past the bathrooms and down a narrow hallway to the large room where they stored extra tables and chairs and where Sister had a small office. She knocked, and Sister called to her to come inside. She walked around chairs and a long table and found Sister Maryann sitting at her desk.

“You wanted to see me?” Kelly asked.

“I'm sorry. Those men said they wouldn't hurt you if I did what they told me.”

Kelly began to back away from her, from the entrapment. Backwards, step-by-step and she would rewind the danger and tuck it back inside the waning daylight, if she might make it to the door. She backed up until she felt a hand reach and touch her neck. A finger slid along her vein as a moan came from behind her. The nail dug into her chin and left a scratch just below. She dared not turn, for she knew his scent. The smell of cologne—like a tropical thunderstorm infused with the smell of musk--made her sick to her stomach. The finger dug in deep and as the small drop of blood trickled down her neck, another moan came from behind her and the finger on her neck moved down to the blood drop and smeared the liquid as it pressed the scratch hard, opening it up for more blood to flow. Then the finger moved from her neck and she closed her eyes as the sucking sound of a finger to pursed lips made her quiver.

She saw Sister Maryann rise from her seat, and walk to her. Sister took the hand around Kelly's neck and moved it. The vampire seemed startled by Sister.

Then the door opened and another vampire, identical in looks to the first one, said, “He's here.”

“Who?” asked Sigman.

“The Draculan Hunter. He found us. We've got to go. Take the girl and go out the back door to the alley.”

“Nonsense,” Sigman lifted Kelly and she gasped. “we should kill him here and now. Then we'd be rid of him once and for all. You're into health food. You deal with him.”

Sister Maryann said, “Let go of Kelly, then you may leave.”

Sigman dropped Kelly, who fell to the floor. He looked at Amwolf and they laughed.

Amwolf moved so close to Sister Maryann that she closed her eyes as he spoke. "Who's the drifter?"

Kelly said, "Please, let her go. I'll...I'll go with you. Just let my friend go."

Sigman bent down, took Kelly's hand and kissed it. "Ahh, my future bride is trying to be noble. Just look into my eyes and you will see how devoted I am to you."

Kelly glanced to the floor. "If you let her go, I'll look into your eyes."

Sigman then turned his attention to the nun. "Well, the drifter can't dress. Look at the polyester threads. Tisk tisk." Sigman moved his right index finger over his left. "Shame on you!"

Amwolf joined the conversation by saying, "She's committing the first cardinal sin of fashion by wearing a fabric which is flame retardant. Ugh! Have you considered this smock in rayon?"

"Not rayon, try cotton. Poverty is no excuse to be uncomfortable. And your hemline went out in 1274."

"More like 1537, brother, and I think it was King Henry the eighth who sat on the throne the last time I saw a dress like this in fashion. I suppose we should put the sad creature out of her misery, in a compassionate, quick way."

"NO!" Kelly said. The twins turned to view her.

Sister said, "Kelly, I'm not afraid to die. I can't allow you to leave with these men."

"I couldn't live with myself if these monsters got to you," Kelly cried out.

Amwolf folded his arms and said, "What about my dinner? Hmm?"

"I'll stop by that Chinese restaurant down the street and pick up take-out," Sigman suggested as he lifted Kelly to her feet.

Amwolf nodded, "Nah, I'm too hungry."

Amwolf found the light switch and turned off the lights. Kelly was unable to move as she heard the sounds of Sister screaming.

Then, faint sounds from the dining hall drowned out the sounds of prayers and gurgles and Kelly knew what was happening to her friend. How she wanted to kill the monster who had her pinned against his fanged teeth.

Amwolf wiped his mouth and then said, "Don't kill her. Remember, Mother wants granddraculans."

Kelly's tears streaked across her flushed cheeks, the anger replaced with her fear. If Sister Maryann in all her goodness wouldn't be spared, why would she? Kelly wanted to live. She willed to survive. Would Liam be able to save her? If she was smart, maybe she could escape. Death wasn't the worst of it. Living as the undead would be unbearable. Would she hunt people? Would she suck the life-blood from innocent individuals? If this beast turned her into one of them, what perpetual horror show would she host? No, she would find a way to let him drain her blood if need be, rather than live forever a vampire's life. She would find another way out. If only she could have warned Sister. If only she would have lived anywhere other than

Philadelphia. If only she would have never felt the painless prick on her veins from his bite.

Kelly felt the wind as the door to the back office opened. She looked up. Sounds of the dining hall with a subdued hum of plates clanking vanished as the door shut.

Liam switched the lights on and lunged towards the Draculans.

"No! Not now, Draculan Hunter! A dead girl is the last thing you want," Amwolf said. He put his hands over his eyes for a moment until he adjusted to the light.

"Kelly!" Leola yelled. Kelly dared not make a sound.

Leola then looked at a dead Sister Maryann, her body draped over her desk, and she screamed. Liam took a step toward Sigman and Kelly, his silver dagger drawn.

"Let her go, and I'll let you leave," Liam said.

"Better yet, I'll let *you* live. A fight right now wouldn't be prudent," Sigman said.

"Let her go! If you don't I'll—" Liam said.

"You'll do what? I hate to disappoint you, but she'll be my bride soon and then I'll send her to kill you." Sigman laughed as if the thought was ironic.

"No!" Leola said.

Amwolf moved towards a window and pushed it open, and with a flash he jumped out of it and into trash cans. Liam began to move, but Sigman pulled Kelly so tight she let out a yell of pain, and Liam stopped.

"Don't be foolish. We all want to survive. Why don't you go back under that rock you crawled out of and let us be? Nobody misses those humans we eat. As someone of superior stock, why would you care? If you disappear now, then I won't hunt you. Think of it, all you need to do is look the other way."

"If you let go of the girl, then I'll walk away. If you don't," Liam held his dagger higher and said, "I'll end you tonight!"

"Let's at least get on the same page! I say, 'get out of here and I'll let you live'. You say, 'let her go or I'll end you tonight'. Thanks for the tempting offer, but I'll keep her so my Mommy will have granddraculans."

Sigman Van Horn picked up Kelly. "Toodle-oo!" He gripped Kelly as he jumped out of the window. Metal tin lids rattled as they tipped over the cans, securing an almost soft landing. Then Sigman lifted and hoisted her over his shoulder.

Kelly looked up towards the window and saw Liam and Leola above the trash collection site. Then with record speed, they disappeared into the dark night.

"Stay here!" Liam ordered Leola.

He jumped out the large window and onto the trash. Then Liam got up and ran as fast as he could, and when he got out of the alley, he saw the pair climb into a cab.

He looked to find another cab, but there were none to be found. He put his hands on his head,

realizing he might have lost the only girl he had cared for in a long while. If she was turned into a vampire, he would be forced to kill her.

Liam looked up at the night sky as a gelatin orange sunset was hidden behind the buildings. He kicked the tire of a rickety bicycle set against a wall.

Leola opened the front door of the building. She stared at Liam and said, "You didn't find my baby sister and that monster?" She put her hand over her mouth as her sobs began.

Liam walked over to her and put his arms around her. "I'll find her. They won't kill her."

"No, it's worse. They'll change her into one of them."

"I'll find her before they do. They must live close. I've narrowed it down to five square blocks. It's just there are so many apartments."

Leola looked at him. "So many? The chances aren't good you'll find her in time."

"I just need a break. I'll get it."

"If you don't...if they turn her into a Draculan, you'll have to kill her."

Leola began to cry and Liam let her. If he weren't trained so well, he'd have cried too.

Kelly opened her eyes and realized she was sleeping on a couch in a tiny room. She heard cabinet doors close. She tumbled off the couch, remembering the vampire had forced her into a taxi, but she couldn't recall anything else. Had he hypnotized her? The room was probably a large closet. She jiggled the doorknob and found that the door was locked. Then she heard laughter and the door opened. A tall man was wiping the counters of the compact kitchen.

"Hello sleepy head! That horse pill you gave her really knocked her out, Wofie."

"Welcome to our humble home, Kelly Harper," said a man who looked identical the one cleaning the counter tops. "Please sit down, we won't bite."

The other man stopped what he was doing, looked over at his brother and laughed. Then the other one joined him in his laughter as they continued to find the joke funny for a few moments.

Amwolf said, "By the way, I have more blood stored in the fridge. I'm afraid we must order out for her dinner."

"You expect me to drink that homeless shelter grub? I'll pass," Sigman said.

"Suit yourself. I know it's not as sweet as a young woman's blood," Amwolf leered at Kelly, "but it keeps me strong. And I don't need to constantly diet."

"Oh no, you don't! It's genetics, I take after Father and put on weight far too easily."

Kelly felt sick and clutched her stomach.

"Oh, forgive us for not asking you to sit." Sigman pulled out the other chair and she sat down. She glanced between them, wondering why she was still alive.

Amwolf said, "If she is going to be your bride, you better teach her how to dress. Over in the closet are a few dresses I picked up."

"You want me to put on a fancy party dress?" Kelly asked.

Amwolf clapped his hands together. "Go to the closet and put on the gown I picked out for you. I must inspect it before Mother arrives on the red-eye."

"Better hurry before Mother arrives. If she doesn't approve, type O blood or not, you won't like it," Sigman said.

She turned to see Sigman Van Horn. "Who are you?"

"I'm Sigman. He's Amwolf. Mother is Mrs. Van Horn until the wedding. Then you may call her Mother Van Horn, but only after you produce an heir."

"An heir?" Kelly asked.

"Yes, you can bear vampire children," Amwolf said.

"Stop using that term!" Sigman said.

"Sorry, he gets so sensitive, he's an actor," Amwolf said.

Kelly looked at the twins. How would she escape? She must keep them happy until she found a way. If she lived until morning, she might find a way out.

Kelly said, "All right, I'll try your dress on."

"Sweet, it's over there." Amwolf pointed to a door near the front door.

Kelly got up went to the front closet, found the sexy black gown and high heels and she took them into her arms.

"The bathroom is over there." Sigman pointed to a door across the room.

"Hey, Sig. Give me a hand with dinner."

Kelly glanced at them opening the refrigerator. She slowly walked to the bathroom and closed the bathroom door. It was a large bathroom with a seat and closet.

Kelly took off her tee, jeans and sneakers and she put on the beaded gown and heels. There was a slit in the right side and her leg showed through. As she looked in the mirror she realized she looked the part of a vampire bride.

"You need red lipstick, in the top drawer." said Amwolf. She looked into the mirror and saw only her own reflection. She turned to see Amwolf in the doorway.

"Oh, I didn't hear the door open."

"We Draculans are quiet hunters. Put on the lipstick please." She obeyed him and then he said, "Now turn around."

Kelly slowly turned around.

"Yes, you'll do nicely. You have high cheek bones, Mother will like it. She said you can tell

good stock from the cheeks. You're beautiful.”

Amwolf went up to her and caressed her shoulders.

“Where'd everyone go?” Sigman entered the room and Kelly glanced at him as Amwolf slid his hand around her waist.

“She's my future bride,” Sigman said.

He took Kelly by the hand and guided her past his brother.

Amwolf slipped his hand around her waist again as she passed by him and she stopped. Amwolf said, “Maybe we could share that third bite? Don't we share everything? Look at her rump in this dress--”

Sigman turned and moved his brother's hand off her waist. “Rump roast will clog your arteries, Doctor. I know of a healthier alternative in the kitchen.”

Amwolf said, “Maybe the girl should decide who should get the third bite. Maybe when she compares being the bride of an out-of-work actor to that of a doctor, she might want to reconsider the options.”

Sigman's face flashed anger, “No you don't! I bit her first. Get your own bride. I spend all this time hunting down girls, and you want the best one I've found in centuries! Don't forget, I still can whip you if I want to!”

“Can not!”

“Can too!”

“Can NOT!”

Kelly looked between the two and thought of her own complicated relationship with Leola. “Stop fighting! You're twins. You shouldn't be fighting.”

Amwolf and Sigman looked at her. She waited, the silence hanging in the air. She thought that perhaps she erred by speaking to them.

“Finally, someone who can control us.” Sigman put the knuckle of his pointer finger into his mouth.

“I apologize.” Amwolf bent slightly, took her hand and kissed it. “Wisdom from your future bride. You have chosen well, Siggie.”

Kelly didn't know quite what happened, but she needed a drink. “I think I'd like a glass of wine.”

“Oh, poor dearest. You must be thirsty. All I have is blood or water,” Sigman said.

“I'll take water.”

“Of course.” Sigman let go of her, bowed, and left the bathroom.

Amwolf said, “I am sorry for so many things, Kelly. I should keep myself in check. After all, you will be a mother soon. Then you'll gain weight, dress in sweats, and be completely stressed

out caring for the baby Draculan who will throw up blood all over you. After the diaper changing, sleepless nights, and completely letting yourself go, no male Draculan will touch you again.”

“What a comfort that thought is. Thank you,” Kelly said. “Can I take off the dress now?”

“Yes, you'll be wearing it tomorrow, so hang is up carefully.”

“Tomorrow?”

“At your engagement party. Mother and Dad are flying in specially to host it. A lot of very important Draculans will be there.”

A thunderstorm blew into the city center and the lights went out.

“How nice, a blackout,” Sigman said.

“Yes, it's so quaint to have pitch black again, reminds me of two hundred years ago. The good old days in so many ways,” Amwolf said.

Kelly entered the living room dressed in a purple cock-tale dress and Sigman said, “Looky, my bride is gorgeous, for a human. Wait my dear,” Sigman got up off the sofa. “Wait until you see how wonderful the life of a Draculan is.”

“Is your Mother here?” Kelly asked.

“Will be here any minute,” Amwolf said.

“Don't be nervous to meet her. She's harmless, relatively speaking,” Sigman said.

Kelly nodded. She heard a muffled sound in the kitchen then the cry of “help, help” came out from behind the swinging doors.

“Excuse me while I take care of dinner.” Amwolf got up and moved quickly to the kitchen.

“It's so hard to salivate over a good meal. Poor Amwolf. Don't worry, my pet. The tourist off the duck boat won't suffer at all. Amwolf is a skilled surgeon.”

Kelly tried to hide her horror and glanced down.

“Oh, I love those shoes,” Sigman said.

“I didn't pick them out.”

“You'll have to learn to shop at the right places. Mother will help you, she does the fashion shows at New York twice a year.” Sigman leaned in close and Kelly thought he might be staring at her neck—a slight scar was still visible from her attack—and then he whispered, “Father is loaded.”

“I'm not that interested in fashion, or money,” Kelly said.

Sigman said, “You should be. You look wickedly good in plum. And this dress shows off your lovely neck.” He touched her neck softly like he was touching a rare jewel. His fingertips caressed her as they slid along her throat. “So many lovely parts of a woman. So much to

drink in of her beauty.”

Kelly closed her eyes as he continued to speak. “Even immortals are envious of the power of enchanting prettiness. Some Draculans call humans inferior beings, and this for the most part is true...yet when one captures the gaze of not just one superior being, but of two, then this woman is deserving to become one of our kind.”

The doorbell rang. Sigman turned towards it. Amwolf Van Horn opened the folding doors and appeared. “Oh, Mother is here!” He turned the handle of the door.

Kelly viewed the spectacle in front of her. There stood an elegantly appointed woman wearing a leather coat and mini skirt and leggings. She wore high heels and carried an over-sized expensive handbag. She was model thin and tall. She wore sunglasses in the darkness and took them off as she entered the flat.

“It's so good to see you,” she said in a deep voice, “my son, the doctor!” She turned to size up Kelly. “So, this is what all the fuss has been about. A puny little oaf of a girl.”

Sigman raced to his mother's side. “Now, Mother, she will give you granddraculans. I thought you'd be pleased that I'm taking the first step to a stable life. No more wild ways.”

Mrs. Van Horn squinted at him. “You promise?”

“Cross my heart, Mommy,” Sigman said. Mrs. Van Horn touched his face. “Oh, you're such a darling boy. I understand how difficult it must be, the limited choices of suitable brides. Even if you tire of her, the children will be worth it.” Her lower lip trembled as if she were about to cry.

Amwolf went to her other side. “Dearest Mother. What's the matter?” He took her hand into his own.

“Yes, Mommy. Do tell.” Sigman said.

“It's your Father. He's gone off and taken another bride. You'd think at his age, over eight hundred and sixty years old, he'd have given up his old ways. All I've done for him, and this is the thanks I get. I'm tempted to find another Draculan myself.”

“You can't be serious. Please reconsider,” Amwolf said. “A divorce is harder than you think.”

“Yes, and think about the money.”

“Money? Is that all you think of, Sigman?”

“Yes, I mean no,” Sigman said.

“It's of no consequence. He'll be here later.”

“Thank the Devil!” said Sigman.

Mrs. Van Horn said, “He's not foolish enough to be a no show at the engagement party of the decade.”

Kelly said, “Engagement party?”

“She's speaking to me?” Mrs. Van Horn said.

Sigman put his index finger to his lips to warn Kelly. Amwolf made a cutting motion over his neck to tell her to stop.

“Yes, I am.” Kelly folded her arms.

Mrs. Van Horn glared at her.

Amwolf said, “There is an engagement gala being given in Sigman's honor by Mother and Father tonight at the Museum. Our parents are patrons to academics and the arts.”

“She better give you an heir or she'll be worse than Victoria. Tell the tramp to change out of the cocktail dress. I'm heading over now,” Mrs. Van Horn said.

“But I have dinner waiting,” Amwolf said.

“I'll eat on the way, thank you,” Mrs. Van Horn said.

Chapter 12

The museum was filled with those individuals who were seen and those who came to see them-- senators, governors, Hollywood starlets, industry tycoons. Kelly had never seen so many luxury cars: Jaguar, Porsche, Aston Martin, Rolls-Royce, Lamborghini. All were parked along the closed off block surrounding the place. Sigman's father must be important she realized. She saw a limousine stop next and she waited to greet the next guest inside the lobby. She was startled to see her Great Aunt Betty Harper wobble in with her cane.

"Dearest Leola!" Her aunt kissed her in greeting and almost fell over.

"Are you okay?" Kelly asked.

"Yes, dear. I'm happy to be here. It's not every day that my niece gets engaged. And not just engaged to a nobody! To find your true love is the son of tycoon Count Van Horn...well, you did well for yourself, Leola."

"I'm Kelly. I'm the younger one."

"Oh, dear. Now I understand."

"Understand what?"

"When I phoned to congratulate you, I phoned Leola. I thought it odd that you hadn't a clue to what I was talking about. I had to read the invitation that I received over the phone."

"You called Leola? She knows about the gala?" Kelly had hope for the first time that she might escape her fate.

"Yes, that's right. Will you introduce me to your fiancé?"

Kelly glanced over at Sigman Van Horn who was beside a menacing looking man who Kelly assumed must be his father. Sigman saw her stare, and he whispered in the ear of his father, then made his way through the crowd of bejeweled ladies and sophisticated gentlemen.

"Here comes Sigman now." Kelly said. "Please don't say anything about Leola to Sigman."

"Why not, dear?"

"They don't get along."

"Oh!" Her great aunt's hand flew to her mouth to stop her from speaking.

"Neither do my parents. They refused to attend. So please, don't say anything."

"Oh, I won't, I wouldn't want to hurt his feelings."

Kelly smiled at the mention of Sigman and feelings. If he and his relations had any feelings at all, it was equivalent to those a tiger might have as he pounced on his prey.

Sigman bowed to Kelly's great aunt. "Charmed to make your acquaintance. You must be Kelly's aunt."

"I'm delighted to make yours! Welcome to the family."

Kelly and Sigman entered the museum main hall which was filled with dim chandeliers. Kelly's expression became that of a patient receiving a grim prognosis with no chance of survival. Sigman took her by the arm and led her through the crowd. He took a detour away from the gathering and into a coatroom.

Sigman pulled her close and whispered, "It won't be long now." He began to kiss her on the throat. His unexpected advances took her by surprise, and she pushed him off her.

"What are you doing?" Kelly asked.

"I'm getting ready for the after party. You know that tonight I'll change you into a Draculan."

"Tonight?"

"Yes, that's why we're having this party. Once our engagement is announced, then I'll change you. Afterward, we can eat the guests. Simple and elegant."

"How would you get away with that?"

"Oh, the fire."

"Fire?"

"Oh, sorry. The explosion. I keep forgetting what Amwolf told me—"

"Explosion?"

"I think that's correct. I forget what he said exactly." He pulled her close to him and said, "I had to pick out the locale, the china plates, and the floral arrangements, as well as send out invitations. I can't remember the unimportant details..."

"You're going to kill all these people and destroy an entire building?"

"Don't worry, the building's insured. Why are you so glum? Soon you'll be my bride. It is the happiest day of your dull, meaningless, and pathetic life. I'm surprised you humans don't cut your own throats after seeing your little insignificant lives. Yet, you are being raised to the highest height of existence, a Draculan! Don't you worry, I'll think of a way you can thank me."

"Thank you?"

Sigman bent down and kissed her neck as Kelly cringed. "Ohhh, darling. I feel your pulse and all that blood inside. Do I shock you if I say you're the best bite I've had in centuries?"

"Yes." Kelly pushed him away as her dress' strap fell over her shoulder, and she fixed it.

Sigman purred, "I love it when you recoil! It makes winning all the sweeter."

"When will it happen?"

"After the announcement. I'd say rather shortly. Mommy hates it when Dad talks up his meals, and he always gets crazy with fresh blood running around. Speaking of Mommy and Dad, I should go and find them. Why don't you stick to the upper part of the museum? Your first hunt

will be the most difficult. I'll make sure there's something easy to tear into..." Sigman began to laugh. "Tear into! Sometimes I crack myself up!"

He continued to laugh as he walked away from the coat room into the main floor. Kelly followed. She scanned the huge room; in the center was the bones of the Tyrannosaurus Rex. The killing machine's shadow fell over the guests of pedigree and social significance. How would she warn them? Why would they believe her? Then she hoped. Kelly hoped that Liam would be there somehow.

Liam Abraham had no plan. He was dressed in a black Armani tuxedo, dagger inside his coat pocket. He hovered near the caterer's van. The workers were moving swiftly as trays of food were being taken inside through a back door. He picked one up and followed a waiter. As he continued through the side concession area of the museum on the lower floor, he took a glass of champagne and instantly blended into the crowd. He saw many people, but to find all the Draculans intermixed with humans would be difficult. He scanned the room for Kelly. Then he looked up and beyond the railing above him, and he saw her. Dressed in an elegant gown, hair in an up-do, with an exquisite red ruby necklace falling to her breasts, she leaned over at the same moment that he looked up. The two locked eyes on the other, hers filled with relief and gratitude, his full of fear and anger.

How would he save her? How would he warn all the people they were in danger? If he could find a way to expose the crowd to a force of light, something like a thousand LED's, then he'd kill them all. At that he had a lightning rod idea, and he nodded at her as she straightened up and nodded back. Then Liam picked up a tray, and with the other waiters, left through the back entrance.

The orchestra played sweet classical tunes and the guests began to dance. Amwolf bowed to Kelly. "May I dance with my future sister-in-law?"

"Oh, why yes," Kelly said. She realized it was to her advantage to be on the dance floor, and more difficult to locate so the announcement would be delayed.

Sigman was addressing two debutantes as she passed him on her way down the stairs. Sigman put out his hand as Amwolf and Kelly passed, forcing them to stop on the steps.

"Would you ladies care for another glass of champagne?"

"Yes," said the taller one. The woman giggled.

"Splendid! If you both go downstairs, there are plenty of waiters to assist you," Sigman said.

"Oh," said the shorter woman.

"Come! Come! Don't dilly dally!" Sigman clapped his hands, and the ladies went down the stairs as Sigman watched.

"Where are you and my betrothed going?" Sigman asked Amwolf.

"Don't get all bent out of shape. I'm just dancing with her," Amwolf said.

"Dancing? All right. But, no nibbling on her neck, and no looking into his eyes. Understand?" Sigman said.

Amwolf said, "Fair enough unless she asks me to bite her." Sigman was silent. Amwolf stated, "You never told her, did you?"

"Told me what?" Kelly asked.

Amwolf said, "Since you're able to carry and bear vampire children--"

Sigman said, "No slurs! Draculan children!"

"Anyway," Amwolf said, "you may choose to wed either of us with our parents blessing."

"See, I knew Mother likes you best."

Amwolf answered, "What are you complaining about? Dad put you back in his will and on the trust fund payroll. So why do you care which of us she chooses? You're the one who hates all his brides!"

"Not true, not true. I was angry when those Draculans hunters killed them."

Amwolf said, "You were not! You tried to post Victoria's address on social media sites that Draculan hunter used to trace down fifty of your brides! Do you really want to be his wife, sweet, innocent Kelly? Remember, I'm a doctor!"

"I found her first, and Dad said he'd prefer me to have a new bride, so there!"

"That's because he figured you'd cost him less money if your new bride kept you from your binge drinking and wild partying!"

"You don't even like Kelly! You just want what you can't have!" Sigman said.

"I do like her...enough."

"See, see how he treats you! Believe me, he won't shower you with diamonds like I will!"

"And how long will that last? Until his roving eye catches another pretty young thing! With me, you'll have a steady Draculan with a stable job!"

"Ha! You mean a boring life. And don't forget what a health freak you are too. You'll be having her diet on those homeless men she's so fond of helping! At least I'll let her cut loose after the baby is born. I'll pack the both of them off to an apartment across the globe where she won't have to see me and I won't have to see her! Wouldn't you like that, dearest?"

Kelly was stunned. She stammered, "Y...yes."

"Time to dance!" Kelly Harper was led to the dance floor by Amwolf Van Horn. She avoided eye contact. Amwolf held her too close.

"If I told you you'd be better off with me, would you look into my eyes?" Amwolf said.

She glanced at him. He reached out and held her chin firmly. With a hypnotic look, she answered, "Oh, Amwolf. You're the better Draculan."

"Yes, I am."

"You have a stable job."

"Yes, I do," Amwolf said.

"Even if you eat the homeless, you help people at work."

"I help all kinds of people, Kelly. I only feed when I must to live. It can be the same for you. You may continue your work at the shelter. I'll work at the hospital. Once our child is born, then we will be extremely happy."

"The shelter," Kelly said.

"Yes, that's right. I'll see to it you run the shelter." Amwolf leaned down and kissed her with passion, fangs beginning to protrude and be visible. Kelly reciprocated the kiss as he touched her throat with one hand. "If I bite you now, there will be no turning back." They swayed as he danced her to the nearby coat room.

"The shelter?" Kelly said as she lost eye contact as they reached the privacy of the closet. Amwolf's fangs were bared as he ran his hands along her backside. His eyes closed as he began to lunge at her.

Kelly said, "Sister Maryann is dead. You killed her."

Amwolf stopped as his fangs reached her and stood straight up. "Look into my eyes, and the third bite won't fill you with pain. If you don't let me hypnotize you, the pain will be worse than childbirth. I don't want you to suffer."

"Did Sister suffer?"

"No." He shook his head as he massaged her neck. He moved behind her and looked her over. "Nobody suffers if I hypnotize them. I don't like pain. And you look so delicious in this dress." He moved his hands over her neck and kissed it.

"Isn't your brother going to be angry that you're doing this?" His fangs retreated back inside his mouth.

"Eventually he'll get over it." His fangs came out again. As she turned to him, she screamed.

Then with a blunt force, Kelly witnessed a flash of a silver dagger cut into Amwolf Van Horn's neck.

Within a second, he turned to dust before her eyes. As the dust fell to the coatroom floor, Kelly made the sign of the cross over them. "Mercy," She prayed.

"Thank God above I found you!" Liam said.

She reached for Liam Abraham and hugged him. He held her tightly for a moment, then let go, wiped his blade with a napkin, put it back in his sheath, and tucked it back into his tuxedo pocket.

"Come on, we're getting out of here!" Liam said.

He took her hand and they ran for the front lobby door. An announcement came over the intercom, "Ladies and Gentlemen. It is time to gather in the Grand Hall. Mr. and Mrs. Van Horn

have an important announcement to make.”

Kelly and Liam got to the front door and then, as if a hurricane blew over them, out of the corner stepped Sigman Van Horn, with a coat draped over his shoulders like a cape. The Draculan faced the hunter as Kelly stood in between. Sigman stood six feet three inches over Liam's six foot one. The men's eyes took a hard stare at the other and Kelly saw Sigman reach for another woman--her great aunt Harper, who happened to be asleep in a chair next to the door.

Aunt Harper woke up and said, “I haven't had champagne in years. Leola? Is it time for your engagement to be announced?”

Sigman helped her to her feet. “Yes, exactly. Kelly darling, if you go with me, I'll let your dear great- aunt go.”

“Go where? I just got here,” her aunt replied.

“Yes, it's time,” Kelly said.

“No!” Liam said.

Kelly turned to him, “I must. I let them get Sister Maryann. I can't let them take my aunt too.”

“If you go, you'll be one of them,” Liam said.

“Don't look so angry, Draculan Hunter. You should be flattered that you'll be her first bite,” Sigman said.

Sigman bared his fangs, and Kelly said, “Not here.”

Sigman said, “The dagger? If you don't hand it over I will make a mess right here and now.” He grabbed Kelly by her arm and twisted it behind her back, causing her to cry out.

Liam took out the dagger from his pocket and handed it to Sigman. “Here you go, vampire.”

“Call me by my proper name. Draculan. Words hurt you know!” He let go of Kelly's arm and she followed Sigman to the main hall.

Liam turned to Kelly's great-aunt and said, “Get out now if you want to live. I mean it!”

Great Aunt Harper looked at him with great fear, and then opened the front door and exited the museum.

Liam closed his eyes for a minute. He turned towards the main hall. He would save Kelly Harper. This time he had a plan.

Chapter 13

Kelly stood next to the T Rex on display. So many people waited on Count Van Horn to take the microphone. He was making his way across the crowd, shaking hands as he approached. They seemed so happy, the people who would be dead before the hour was over.

How fleeting it all was. She would be a slave to the Draculan curse through no fault of her own, and these people would feed her. Drained of their blood, the corpses wouldn't be found after the explosion. Would she kill Liam? Would she even understand that she killed him whom she loved? Could she stand a life as a monster with no end? Only there might be an end. Draculan hunters! There must be more. If she posted on Facebook and left hints, they would find her and kill her. It was her only choice after the third bite.

She saw the time on a clock and realized it was past midnight. It was now Halloween.

Mr. Van Horn paused to kiss his wife before he reached the podium. He saw Kelly and stopped. He walked to her, paused to shake Sigman's hand, and then said to her, "Ah, the type O. I see why Sigman agreed to the wedding." He kissed Kelly and she wanted to run, but he gripped her by her back. He whispered, "If Sigman doesn't work out, coma and see me." He let go and winked.

Kelly felt like fainting. She began to swoon, and Sigman stepped to her and helped steady her.

Sigman said, "Now, now, you don't mean to tell me you faint at the sight of blood." He laughed.

Kelly saw something strange in the corner of her eye, but she dared not turn to it. She had a glimmer of hope, that Liam somehow hatched a plan, a good one.

Mrs. Van Horn stepped closer to Sigman and said, "Where is Amwolf?"

Kelly turned slightly, so as to avoid her eyes; she didn't want to reveal anything to her.

"He's probably sulking somewhere."

"Siggie!"

"Sorry, Mommy. He's around here somewhere I just saw him not too long ago."

Mr. Van Horn took the microphone and said, "It gives me great pleasure to announce the engagement of my second son, Sigman Herbert Van Horn to Kelly Megan Harper."

A waiter appeared with champagne glasses, which they took from his tray, and raised for the toast.

Count Van Horn took the last one and said into the microphone, "A toast to the couple!"

Everyone answered, "A toast to the couple!"

Mr. Van Horn continued, "May Kelly give to Sigman an heir."

The crowd laughed, but Mr. Van Horn continued, "May she be a fine addition to our kind."

The crowd began to murmur.

“May she enjoy the delights that await mortality. Friends, it is not God who gives life. No, it is your blood!”

The lights went out and through the pitch-black hall Count Van Horn shouted, “Long Live Dracula.”

Kelly felt it, the fang against her, only in the dark Sigman had missed her neck and gotten her shoulder. She knew she was bleeding, and she clutched her wound.

“Oh, Kelly, the third bite is the best,” Sigman said as she felt his hands wrap around her throat.

There was nowhere to run, nowhere to hide.

Kelly thought of Leola, her parents, and then Liam. She didn't hold it against him that he couldn't save her. Maybe he'd do the ultimate good and slay her after she was turned.

Sigman's mouth covered her neck and for a moment she winced in pain. She heard him say, “Look into my eyes.” Kelly turned to him and she looked into his eyes as they glowed in the darkness.

It would be over in a moment she knew. She heard the screams of other victims and imagined half the guests must be vampires. A world of those unafraid to die routing around the dark alleys and underpasses of the city ready to drink dry the people who wandered into the shadowy night.

Nighttime and alleyways would be her new home, those weaker than she her prey. The dance of his eyes called her to a pain-free ending of her human life, but she wanted to feel the end, to somehow remember what had been taken from her, and so she looked to the ground. She wanted to remain aware to the end.

As the mayhem erupted in the hall, a flash of light illuminated the room.

At first it was like headlights from a distant highway, and then it became as daylight in the museum. As the door opened and hundreds of people entered, there was a flurry of LED lights on strings being plugged in throughout the hall. The flood lights brought in were bright, and the Christmas lights made the nighttime day.

Draculans looked up from their mealtime, stunned like deer seeing a poacher's bright light flooding their field. Fangs and blood were now visible, and then, the terrible shrieking as the vampires came face-to-face with the lights.

Kelly saw Sigman Van Horn's expression of bewilderment as no blade had touched him, just a simple set of lights that cut through the darkness.

The lights were as the sun, and Sigman Van Horn turned to dust before her eyes. He was no more.

She saw the rest of his kind disintegrate as all the lights came on. She saw the caterers carrying in Christmas trees and more lights to hang throughout the museum. Then she looked for Liam. Where was he?

She kicked the pile of dust that had threatened her with death just moments before. Liam's dagger lay over the ashes like a cross. Where was he? She turned and saw Liam Abraham

coming to her.

She ran to him, and he caught her, and held her in his arms.

He stated in disbelief, "You're still alive. You're still alive."

"Yes. I love you," Kelly said.

"I love you too." Liam kissed her with relief and meaning, for what had once been lost was now found.

"I couldn't forgive myself for letting them take you. I thought I'd have to kill you," he said.

"But you didn't. How did you get all those lights here so fast?" Kelly asked.

"I asked the caterers if they did Christmas parties, outdoor events, that sort of thing. Then I offered them a cool million if they'd light up the museum to be seen from space in thirty minutes or less."

"Thank you for saving me. You cut it close!"

"I tried to hurry them. If it hadn't been for –"

"Never mind. Just kiss me again," Kelly said.

Liam Abraham had battled many types of creatures and won. Vampires were a particularly dangerous opponent, and he had defeated many of them. He was accustomed to winning.

The social worker in front of him repeated, "Well? Aren't you going to kiss me?"

Here before him was a gorgeous woman with her lovely curves, and a soft voice, and he had been defeated.

The Draculan Hunter obeyed her.

The End.