

## Vampire Business (continuation to Vampire Adjuncts)

### CHAPTER 1

Eric and Connie stared out the window of the motor home, straining for a better view of what could be the remains of a building as they rolled past. Eric's eyes returned to the road in time to see the RV run over a shadow on the road.

"What!" he yelled. "What was that?" He tightened his grip on the steering wheel to keep his reflexes from turning too suddenly which would roll the RV.

"Don't take your eyes off the road. I'll look." Connie stared at the flat screens on the console that showed six views around the vehicle. With the type of people they moved around with, it paid to know what was above and below them as well as on all sides.

"We didn't run over anything. It was just a shadow," he said.

Connie gave him a quick glance. His voice sounded like he wasn't sure what he ran over. What did he think he saw?

"I don't see anything that will come back and bite us," she said, "nor what that shadow could have been."

Eric gave a relieved sigh. "Good. If I run over something I want to do it on purpose to enjoy it."

"I hope you're not talking about having road kill for a meal. Why don't you park this thing before we end up in the irrigation ditch, then we can take a better look at the farm," Connie said.

"Will do," Eric replied. "And just for the record, I've never had road kill."

On both sides of the road white ash trees and a fence separated the plowed fields from the road. A few yards further up the road Eric maneuvered the bus sized motor home to a pull out on the left-hand side. The RV tires crunched over a new surface as the road went from asphalt to dirt. Overhanging tree branches brushed along the side of the motor home, not scratchy enough to worry about the paint being scraped. As Eric cut the motor Connie was already heading to the back of the bus to see if she could get a clearer view from the back window. She kicked off her slippers then belly flopped onto the bed, bouncing sideways. She righted herself and pulled the curtain back for a view of the road behind them.

Eric slipped off his loafers he wore in the RV and dropped onto the bed next to her, knocking them both off balance.

"Hey," Connie yelped. She punched his muscled arm and listened to him chuckle. It was the little fun moments like these that made her almost forget that she didn't trust him fully.

"Between the trees and distance, I can't see a thing," she said. Their shoulders bumped as he wiggled into a better position to see out the window.

Eric smiled widely at her.

Peripherally, Connie could see him staring at her intently with an idiotic grin. Studying her reflection in the window she didn't see what could have him grinning like that. Males, whether human, vampire or werewolf, were so weird on what went on in their minds. Her nose wrinkled in amusement.

Connie glanced at him to see if that would put a stop to his grin or if he would offer an explanation. His grin grew wider.

"We can ride the motorbikes over for a quick look around," she said, both as something to do and to get him refocused. Eric's eyes had a gleam which could mean several things. None of what she was interested in.

"The place looks deserted," Connie went on, confident he was as interested in leaving the bus for a while as she was.

Connie shifted her weight to free her arm so she could tuck loose hair behind her ear, and to put distance between them. Her painted black and green enameled finger nails ran through her bleached white hair creating an interesting contrast of colors. She forgot her hair was too short for any loose hairs to fall out of place.

“What about our signora della sporgenza?” Eric reached over to tease a cowlick in her bangs to part.

“Our boss *ladies*?” Connie corrected to plural. “First off, don’t call them boss. Use Ladies of the Night, if you need to reference them by anything other than their names. Boss infers they are responsible for you and I. Helen believes in the school of hard knocks and Bertie expects you to do your job. Secondly, this is our job, day time recon.”

The two vampires they were traveling with, Helen and Bertie had the storage space beneath the kitchenette reconstructed for their private containers. Besides being in complete darkness, it allowed them more than one exit from the RV should it be necessary.

“Besides, Bertie or Helen will probably know before us if there’s danger,” Connie said. “Leave my bangs alone. I worked hard for this look.” She swatted his hand away as he continued to play with her hair.

“And they would be in the thick of things in the blink of an eye,” he said glibly, and then added, “Except its daylight. They’ll be awfully cranky if they have to be out in the light. Can you feel anything odd or out of place?”

“It’s too far for me to pick up anything.” She held back her sharp return that his attempts at getting in her pants were wasted and if he kept touching her she would break his fingers. She had told him a few times in the Tilda Holding that she didn’t mix business with pleasure. Maybe he thought traveling together changed things.

“It makes a lot of sense for us to take a closer look,” he said. “And we’ll be very careful not to stir up trouble that will wake our ladies of the night.”

“Bertie would say you’re stirring up trouble by saying that. You’re not bored, are you?” Connie asked.

“I’m just thinking about doing some recon. Stepping away from here for a bit would suit me fine. It’s not like we’re going to run into a vampire. It’s sleepy time.”

“You’re in for a surprise then,” she said. “Traditional types would be asleep, but they aren’t what we’re looking for. There’s a whole new breed of vampires out there that aren’t as bothered by daylight, and even members from the older clans, like Bertie and Helen, they’ve adapted to daylight. They wear treated clothing and cosmetics to protect their skin and dark shades to protect their eyes. Then there are the marshals who can move around in daytime and can stay active twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week if necessary.”

“Marshals,” he snorted. “Sure they can, but they need a small army to support them, making them easy to spot. If they’re looking to surprise someone with a visit, the entourage is a give-away. I happen to like the traditional types - staying up all night and sleeping the day away.”

“Well, you’re adjusting to the afternoon shift pretty good.”

“It’s all right. So, what’s our story if we’re challenged?” Eric asked. “We can say we’re looking for Howard,” he said without giving her a chance to suggest they wait and see who would be challenging them before getting defensive. “That’s the truth so if we do run into a vampire...” he started but didn’t finish what they both knew – few Homo sapiens could lie to a vampire. It had to do with minute body queues that a vampire could pick up on. “But, the place did look deserted, so I doubt we’ll meet anyone,” he finished confidently.

“If we do have to use Howard’s name I hope it isn’t a clarion call for trouble,” Connie said. She rolled off the bed to her feet. From the closet she handed Eric his motorcycle boots already stuffed with a pair of socks then picked up hers.

Eric picked up their shoes and followed Connie to the front of the bus. He stored the indoor shoes in the pockets behind the captain chairs then sat on the steps to put on his socks and boots when Connie vacated the steps. Connie waited for him on the road with her face tipped up to enjoy the sun on her face.

It was Connie's rule not to wear outdoor shoes in the RV. So far, she hadn't heard any objections. Helen liked the idea because she didn't want hard soles walking above her when she was resting. Bertie was indifferent and let others decide what the rules of the road would be, unless she felt her intervention was needed. Though she and Eric were on loan to Helen, Bertie as the Tilda Clan representative would take care of any behavior problems. Primarily, her interests were on the internet, her Blackberry, and locating people.

The people Bertie was locating were names she had gleaned from Howard. A lot of vampires were interested in the names. Everyone was worried Mueller, a vampire on the decess list, had picked up the names from her while they were engaged in bleeding rituals and if so, what he did with them before he was removed from existence.

Howard was a VIP. That was Vampire Iniquitous Palliates. VIPs investigated anything to do with vampire business and the business could be something that had happened centuries ago. VIPs put no time limits on their investigations though all other bodies of government in vampire business had limitations; otherwise, old feuds would be forever reigniting in different ages. Even the highest vampire council member worried when a VIP was looking into their business. So, if a VIP leaked names, it was something of interest to the Clan elders of the Tildas who were known for thousands of years to be enforcers of Counsel Edicts on all continents. Nothing happened officially or unofficially in vampire business without the Tilda clan elders knowing about it, and Howard and his names were now their business to know.

Thousands of years ago, Mueller's mother reported to the clan elders of the Council d'França that her son was a troubled vampire, thus getting him removed from her clutch. A clutch was an unimportant vampire family with few extended family members who were not part of a coven or sept. No one wanted a troubled vampire youth wandering around unmonitored.

Mueller was placed with the do Çeixo coven. The coven hoped to one day become a sept so they carried out jobs for the Council d'França as part of the requirements for this move up. In the coven Mueller could be mentored – another word for monitored closely. If he were folded into a clan he would have been shuffled off to some far away holding where he would have been forgotten, yet under another's service for hundreds of years.

When the vampire war broke out Mueller was conscripted into one of the minor clan armies of Jacome and separated from his mentor, leaving him to his own devices. The war casualties of clans fighting clans hid from view the blood sport a few participated in. Vampires were killing their own kin and keeping a tally with Mueller as the master score keeper. In the midst of the chaos of war the secret club was found out. Its members were exterminated with the exception of Mueller, who eluded his hunters. His capture fell to the Tilda Clan, the Enforcers of the Medring Assemblage, a group quickly put together to identify all members of the club, and to eliminate them with the exception of the leader. He was to be brought before the Vampire Council d'França to be exterminated. His mother, who had moved into the Jacome Holding, blamed it on Mueller's sire who refused to acknowledge him as his. It wasn't a surprise that his siblings were killed under the cover of war.

A stake was driven into Mueller's heart. He was then encased in a silver coffin and buried deep in a mausoleum where he was to wait to be judged and exterminated by the Vampire Council when the vampire war was settled. That was the agreement. Agreements tend to fall into disagreements.

Since Mueller was safely encapsulated the matter of his extermination was put at the end of the list of matters to attend to. Over the centuries, guards to his mausoleum changed as did the landscape. Gruesome stories usually were sufficient to keep the human villagers living near a vampire crypt from

vandalizing it or entering the burial site; however, as shown with ancient burial sites around Earth, greed tempted the foolish. The educated humans used claims of exclusion for the sake of higher learning to desecrate the burial places of the long dead, or those in deep sleep, such as vampires in hibernation.

And so it was with Mueller's case. An archeologist and his novice crew, delayed in their travels to their dig due to a mechanical breakdown of their truck, took a stroll through a town's graveyard to identify gravestones while their vehicle was repaired. A structure covered in brush, far from the other grave markers caught their attention and their curiosity. They broke the old lock which was not a match against modern day hammers and stepped down into a vault. The walls of the vault had symbols and designs they couldn't understand and their prize find was a silver sarcophagi.

What possessed them to open it and remove the stake, an inexperienced and juvenile act, is anyone's guess, but it set Mueller free. Everyone present paid with their lives since Mueller was hungry. The carnage Mueller left behind was attributed to a vengeful spirit, whose tomb was disturbed.

It would have taken less effort to leave off the rendering of his victims and just drain them of life, but Mueller wanted the Supreme Council of Vampires to know he was awake.

Mueller found himself surrounded in an unfamiliar land and culture with no allies. Any connection he may have had to others in blood, because blood held memory, passing it onto the cells where it became part of the vampires past, only had the humans he fed upon and their images confused him. Being staked and isolated for so long deprived the cells that held memory to evaporate.

The Vampire Watchers herded him through the African continent where he found a convenient shipping container to hide in while the ship sailed to the American continent. The Vampire Supreme Council located far from the American continent, no longer considered Mueller as their problem. The vampires that migrated to the American continent didn't have the cumbersome rules to go through to order Mueller, now Mullen, permanent removal.

In the Americas with a new name and life Mullen stirred up dissention among the disenfranchised vampires, werewolves and ghouls by his mere presence. Mullen was a celebrity due to his survival from being staked and entombed in a silver casket. The American Tilda Clan put an end to him by practicing a new method humans had for preparing their dead. They drained his blood, filled his body with embalming fluid, and burned his head and bloodless body. All those that had been part of the attack on the Tilda Clan's Hold were exterminated. No one on the American continent wanted to chance a vampire war in their territories.

Connie touched her amulet that lay against her bright green Betty Boop vampire T-Shirt, reassuring herself that it was there. It was protection from life threatening blunders in vampire land. When she was in the Tilda Hold in Glen Oaks, she always was surrounded by vampires and non vampire residents that she trusted with her life. This was her first excursion out of the Hold since she left her ordinary human life behind, to learn to be a magician from an ancient vampire. A master magician. The fact that he accepted her as a student was amazing. Years later when she asked him why he chose her over all the other applicants, he told her he knew her blood line on both the female and male side and there were many talented witches, wizards, and magicians. She had a solid foundation. Perhaps that was why she picked up on some things faster than others. Which reminded her, if Eric did get out of line, all she needed to do was put a spell on him; however, he would have to be really bad before she used her warding away. Master Frank believed in practicing but he also believed that developing a scrupulous character meant not interfering with another's free will unless it was necessary. Master Frank had millions of years to develop his beliefs.

Eric touched his medicine pouch, hidden beneath his black T-shirt that stretched across his muscular chest. His T-shirt had a bright red cross on it with Give Blood stenciled across it.

While Eric unloaded the motorbikes Connie retrieved the motorcycle helmets, gloves and black leather coats from a storage locker. They walked the bikes a few yards from the RV before starting them up, then roared back down the road. They turned onto the farm's entrance where a weathered sign

read Anderson's Farm. Eric and Connie slowed at the sign. There in the upper left was a rune. They glanced at each other.

"I've never seen that one before," he said over his helmet mic. He continued on with Connie close behind.

The fence was newly strung on one side with a few new posts. Broken brush and saplings along with broken posts were stacked away from the new fence. They drove over the cattle guard and in to the farm's main driveway. The area was clean of any debris with only a concrete slab and a few burnt remains of a house's skeleton standing.

"I'm going to take a look at the field," Connie said.

"I'm going to take a look at the barn."

Eric parked his motorbike, set his helmet on the seat, and began his walk around the barn. He hung his sunglasses on his T-Shirt collar as he studied the foot traffic that was both animal and human at the back of barn leading to the corral. Squatting for a closer look, he stared at an unfamiliar print. He stood up to follow the prints when something moving and black caught his attention. He turned to see what it was.

A crow fluttered to the fence post. He and the crow studied each other. The crow turned its head and cawed noisily, then fluttered off. Frowning, Eric looked for Connie. She had removed her helmet and gloves and was running dirt through her hands – and sniffing it. His nose wrinkled up as he mirrored her expression. He wondered what was in the dirt to disturb Connie. Looking around he didn't see anyone else.

Walking back to the front of the barn Eric was about to open the door then stopped. He looked toward the field and saw Connie pushing her bike toward him. He went to join her.

"Anything interesting?" he asked when they were near enough to carry on a conversation in low tones.

"Nothing good will grow in that soil. Someone poisoned the ground." She parked her motorcycle beside his and set her helmet on the seat. Eric's grin was infectious and Connie found herself also grinning, not knowing what he was finding so amusing. "They obviously aren't friends of earthworms." Connie held out her dirty hands then smiled mischievously and advanced toward him.

"You are not going to wipe your hands on me after you just ran your hands through poison." He backed up and waved her hands away in a dramatic display of horror, nearly tripping over his feet. He broke out laughing.

"You are squealing like a little pig," she taunted him. When Connie got close he grabbed both her hands holding her hands away from his body.

"There's a cistern with water over there. I'll let you use my hanky," Eric said.

Eric dipped his handkerchief in the water and handed it to Connie. When she finished washing her hands she rinsed it and handed it back to him.

"Let's take a look around the remains of the farm house."

A flock of crows cawed above them.

"Damn birds," Eric said.

Connie looked up, her sunglasses reflecting the weak winter sun. "I was being watched by a flock of them sitting in the trees. I didn't notice them on our way here."

The cawing intensified as they neared the remains of the house.

"We're being warned off," Connie said. She turned and walked back to their bikes.

"Are we going to let a bunch of birds chase us off?" Eric demanded.

"Yes. Good sense says trust the omens. They may have a good reason. Back at the RV we'll discuss it." Connie could hear Eric stomp his boots in the dirt as he followed her. She turned to look at him. His mouth was turned down in a frown. His sunglasses hid his eyes. She didn't think he would challenge her again, but he would probably find some passive aggressive ways to show his displeasure in

her not following his directions. He was also a very charming person, she reminded herself, grinning at remembered humor.

“This is private property,” she reminded him, “and they may be the owner’s guards.”

Eric followed her to their bikes and jammed his helmet over his head. That probably hurt because he has no hair to bounce the helmet off, she thought. Over his helmet mic Connie could hear him muttering obscene threats as the cawing continued. She wondered why they were so upset and why Eric was so annoyed with them.

Eric’s moods swings could be annoying. As a magician’s apprentice, she should be able to get past such things.

Their motorcycle ride back to the motor home was accompanied by the flock of crows. If the bus was further away, Connie was sure Eric would have raced the bike down the road just to see the birds trying to keep up. However, this was not an ordinary flock of birds, and they most probably would have chased Eric until he ran out of gas or ran into something. His understanding of the supernatural was almost null, or so he was giving her the impression. That could be another reason why he was sent on this trip – to change. Someone must see something in him that was worth all this training and giving him advantages others more worthy deserved.

As Eric put the motorcycles back up on the racks, Connie returned their jackets, gloves and helmets to the storage locker. The noisy cawing from the crows had ceased but not their watchful presence.

Eric pointed his finger at one bird and pretended to shoot it.

“I suggest you not do that. They may take it personally and poop on your head.”

“They better miss or it’s war,” he said. He took aim at another.

Connie poked him in the ribs and got the expected squeak. He was ticklish.

“Helen’s awake,” she said.

## CHAPTER 2

In the comfort of a wooden sleeping container Helen's eyes opened to the protection amulet she had embedded in the lid. The color had changed to a dark blue. Something had challenged her protection spell, but it held; otherwise it would have been a dark brown. Above her she could hear Connie and Eric worry about something they passed.

Helen whispered a spell to reenergize her amulet. It turned green again.

The RV came to a stop. Connie's footsteps passed above her and then Eric's. Ten minutes later they left the RV and unloaded the motorcycles then drove away.

Helen slid the cover to her sleeping container open and then the motor home's floor cover. As she rose from her bed she put on dark glasses then confirmed there wasn't any living presence in the RV. She held her hand above the closed lid to Bertie's container. Nothing had disturbed Bertie's protection spell. Was it because whatever had tested hers recognized the warning it would give to the occupant? Who would want her awake? Howard? She had put out in the ethers that she was looking for him.

Helen stared out the heavily tinted windows to follow where Connie and Eric were heading to. There was an energy vortex nearby with waves of energy wildly spewing out. She caught one of the charges and felt it run up her fingers and into the rest of her body. It was energizing, then it whipped away from her and was grounded by the living tree it touched on next.

She returned her attention to the humans as they moved in different directions. A flock of crows watched them also. They were messengers, or spies, depending on how you felt about being watched. Helen felt no threat from them.

A blasted mental command went out. Her head turned sharply to where Eric was. It was a ward-off directed at whoever may wander too close to something not meant to be seen by the uninvited. Neither human appeared to have heard it. Since Connie was a sensitive, she suspected it wasn't on a wavelength that reached Homo sapiens, sensitive or not. She extended her awareness above them, looking for where that command came from but the irregular energy from the vortex was making it difficult to pick up any trace. Then the energy ceased and all was clear around the area.

Her attention went back to Connie and Eric, following their safe return to the RV. They brought the flock of birds with them. She listened to Connie access the side locker while Eric put the bikes back on their racks. Something felt different. Whatever it was wasn't from the vortex. She would have recognized it since she absorbed some of its energy.

While she waited for Connie and Eric she looked over the RV. It had almost all the comforts of home, she thought, except she never had a home of her own. Usually she stayed with clan members, or in another's lair. Helen sniffed the air. The lingering aroma of the coffee from Eric's latte machine intermixed with the human scent of Eric and Connie. Perfumes from shampoos, after shaves, and soaps didn't cover their unique scents. She stood at the doorway of the small bedroom, feeling only the lingering after presence of Eric and Connie. They weren't lovers. From what she was picking up, she didn't think they would be anytime soon.

A rap on the door was followed by Connie opening the door. She removed her boots on the step then made room for Eric to follow suit. "Did we wake you?" She dropped her boots on the rubber mat near her seat, and gave her a silent signal asking if she needed a recharge of energy.

Helen gave a small shake of her head. "Why are the crows angry?" she asked.

Eric followed Connie in, removing his boots and trading boots for indoor shoes with Connie. "Maybe it was something they ate." He glanced at Connie who rolled her eyes.

"The dirt on the farmland we visited is saturated with pesticides but that's not what got them riled up. Eric has been pretending to shoot them," Connie said.

"Pretending isn't the same thing as actually shooting at them," Eric said. "They can get over it."

Helen eyes darkened at Eric's naivety or was it human male bravado? Both were dangerous attitudes when dealing with things he didn't understand, Helen thought. Thoughts *are* intention to many species. The messengers and their master would mark Eric and whoever he was with. They certainly didn't need to draw that type of attention to themselves. But it was done and now they would have to deal with it. She glanced out the window where the birds were circling. They were curious.

"We stopped to check out the Anderson farm house," Eric continued. "A sign with the Anderson's name had a glyph I didn't recognize. When we went to check out the house, those birds made so much noise we left."

"What glyph was that?" Helen asked.

"Four Cs facing outward," Eric said. "Could also be four horse shoes," he added.

Connie pulled a pad and pencil from the console shelf and drew the glyph, then handed it to Helen.

Large and small crescent moons. The Anunnaki's signet. Species' memories of times long gone flashed through Helen's mind.

"It means Safe Haven, doesn't it?" Connie asked.

"It could mean that," Helen said. She took the pencil from Connie and drew a ward off sign for ancient demons on top of it. "The Anunnaki used it to mark their territory. Early societies used it as their own talisman for protection, thinking the Anunnaki, their gods, would look after them. Today, those that interact with what is collectively called ETs, know the Anunnaki are not the ones to trust for anything." Helen regarded the two, wondering how much they knew of the supernatural world.

"Vampires could be considered ETs..." then realizing he may have blurted something he shouldn't have, he added, "since you move between dimensions and other places."

"ETs? We were here when the dinosaurs were here and we're still here."

Eric's eyes opened wide in surprise. "I...are you sure that long? I mean...that's a long time."

"What did you find in the barn, Eric?" Helen asked to change the subject. He didn't need to know that the body they had then was not even close to their form today.

"Barn?" Eric asked.

"Hello. You said you were going to check it out," Connie said.

"There were some prints I didn't recognize around the barn. Circular but..." He frowned. He touched his shirt at what Helen guessed was his amulet underneath. "I've forgotten."

"We'll return later tonight," Helen said.

"It...my amulet didn't work," he said.

"Frank's amulets are not to prevent us from experiencing what we run into but to prevent us from dying from it. Frank's a traditionalist," Connie said. "Lessons without the consequences aren't lessons well learned," she quoted

"Just what is that supposed to mean? Are these for vampires only?" Eric demanded.

"An amulet isn't going to turn us into vampires," Connie mocked.

Eric looked embarrassed. "Sorry. I don't know what's been tipping me lately. And now I'm forgetting what happened ten minutes ago."

"How far are we from the RV Park?" Helen asked.

"Forty minutes by the GPS," Connie said. "We took this side road to see what the farm looked like in the daylight. It means our arrival at the RV Park will be about dusk."

"What about the barn?" Eric worried.

"The barn wasn't a real structure. No telling what was lurking in the illusion," Helen said.

Connie looked surprised. "But I saw the barn too."

"That's something to think about," Helen said. "There's an energy vortex there. I could feel the energy then suddenly it stopped."

"That *is* something to think about. A vortex gives off constant energy." Connie looked thoughtful. "This will be an interesting situation to investigate. So, there's something here that I can't sense. Do you think the mark on the Anderson's sign is meant for the ETs, the Anunnaki or the others?"

"I don't know. Crescent moons are also used by Druids, Werewolves, Witches, and other practitioners of the supernatural. Tonight we'll investigate."

"We aren't planning any trips off-planet are we?" Eric asked.

Connie laughed nervously.

"No." Helen felt certain they wouldn't be involved in ET business. There were rules in those encounters, enforced by more powerful species than the Anunnaki.

"Good. So, what about them?" Eric pointed out the window at the birds.

"Nothing," Helen said. "They're only messengers."

"A bunch of nosey peepers," Eric muttered under his breath. "They're lucky I don't have a gun."

"We all have our jobs," Helen said. "Unless they're preventing you from doing your job, don't bother them."

"I don't like being spied on," he said. Eric went to the driver's seat, turned on the motor and checked his mirrors. "I'm just saying..." he said in a calmer tone.

"I got the message," Connie said annoyed. "You don't like crows. But you didn't have to carry on and create trouble by shooting at them. You're not the only one that's in their target area if they should take issue."

"You're a magician's apprentice. Ward them away," he said breezily.

"That was our first excursion without Bertie and Helen's presence and you're acting like you're possessed."

"I'm not possessed," he said outraged.

"Then lighten up. I'm not wasting my time on cleaning up your messes, Eric. We all learn from the consequences of our actions," Connie said. She glanced at Helen and gave a slight nod that she had the situation well in hand.

Eric looked angry for a moment then his face cleared. He shrugged his shoulders and concentrated on his driving.

Helen stepped into her container and shut the lid and the sounds of the two humans. With her lid secured, she went into a trance, following the progress of the motor home, looking for anyone that was interested in their passage. Only the birds followed them.

Her thoughts took a strange turn as a name she hadn't heard for thousands of years came through as if it were spoken near her ear.

As a veteran of hibernations, Helen was used to the memory flashbacks. Though sometimes she could see no immediate relevance of the flashbacks to her present situation, she could months later see a connection, though maybe not an important one. It was like tying loose ends to fragments of memories. It showed her that with their long lives, nothing in the past was without connection to the present. She wondered what that name had to do with now.

Her curiosity was piqued.

### CHAPTER 3

Eric parked the motor home outside of the office of Hutchinson's RV Park. The park was a mixture of shaded trees and open stretches for large motorhomes to maneuver around. The RV hookups were for A class RVs to small trailers with fire pits and tent space. Three brick buildings marked restrooms and showers were spaced evenly across the camp area. The only vehicle besides theirs was an old Volkswagen van with traveling stickers covered in dirt and a rusted bumper that further attested to its vintage. Its popup top was extended. From their angle they couldn't see anyone.

"I'll go sign in and see what information the office may have about the farm," Eric said.

"I'll come along. I want to check and see what kind of tourist sites they have," Connie said joking. They hadn't seen anything but farms for miles.

Connie was relieved Eric's dark mood had left. She glanced at the kitchenette floor that moved back. Bertie and Helen rose from their containers.

"It will be dark in about an hour," Eric said. "There aren't street lights around here so it'll get dark faster here than the city." He looked at Bertie in askance. She shook her head that she didn't need fresh blood from him.

"We're going to sign in and check out the local news," Connie said. The two left, locking the door behind them out of habit. It would be an unpleasant experience for an uninvited visitor to find himself or herself confronted with two irritated vampires, and one that would help herself to blood to pay for the unasked for disturbance.

"Why did you get up earlier?" Bertie asked Helen. "Hungry?" Her eyes glinted as they swept over Helen's body.

Helen leaned toward Bertie and they kissed roughly. Pulling back slightly, their lips almost touching, Helen answered, "And you didn't get up to join me?" she chided.

"I was visiting someplace dark and nasty," Bertie answered in a whisper. "I was having way too much fun."

They smiled, thinking of their favorite places to visit when in their containers. Vampires didn't dream but they could visit other dimensions in thought.

"Something had attempted to get past my protection spell," Helen continued. "I wanted to see what it was."

Bertie looked at the floor where their sleep containers were. "What did you find? It looks undisturbed."

"Nothing I can identify. It was before Connie and Eric stopped to look at the Anderson's Farm. I also heard a ward off command while they looked around the farm."

"I didn't hear it," Bertie said. "Is it something to worry about?"

Helen's lips curled into a smile, the whites of her canines shining. "We'll have to wait and see if it's a problem."

Bertie went to the refrigerator. She took out a pint of blood and took a sip. Helen watched her as she savored it. Helen guessed she was thinking how much nicer it would taste if it were warm. Bertie's eyes rose to meet hers. They turned bright red and her fangs distended as she tasted the blood. Her own fangs distended as she remembered how physical Bertie liked to get when in a blood haze mixed with sexual fervor. Bertie took sensual enjoyment from taking a bite out of her blood donor. That would take more than an hour as Bertie had her rituals to blooding. The physical violence that would kill a human was stimulating and erotic to a vampire. It was in their genetic makeup, but for self-preservation, their species adapted to blooding the fragile Homo sapiens without too much violence. Helen watched a drop of blood escape between Bertie's lips, which her tongue quickly licked up. Bertie didn't waste blood. She put the bottle back into the refrigerator. "I don't understand how you can give up blood."

"I haven't given it up," Helen said. "I just don't have it as my main source of energy. You'll learn when you go into hibernation that psi energy feeding is more practical."

"Practical," Bertie laughed. "I never heard anyone talk about the waking having practical steps."

"For one, you don't go on a frenzy of bleeding everyone present for your waking. The other is you don't forget what you knew because cell memory didn't deplete with the starvation of nourishment."

"Waking up to a bleeding is an orgy I wouldn't want to miss. I love the taste of warm blood," she said seductively. "Until I have to hibernate, I won't worry about it."

"I'm sure the staff assigned to wake you will be ready with whatever you'll need for a safe waking," Helen said. "Mother said there are still more sanguine than psi vampires waking, so you have plenty of company. That doesn't mean I'll pass up a bleeding party, just that I'm particular about the orgy attendees."

Bertie's change in eye contact with her was a barely discernable change but Helen caught it. Bertie was planning on attending her next bleeding without her. Vampires were not exclusive to one energy donor or sexual partner or partners. Traveling together didn't mean they were a couple in the human sense of the word, so why Bertie didn't want her around for her next bleeding was of interest to her.

"I believe there's an energy vortex at the Anderson's farm," Helen went on. "If it caught Howard's attention, then no doubt it will be picked up by others that could tune into that level of energy, which may be why the ward off wasn't felt by you and the humans."

"Connie didn't know about it?"

"No."

"That's interesting. Maybe someone's shielding it."

"Maybe. So, I should feel special that I can see past the barrier?" Helen teased.

"Maybe it's an age thing," Bertie teased back. "The elders are always saying the younger generations aren't sensitive like they are. I remind them that we also used to be only able to move around in the dark. You lose some and gain some."

"Doesn't that bother you?"

"I've been to vortexes and can't see what use they are to us. Not even the werewolves can use the energy. It's not our thing, so I don't really think Howard stopped here because of the vortex. It's for another reason."

"Maybe because you're exclusively sanguine and I'm mostly psi that you don't feel the benefits," Helen suggested.

"Can you use the vortex?"

"Yes," Helen said. "And you're wrong about werewolves too. Out of their werewolf shape, some would be able to use it just as some vampires. Since I don't know too much about using that type of energy, I won't say it's just psi vampires that can use it, nor will I say any vortex since they all put out different energy."

Helen looked out the window, thinking about what Bertie didn't know or was she just letting her think she didn't.

Helen's gaze took in the Volkswagen's owner who was in view, reclining on a chaise longue. The lounge was in the shade, the chest was covered and so were the eyes. The sun wasn't that bright by human standards. Her curiosity was piqued.

"Is he napping?" Bertie asked.

"I don't think he's sleeping."

Bertie laughed. "With that erection, he's having a pleasant dream, or do you think he's showing off for us?"

“How would he know we’re in here? There’s a protection spell over the motor home. He’s baiting someone though. You said mostly old retired people travel in these motor homes; maybe he’s looking to attract a rich old woman,” Helen said.

“Well, you’re rich, old, female, and you’re traveling in a motor home. And,” she drew out, “a very attractive catch you are.” She leaned into Helen and bit her ear, drawing a little bit of blood. “You can go over there and introduce yourself and see what he’s about and I’ll watch your back.”

“No one is going over there now. If you’re so curious before we leave here, if he’s still around, you can go over and introduce yourself.”

Bertie smiled and looked at her Blackberry that was vibrating wildly. “You are the captain of this ship,” Bertie said. Bertie contented herself with her business on the Blackberry, her thumbs moving rapidly over the keys. Helen stared out the window unseeing, but aware of what was around the camp site and roaming nearby.

Connie and Eric came back to the bus thirty minutes later and rapped on the door before opening it. Connie stepped in first, tucking a paper contract in a side pocket of the passenger seat, removing her shoes, and joining Connie and Bertie at the table. She was wearing a smirk. They obviously had information of interest to share.

“What did you find out?” Helen asked.

“John Wilson is the name of the owner manager of this RV park,” Eric said. “He and his wife aren’t vampires, werewolves, or ghouls but friends of Howards. He gave us Howard’s space, S4G7. He said there’s only one other person here, someone he can’t vouch for.” He tucked his shoes behind the driver seat and turned on the engine. “It’s the rusted Volkswagen.” He maneuvered the motor home onto a roadway that would take them to the right of the Volkswagen.

They all looked out the darkened windows at their fellow camper.

“Oh, my. Who is that?” Connie asked.

“We were checking him out...he still has a hard on,” Bertie said. “That has to be Viagra driven and not just wishful thinking.”

Eric pulled into their slot. Connie got the binoculars from the glove compartment and studied the figure on the chase lounge while the others looked at the video screen that had the reclining neighbor on camera 4.

“More like a washcloth,” Connie said. “Male performers are known to stuff their pants with a washcloth to get their audience excited.”

“Gimmie,” Eric said. Connie handed the binoculars to him.

“That’s not a guy. Probably using a dildo.” He handed the binoculars back to Connie. “Does that excite you?” he asked Connie.

Connie looked again, ignoring his dig. “Why do you think a woman is posing as a guy?”

“Maybe she’s hiding from someone looking for a woman,” Eric said.

“Funny guy,” she said.

“What did John Wilson say about Howard?” Helen asked.

“Howard comes through every four months and isn’t due back until January. John doesn’t know anything about Howard’s business or his present whereabouts. Someone asked him those same questions a week ago and threatened him with bodily harm if he didn’t answer. Mr. Wilson said his friends that keep an eye out for him did some damage to the rude visitor,” Eric said.

That told Helen that the rude visitor wasn’t a vampire or werewolf. It had to be a human. And his friends were human also. A vampire would have nearly drained the human of blood and left him or her somewhere far away to recover if possible and a werewolf would have ran him until he dropped from exhaustion. Humans, in packs, liked to beat up or shoot people they didn’t like.

What made Mr. Wilson trust Eric and Connie? Was it the statements on the shirts they were wearing? Did Connie use a truth spell?

"What about the Anderson's farm?" Bertie asked.

Helen would have liked to hear more of Mr. Wilson. His connections so far were making him an important contact of Howard's yet he wasn't a name in Howard's list that Bertie recalled.

"The Andersons moved to Wisconsin leaving the house vacant. A stranger set the place on fire four days ago shortly after midnight. Anyone that came to put out the fire he shot at them with buckshot," Eric said.

"Then the sheriff and her deputies arrived with their guns. John said there was so much muzzle flash it was like being on a battlefield. He didn't know how they were so lucky that only the visitor was hit," Connie said.

"You're both grinning like you're saving something," Bertie said.

"John said the morgue driver stopped to have a drink on the way to the morgue and stayed until the bar closed. You see, they all believed the body shot up was a vampire and the bullets didn't hurt him. They were placing bets on how long it would take for the body in the back of the van to recover."

"And did the body get up and leave?"

"At one in the morning."

"So the town isn't frightened by vampires...what about werewolves?" Helen asked.

"Neither volunteered information on werewolves. Nor did they say anything about an energy vortex or who might be managing the Anderson's place. I didn't want to use anything to compel them to talk least it be considered force. They have strong protective energy around them," Connie said.

"They threw in information that UFOs, ETs and big foot are common sightings. His wife said over in the next county are where the UFO sightings are being made."

"Are the ETs leaving any messages, like crop circles?" Bertie asked.

"She didn't say, and I didn't think to ask," Connie said.

Eric turned on the hydraulic motor to expand the dining room and then the bedroom in the back. He and Connie went out to hook up everything on the outside.

Bertie logged on to the Internet to find out what was going on in the world of vampires. Helen sat and listened to what was going on around them. Eric and Connie's conversation was a continued assessment of the fire and the purpose of it.

"They shouldn't be talking about our business where others can over hear it," Helen said.

"Connie probably thinks her spells are protecting them from that," Bertie said.

"The crows can hear them."

"I'll say something to them when they return. My inquires have a lot of replies," Bertie commented as resumed scanning her email. "Whoever said vampires are strictly night creatures doesn't know a modern vampire."

"Or their friends," Helen said.

"Of course. We have plenty of those that don't mind doing day work just so they can share a night with us," she mocked.

"The very type of friends that would be the first to give us up," Helen said. "I would rather keep my circle very small."

"But then you miss out on all the news that's out there."

"There's the internet and the ability to search for anything," Helen said.

"I like the physical touch," Bertie said seductively. "What better way to get a wealth of information than a bite and suck? It's so intimate."

"I can understand why you would bite another vampire for the centuries of information and the passion, but Homo sapiens only remember their present life and hypnotizing them will give better information not tainted with emotions and their clinging connection. Besides, they're not that passionate."

"They are fragile for the passion we like, I'll grant you that. But I find mixing it up makes life interesting." Bertie's attention was drawn back to something that flashed on her netbook screen.

When Connie and Eric finished with the outside hookups they joined Bertie at the table to see what she had found in her investigation.

"There's a coffee shop in the warehouse section of town where vampires stop and meet up with willing contributors to their needs," Bertie said, showing them the coffee shop's website. "It has an eclectic following and is open to visitors."

"It's Goth," Eric said. "Nice web design." He pointed at the coffee cup with the glyph for a vampire. "Click on that."

"It's a link to the coffee flavors that they have." Bertie clicked on it for him to see, then paged back. "You can check out the list closer when we get there."

Bertie switched views to Google Earth, so that they could see what the neighborhood looked like.

"Do trains still use this track back here?" Connie asked.

"Yes. It used to stop at the warehouses where goods were delivered and picked up. Now the train passes through without stopping."

"Tonight, when we visit the coffee shop, Eric and Connie, you two go in and check out the customers while Bertie and I will watch what's going on in front and back of the building, before we join you," Helen said. She looked at Eric and Connie to see if they had any objections.

"Don't bring up Howard's name unless you think it's safe. Whoever grilled the Wilsons got them upset and that means this small community will be alert to any questions on vampire business by outsiders," Helen warned.

"We'll be careful and respectful. I don't want to be someone's unwelcomed supper," Connie said.

"What about the motor home?" Eric asked.

"The ward I have on it now will repel and hide depending on what the threat is," Connie said. "Plus what Helen has put on it and Master Frank no one can get in here without our letting it."

"Don't rely on spells to protect you," Helen said. "Be present and aware of what's going on around you. Use your gut and intuition. If it doesn't feel right than it's not right."

"That should be easy enough to follow," Eric said. "Hey, it looks like the crows left."

"They haven't left. They're sitting near the tree over the other camper," Helen said. "We've done something to pique their interest in us."

"No one talk about our business outside of this structure," Bertie cautioned. "Those birds will carry tales."

Eric glared at the birds.

"You're not thinking of taking shots at those birds again, are you?" Connie asked.

"I might."

"Don't," three voices chorused.

Eric held his hands up in mock surrender.

Bertie gave him a hard look as if she was sending him more than a warning. He didn't look concerned about Bertie's warning or what could happen to him. Helen was curious why Eric felt so annoyed with the birds that he would risk their wrath by harassing them, especially since they weren't doing anything more than following them.

Her conclusion was that whatever his business was about, it wasn't the same as hers nor the same as Bertie's. So who did Eric represent? Humans don't switch loyalties when dealing with the vampire community, because they were bonded by blood.

Eric had been working for one clan elder, Cashman, from the Tilda Holding in New Elms, who had been called back to France to what was assumed a position on the Vampire Clan High Council. Eric

was a human employee who chose to remain in America but still work with a Tilda Clan. There were a lot of subplots going on in clans.

"Connie, you'll need some rest. In four hours we'll head back to the farm house then the coffee shop," Helen said.

Connie nodded and went to take a nap.

"I'm going to walk around," Eric said.

Helen nodded. Connie would normally be asleep during this time, however, Eric's tendency to not always follow Connie's directions had her staying up until she or Bertie got up.

"Don't stir anything up, Eric," Bertie said.

"I'm just going for a walk," he said.

"So what do you think?" Bertie asked after Eric left. She spoke to Helen in a dialect Homo sapiens couldn't understand if they could hear it. The frequency was too high pitched for human ears.

"Of what? Eric challenging what he doesn't understand, our neighbor in the van, the UFOs warning those that can hear to move, the crows warning us that something isn't right around here, or the burned out farm house that's on a vortex?"

"We can start with the woman posing as a man since that's here."

"Not my interest," Helen said.

"That predatory taste is in the air," Bertie said. "Doesn't it make you..." she leaned into Helen, "tingle?"

"Are you looking for additional causes?" Helen said.

"I thought you were into taking up the cause of underdogs – the weak that can't defend themselves against the more powerful," Bertie teased. "She may need help."

"If you're that interested why don't you take up her cause? I already have a full list of to-dos."

"I'm very good at multitasking. You're just like a VIP. Single purpose. Are you sure you're not an agent of the Caffaria Council?"

"That would be a shocker to mother. Straight out of hibernation into the training school of vampire agents? No. And that tingle you're feeling is because there are werewolves nearby."

"A hunting party?" Bertie closed her eyes and sought the sense of a werewolf. She opened her eyes and glared at Helen. "I feel jealous that you're able to sense a vortex *and* pick up on a wolf pack. Eric had better be careful out there."

"I couldn't tell it was a pack so I would say you're more discerning. Maybe our neighbor in the Volkswagen is something more than a woman posing as a man. It would explain why the crows and maybe the werewolves are here," Helen said. "Eric will need more than a bag around his neck with his tendency to challenge good advice."

"Eric, *will* be careful."

"Directives don't last very long. I would say he's experienced many vampire directives and knows how to ward them off."

"I'll keep that in mind," Bertie said.

"Is he here for a test?" Bertie's coy smile was her answer. "Why did you stick him on my bus trip?" Helen asked.

"What better place to test him? Three females should have him figured out in no time."

"You mean trained right. This isn't how I chose to take a leisurely tour across this country."

Bertie smiled. "He's talking to the Wilsons right now. Getting information on the town itself. Not quite following my directive, but not getting into trouble. I'm keeping track of him through our blood tie. You're not dealing in overnight quick studies. I've been at this for a century or two."

"Sounds like you're more than a novice," Helen agreed.

Bertie returned her attention to her netbook that was dingling for attention.

"I'm getting warnings to be careful who we connect with around here. Mueller is a celebrity among some and though they won't join a Blood Hoard they will offer protection and sympathy to vampires and werewolves that say they are."

Bertie wanted to ask her something, she could see it in her eyes. "Is hibernating anything like being impaled with a stake?" she finally asked.

"I've never been impaled with a stake but if it's anything like being knifed and blooded, I'll skip that experience." Helen's eyes darkened as she watched Bertie's reaction to something she was thinking. Her own fangs distended in reaction to Bertie's. Helen cupped Bertie's chin and drew her face close to hers. The two stared at each other, deep in their own thoughts.

"Did you know any of the Blood Hoard members?" Helen whispered.

"I knew most of them and some better than others," Bertie said. Her lips touched Helen's but Helen pulled back, smiling at the game.

"Go on," Helen said.

"At popular night spots picking out vampires and willing donors isn't difficult," Bertie continued. "With younger vampires, differing politics doesn't necessarily mean isolation or hanging out only with your group. How boring that would be."

"How did you get involved with him?"

"Mullen?"

Helen could tell she knew who she was referring to. Bertie was quiet for a few moments. A loud caw from outside had them both looking out the window. The birds were settling in the trees around the camp ground. That was something of interest to note. Helen returned her attention to Bertie.

"I was at a bloody party given by three sisters that were celebrating their return from a century hibernation. He showed up." Her eyes glowed bright red at what she was thinking. "He was an invited guest. The attendees were a mixture of vampires that had experienced hibernation and those that hadn't. It was a sharing of the experience type of bloody party. He watched me for a while before he approached me – I was his link to the Tilda Clan. I could see it as plain as a blood drop." She smiled coyly at Helen. "If he knew through me he could also get to a Caffaria he would have spent more time nestled in my charms."

"You and I hadn't met then. If he blooded you he would have known you were spying on him and he would have sucked you dry and staked you. How did you manage to hide that?"

Bertie smiled. "As you probably found when you came out of hibernation, a lot has changed. Bloodying another vampire doesn't give the drinker complete access to memories, unless that vampire is stronger than the usual vampire and I'm not the usual vampire. I have considerable strength...where it counts."

"That doesn't explain his behavior. He had to have known he was doomed the moment he became conscious and didn't have the traditional staff present. No matter how weak he was - self-preservation kicks in. After he had left his mausoleum, maybe sixteen hours later, he would have found another vampire and blooded them, then depending on who he blooded, remember how and who put him there and that more than likely, he was being followed. So fleeing to this continent was only a brief respite. What did he hope to gain by joining up with vampires that were already under investigation by clan agents? His best chance of survival would have been to learn to blend in and disappear off our register." Helen paused, thinking of how a vampire could hide from his own kind.

"He made a gamble and lost with his life, as he should have ages ago," Bertie said harshly. "Who cares about a dead vampire? Our real worry is Howard."

"Do you think Howard, a VIP, became a convert to Mueller's insurrection plan?" Helen asked.

"Questions that need answers are the reason we're here," Bertie said. "Just what did Mueller have against you or was it the Caffaria clan? Or did you share blood at one time?"

"You were at our first meeting. What do you think happened?"

Bertie didn't look convinced that was all to it. "So, we both have our secrets."

"You think we had a past together? Bertie, be realistic. He was an indentured servant in a coven, loaned out to a sept that was at war. We would have never met or even conversed." Helen was annoyed Bertie would think she would be involved with Mueller whom she found to be disgusting to be around.

"You were a Caffaria princess with bodyguards to keep you from the lower ranks," Bertie mocked. "I heard about those times. What was it like to be so isolated?"

"I wasn't isolated. Are you here to keep an eye on me?"

Bertie didn't blink at the sudden question and didn't hesitate with an answer, "When you use another person's watch dog, that dog isn't going to bark if it's Master comes calling."

Helen leaned into Bertie, roughly kissing her lips and getting an equally returned forceful kiss. Helen thought of how complicated it was getting with a lot of other people's concerns intermingling with her journey. It was going to be an interesting trip.

"That can also apply to Eric," she pointed out. Bertie gave her a shrug.

"When was the last time you were around here?" Helen asked.

"About two Earth years. There was no coffee shop exclusive for vampires. The Andersons were renting a house in town and were talking about buying a farm from a second cousin who wasn't interested in farming. Something big happened to make this a popular vampire hang out in a short time."

"So this coffee shop is the only place vampires meet around here?"

"Carlsberg, three hours from here also has a vampire club. But they're sanguine only. Visitors should expect to be blooded in an orgy." Bertie licked her lips. "I plan on spending a few nights there. If you're in a hurry to move on, I'll catch up with you."

"What about vampires that prefer to stay out of sight?"

"Howard was able to bring some out just by being in the general area. They trusted him." Bertie looked at Helen with a peculiar expression. "Howard is...I can't say charismatic, but he has something about him that most vampires trust."

"What did he say about you picking his brain for information?"

"I didn't do it purposely." Bertie leaned toward Helen. "It happens."

"And you don't suspect he was leading you on?"

"Are you losing interest in checking out the names?"

"I'm curious about the names. I'm also curious why a person as old as he is, would leak names, even if in the throes of passion. You did just admit you're a Tilda agent. No surprise there."

"So I did. I don't know why Howard would be so sneaky as to *leak* the names to me. As we check out the people behind the names, we'll figure it out. The process is what makes the goal worth reaching."

"So, what can we expect at the club we're going to tonight?" Helen asked.

"They're eclectic with a large ghoulish and werewolf attendance. Vampires that have visited have given it five stars, the highest rating. I don't know anything beyond that. A lot has changed in two years. Farms have disappeared and condos and townhouses have taken their place with bored humans and vampires with their usual following. Werewolves looking for new territory have moved in and the ghouls have followed. What's the plan for tonight, besides what you told Connie and Eric?"

"I would like to know why vampires and werewolves are gathering here."

"Well, you did say some vampires and werewolves can feel an energy vortex, so maybe that's why they're around here.

"And?" Helen said.

"There's more?"

"For so many vampires and werewolves to be gathering there has to be more. As you pointed out, not everyone is feeling the energy."

“So we’re going to see just what types of vampires are being drawn here. With the four of us looking over the clientele, we should be able to gather some good information. Who do you plan on passing the information on to?” Bertie asked.

“I’m nobody’s agent. I’ll let you do the reporting. I’m just curious.”

## CHAPTER 4

Four hours later when it was pitch dark, Connie and Eric gave Helen and Bertie rides on the back of the motorbikes to the farm. On the other side of the cattle grate they parked the bikes. Connie and Eric waited with the bikes while Bertie took one half of the property and Helen the other. The two vampires moved swiftly over the ground meeting near the burnt down house.

"I found dead beetles in the soil. That may be the reason why so much poison is in the soil. I'll check on the internet to see if there was some kind of beetle infestation around here. Other than that, I didn't find anything out of place, nor can I feel the energy of a vortex. Are you sure there's one here?" Bertie said.

Helen was staring at the burnt remains and could see the movement of the energy that Bertie couldn't feel. In her inspection she found two different sources of energy. The erratic flow was due to the second source overlapping with the primary source. One was not from Earth. It would be logical to assume there was a portal next to the vortex.

"Bertie, go wait with Connie and Eric," Helen said.

"Why? Is my heartburn bothering you? I never knew vampires could get heartburn," Bertie grumbled.

"Maybe your heartburn is from Eric's coffee." Helen glanced at her speculatively. "Something is setting off the protection spells around this place. I want you to make sure no harm comes to Connie and Eric when I test them."

"Alright. While you poke and see what pops out, I'll keep watch here. The next poke, I'll do."

"You can't poke what you can't see," Helen told her.

Helen walked closer to the charred house remains and just as she felt the ping of the spell, a two story mansion appeared before her. On the wrap-around porch a figure was waiting for her.

"What do you want Helen of Caffaria," a voice taunted. The voice was the same one she had heard in her ear.

Helen stepped up on the veranda coming face-to-face with a familiar figured dressed like an early plantation owner, along with a wide brim straw hat. She last saw him at a Roman military encampment dressed in a toga. She was there for the liquid nourishment and he for his business - assassination.

"Who are you working for these days?" Helen asked.

"Why did you bring his slave here?"

"He is who?"

"We don't say his name."

"Then I don't know who you are referring to, because I don't know of anyone whose name is unmentionable and no one here is a slave."

His eyes became bright red as he stared hard over Helen's shoulder to where the three were waiting. His teeth hadn't distended so he wasn't feeling threatened. It took a lot of energy to create the illusion around the house and barn.

"Why are you protecting the slave?" he asked again.

Helen was picking up on energy that was rising behind him and his smile was beginning to look like a sneer. It was time to get out of the influence of the illusion and back where she had Earth energy to draw from.

Helen appeared suddenly in front of Bertie and the others.

"Let's go into town to the coffee house," Helen suggested. "Maybe we'll get answers there."

"So what was that all about?" Bertie asked. "I could feel something but it wasn't steady enough for me to get a read on it."

"How come we didn't see anything?" Eric asked.

Connie squinted as she looked around the property. She had nothing to say, but her concern was easily read.

Helen didn't want to talk in depth about the strange energy leakage yet. If the others didn't feel it, then it was something to study with more care before bringing it up. No wonder Howard found this place interesting. Something must be happening in the portal to cause the vortex to be unstable.

The ride to town was silent as the four were deep in their own thoughts.

Bertie and Helen were left off two blocks from the coffee shop. Connie and Eric rode to a section near the busy coffee shop where motorcycles were lined up. Eric kicked the stand down on his bike while looking over the people that were studying him as closely as he was studying them.

"Looks friendly enough," Eric said. His eyes were on the leathered women that were giving him mixed messages in their stares.

"There's a few here that are going to be trouble." Connie was watching the guys whose girlfriends were interested in Eric.

Eric looked where Connie was looking. "On second thought, we'll stay close together," Eric said. "Some of these people do look aggressive."

"I hope they don't have a body piercing requirement," Connie said.

"If they do, I'll hold your hand," Eric offered.

"If they do, you go in alone," Connie said strongly.

While Eric and Connie were navigating their way into the coffee shop, Bertie and Helen watched from a block away until they disappeared into the building. Bertie gave Helen a kiss and in a blur was at the back door where she would watch the comings and goings of customers.

The energy from the coffee shop was invigorating and strong, reaching as far as where Helen stood. If there were psi vampires in the coffee shop the energy wouldn't be so strong. They would have sucked the energy up. It was a shame to see it go to waste, she thought, and felt her fingers tingle as she took in the energy herself.

Taking in psi energy was a lot neater than sucking someone's blood. The infusion of life energy via blood rushed to one's head, and then there was the emotional charge that blurred everything until the body absorbed the infusion. Helen felt too vulnerable to let herself be caught again in that moment.

Helen's eyes turned red as she realized she was being pulled into someone's influence through the psi energy. It was tempting to send a strong shock through the connection, but it would be giving someone information about her. Instead she untangled herself, regretting not keeping some of the energy, but there were strings attached.

Her canines distended at the challenge came just as the link dropped.

*Be careful what you touch!* she thought to Bertie.

*Be careful yourself. A group of psi techies just came out the back, and in a hurry. Is it something you said?*

*I was very polite in my decline to indulge.*

Helen's eyes moved back to the street as a car came by a third time. It was as if the occupants were interested but couldn't find the nerve to park and go in. They weren't vampires so they might be tourists looking to become part of the ghoulish community. The warehouse area wasn't a shopping area where a casual stroll at night would have been normal. Anyone in the area was a vampire, werewolf, ghoulish, or wanna-be to be a part of the supernatural community.

Helen's attention moved to the arrival of a foursome dressed in heavy Goth attire with chaotic energy emanating from them. Helen's telescopic sight and increased range of hearing honed in on them. Whoever they connected with she marked them, keeping a mental file on each. It occurred to her for the umpteenth time that maybe she should follow her brother's footsteps and become a VIP. The thought cooled her to the idea. She was getting used to doing things on her own time schedule and once she was a VIP her life would not be her own to direct.

Though Connie and Eric tried to stay together they were eventually separated. Helen could feel their emotions as they worked to maintain calm, trusting that Bertie and she would be able to get them out of anything they couldn't handle. Helen picked up a sanguine and psi vampire's intention to drain the life out of Connie and Eric. Even if it were a trap she felt she could handle it.

In typical vampire speed, Helen moved through the coffee shop to the back room where Connie and Eric were held. Without a pause she plucked the gun from a ghoul's hand and faced the vampire who was threatening them as he reacted to her sudden appearance. Unlike the vampires she passed in the coffee shop this one was prepared for trouble.

For five minutes they fought, turning over furniture and crashing into the walls. Others were at the door quickly but so was Bertie. Bertie grabbed one of them by the throat and shook him. "Call them off, Phato."

"Raymond, relax," Phato got out hoarsely.

Helen felt her adversary withdraw. She stood in front of Connie and Eric, her sword at ready.

"Bertie and Phato know each other," Connie said in an undertone to Helen. "I recognized him when we walked in. I think he was waiting for us," she said in a lower tone so only Helen could hear.

"We told them we weren't tourists and we were friends of Bertie's," Eric said over what Connie was saying, not hearing her add her observation to Helen. "Name dropping didn't turn out so well. It got us hustled back here pretty quickly."

Phato was dressed in bright colored clothes, a sharp contrast to everyone else in the room who were dressed in black. The people with Phato were into heavy body piercings and tattoos.

Bertie released Phato who didn't appear to be concerned with Bertie's attack on his person. He straightened his shirt collar and smiled at her.

"Hello Bertie. Long time no see. I've been expecting you," he said. He attempted to nip her neck which she evaded and tweaked his nipple, eliciting a yelp.

"I was worried about you, Doll. You weren't partying around the smartest group for a while there," Phato said.

"Why would you worry about me? I can take care of myself," Bertie said huffily.

"Sure you can, Doll," Phato said mockingly.

"And stop calling me Doll," she returned. "Or I'll cut you."

"Touchy, touchy."

A boy-girl too thin to be healthy slid between the vampire and Goths in the doorway.

Phato waved everyone to leave, however the thin person remained. "This is Fae. I gave him something more than himself to live for. I saved him from himself," he mocked.

"This is Helen, and you met Connie and Eric," Bertie introduced.

"So, what brings you here?" Phato asked, his eyes briefly resting on each person.

"We're passing through and stopped to visit. According to the coffee shop's website, this place is open to the public. That's not what we've seen so far," Bertie said.

"We discourage tourists. They're so changeable. One visit they're curious and the next visit they come with silver bullets and garlic. Come up to my office. It's more comfortable and I can keep an eye on things."

Phato escorted them to the second floor. Large flat screens had security views from around the building, on top, and inside. Two smaller screens were showing a movie and news. The room had too much going on for Helen.

"Make yourselves comfortable." He gestured to the collection of couches and chairs that surrounded a coffee table. A bar was at the other end of the room.

As they all sat Fae looked up at a young man that came from behind a bar, "I'll have my usual."

They all ordered something and then waited for Phato to get comfortable.

"So why are you really here?" Phato asked, this time addressing Helen.

"A road trip," Helen said.

"I'm along for the ride," Bertie said.

"I'm the driver," Eric said.

"I'm the maid," Connie said.

"How did Lake Winnow get so popular?" Bertie asked.

"It's in the middle of nowhere yet easy to reach with a train that passes through four times a day and twice at night."

"So the train doesn't stop."

"Would you need it to stop?" Phato asked.

"What happened to the Andersons?" Helen asked.

"They thought they could handle the visits at all times of the day and night. It turned out it was too much for them. Then there were the religious zealots that would show up and act crazed, threatening to burn the people and house down."

"Who owns the property?" Helen asked.

"The bank."

"The property has a portal and an energy vortex," Helen said.

"Yes. There's a lot of people that want to use the energy," Phato said. "But you need not worry about the portal. It's too unstable for anyone to cross the threshold."

"Is someone shielding it?" Connie asked.

"Yes."

"So who is using its energy? There was a guardian there that warned us off," Helen said.

"Fae is the guardian. Anyone else is a poser. There's a list for anyone that wants to try using the energy. The rules are, you bring five assistants to monitor you and the energy, and your five assistants and you have to prove you have the ability to work with the energy. If you're crazy enough to want to try again, your name goes to the bottom of the list with your assistants. We can't have inexperienced and weak people messing with a vortex."

"Just how many people are interested in this and who manages it?"

"The very type of characters that shouldn't." Phato looked over at Fae who was wearing a disinterested expression. "Fae would you rather be downstairs where the emotions are more – chaotic?"

Fae waved a hand at him and resumed slurping his drink.

Helen was picking up on so many underlying messages from Phato she wasn't sure if she was understanding what it was about. She studied Fae a little closer but found she couldn't sense much of anything from him. Like Phato, he dressed to stand out but unlike Phato, there was nothing else about him she could pick up on.

Phato pointed to the screens glancing at Fae. "We have visitors. Are you going to speak with them?"

Fae lifted his chin in defiance. "No. I have told you I will not."

Bertie's nostrils flared as if she was catching a bad smell on a breeze. Her eyes went red and her canines distended.

Helen's eyes moved around the room, looking for something that was giving her a feeling they weren't the only ones in the room. It was the same ugly energy the four downstairs put out.

Helen pulled her sword and a knife out in a blink of an eye as did Bertie and Phato. Phato stood before Fae as vampires armed with guns suddenly appeared in the room.

Helen hacked the gun hand off with her knife and his head off with her sword. Eric had the weapon out of the hand before it hit the ground, and shot straight at the doorway.

Helen didn't spend time to wonder how Eric, a human, could see vampires moving this fast, as she moved to keep the vampires with guns from doing Fae, Connie and Eric any damage. Those

attacking really were not thinking this through very well. The reason why vampires stuck to swords was because they could be manipulated in the same speed as a vampire moved while bullets could not be redirected in midflight. So far, bullets that were needed to kill a vampire weren't like guided missiles. Those were human inventions that killed humans.

As quick as the battle began, it ended. Connie and Bertie were gone.

"Where did they go?" Eric asked bewildered.

Helen turned to Phato. "Where did they go?"

"I didn't see them leave. Fae?" He dropped to his knees as Fae suddenly collapsed. Phato picked Fae up and carried him to a couch. "He's tired. He needs rest."

"Phato, who is Fae?" Helen asked.

"Nothing more and nothing less than the keeper of the vortex."

"So who were those vampires that barged in? They were aiming for him."

"They believe everything will be returned to normal by dragging Fae back to the vortex." Phato looked up at Helen with genuine worry, "I don't go out to the vortex anymore because the energy is too freaky for me. Fae came here, looking for me to protect him. He's been losing his focus because the chaotic changes in the portal. Word spread that the guardian wasn't there so every entrepreneur and shyster has arrived to take possession of the vortex and some to see where the portal goes to, but no one has been able to enter it."

Helen looked at Eric who kept his acquired gun fixed on the doorway. "Eric, can you jump out a window without breaking a leg?"

He went over to look out the window. "These boots have good ankle support. Hey, there's something dark moving toward this building, and it's blotting out the stars. We should go now." He pushed open the window and clambered out.

Helen looked at Phato. "Did Fae know Mullen or Mueller?"

"No. Fae only knows the business of the gate."

Helen jumped from the window, landing without difficulty. Eric was waiting at the motorcycle, looking nervously in the direction of where he saw the dark cloud. Connie's motorcycle was gone so she sat behind Eric and they sped away from the cloud.

Guardians of anything that required a long tenure, became bored over the centuries and it wasn't unheard of that one would wander away or get distracted for a while. To be involved in returning a guardian to its duty wasn't something Helen thought she was qualified to do since vortexes and portals usually were to other dimensions and had their daemons and other unknowns that went along with it.

However, Helen reminded herself, there was always a first time and that's what made living long rewarding -- the new experiences.

## CHAPTER 5

Bertie and Connie weren't at the RV Park. There were no lights on in the motor home. The only lights came from one of the restroom and shower buildings. As they entered the safety parameter of the RV the security lights lit up the night. The lights were a false warning to people that came too close to the motor home. If anything that was a danger to Helen or Bertie came within their personal safety zone, they would know.

It took seconds for Helen to inspect the exterior. Nothing had approached the motorhome while they were gone. It surprised Helen because the one other camper wasn't showing the natural curiosity most humans have toward strangers.

"I'm going to see what's going on at the Anderson's Farm, Eric. While I'm gone, search on the internet for information on this town and Anderson's Farm. Also, look up information on guardians of vortexes and portals." He looked undecided. "Can you do that?" she asked impatiently.

"Eh, yeah. I guess so."

"Can you or can't you?"

"I know how to use the internet, Helen," he said sharply and then looked embarrassed. "I'm worried about Connie. I know Bertie will keep her safe... I just worry about her. She knows a lot but not enough...you know what I mean?"

Helen turned and left Eric to his tasks. She didn't believe Eric was concerned about Connie. She suspected Eric knew if he didn't do as he was asked, he wouldn't be accompanying them any longer on the trip.

Unlike the motor home and motorcycles, there were no fences or roads that determined her route to the farm on foot. She wasn't very far when a strong scent of werewolves warned her more than the usual twelve were nearby.

Vampires didn't have a scent, but they did leave a vacuum of dead energy as they passed, which did change the environment that a werewolf would pick up on if she wasn't careful.

She found Bertie and Connie near the remains of the farmhouse.

"What's happening here?" she whispered to Bertie. Bertie was leaning against a post, which effectively hid her from human sight and would mask her presence from werewolves. Connie was lying flat on the ground a yard away. Helen could see a shield blocking her from being seen by human or werewolf and maybe a vampire that didn't know her.

"It's about time you got here," Bertie said. "Werewolves are roaming everywhere. Someone's called them out. Hired guards, is my guess."

"Connie, you would be safer if you waited at the motorhome," Helen said.

"And do nothing? Didn't Eric tell you what those idiots are going to use the energy from the vortex for?"

"No." Helen regretted that she hadn't asked Eric what he had learned in the coffee shop. That was careless of her. But she did notice that neither woman asked about Eric.

"They're going to focus the energy through one person and open up the portal long enough for a selected few to go in and find out where the portal leads to then return and plan their next visit. These people don't know what they're doing," Bertie said.

"Curiosity is in their DNA," Helen said.

"And educated out of most," Bertie said.

"What are you going to do, Connie?" Helen asked.

"I'm going to try and cut off the energy so they can't get the portal open," Connie said.

"And what are you going to use for protection?" Helen asked.

“Besides Frank's amulet - my protection spell and good sense.”

“They’re arriving,” Bertie said. “No vampires amongst them. I wonder who summoned the werewolves. Usually, they don’t work for humans unless it’s under the direction of a vampire or werewolf elder.”

“Have you grounded energy from a vortex before?” Helen asked.

“I've been part of two projects that used energy from power objects and an observer of fifteen demonstrations on rebuilding and cleaning vortexes,” Connie said.

“Then you know you manipulate the direction of the energy blasts by working on the outside, like creating a path.” Helen leaned close to Connie. “Don't touch what comes from the portal or vortex, Connie.”

“I know. I’ll be careful. I know what I’m doing,” she assured her.

Cars stopped and doors came open. Flashlights bounced around the area. Bertie was right. There were no vampires among the newcomers. All but two were Homo sapiens.

“Werewolves are running this meeting?” Helen asked. The illusion from earlier this evening wasn’t something she thought werewolves were capable of creating, but species on Earth don’t stop evolving whenever she went into hibernation, she thought wryly. Her mistake would be underestimating anyone.

“Fae needs to come back to manage this place,” Bertie said.

“You can’t force a guardian to be a guardian,” Helen said. Helen’s head snapped to the left where the portal was. Something was moving rapidly in the tunnel. Helen drew her sword then realized what it was and threw herself on the ground.

*Down!* Helen mentally shouted to Bertie.

A sonic boom shook the ground as air whooshed out from the portal, knocking anything not anchored down. Bertie held onto the post. The air blew above Helen and Connie. It was as if someone had opened a carbonated drink after shaking it. When the energy dissipated, everyone picked themselves up. Flashlights once more bobbed around wildly. Excited voices and screams nearly blotted out the sound of a low wolfish growl. Helen agreed with the werewolf’s displeasure at the tampering. The humans moved to the front of the portal and the two that had come with the group but were not humans, left the area. The humans began to argue about who would go first.

“Something may have come out in the blast,” Bertie said. “Can you feel the change?”

“It smells,” Connie said.

“This must be corrected. Only the guardian can bring order and put what doesn’t belong here back to it’s correct dimension,” Bertie said.

Helen turned around, staring intently in the darkness behind them. She saw something moving in jerky movements and went to investigate. It suddenly disappeared.

Helen circled the area to study what was present. A werewolf found her. To kill or not to kill depended on the werewolf. His snarling and leap toward her ended abruptly when she sliced him in half. This one was young; otherwise, he would have known a werewolf cannot beat a healthy adult vampire, even on the best of nights.

A motorcycle engine roared away from the farm. Bertie and Connie, she guessed. Since she wasn't invited to accompany them, she would do her own looking around. Howling from behind her was echoed until she was surrounded by werewolf howling. She quickly climbed the nearest tree to get an aerial view of her surroundings. Werewolves were moving swiftly across the ground to where she had slain their brother. She may be in trouble if she stayed. How strong was their bond to their brotherhood as a whole? She could feel that not all were from the same wolf pack.

This was a new world where vampires and werewolves weren’t birthed into being any more. They were now created through a virus. Homo sapient was the only species that could convert to either werewolf or vampire from a bite. It had to do with the experiments the Anunnaki did on species it

captured during their early years on 3<sup>rd</sup> dimensional Earth. Then, the Anunnaki were primarily in the business of extracting minerals from the planet, gold being their main interest. As their stay lengthened they became involved in other things, like creating their own slave labor force by intermixing DNA and performing experimental surgery, both as amusement and to create an ideal worker in their mines. Vampires in their early form were night creatures, ideal for working in the darkness of the mines, but their physical form was not made for mining. Many different species were created in the Anunnaki's laboratories, some didn't last long and others evolved into other shapes and species.

Helen didn't want to leave the area without knowing what was released. Her eyes glowed red as she looked for what came out of the portal. From her perch, it didn't take long to locate something odd, hopping, flapping, and heading her way. She held herself still, waiting for more of it to show. Tiny yellow eyes gazed up then away. A profile of the three foot creature's head was that of a rooster. There were no three foot roosters on Earth, but there had been three foot cockatrices. A cockatrice. They usually traveled with dragons. What other creatures came out of the portal?

The cockatrice continued past her tree, heading to the RV park. Why? She needed to protect her motorhome. A cockatrice didn't move as fast as a vampire so she would have plenty of time to reinforce her protection around the motor home.

Helen entered the camper and found Eric closely pressed against a stranger. This was a bad time for his inviting a stranger within their living quarters. Ignoring the two, she pulled open a closet that they stored herbs for spells. Connie had stocked the cabinets with herbs for cooking and for her studies.

"A cockatrice is headed this way," she said. "Stay in here both of you. Don't look out the windows. Where are the Wilsons?"

"They're home. They don't live here," the woman said. It was the Volkswagen sunbather dressed to seduce, and in no way did she resemble a man now.

Helen left the two. Around the motor home she spread the mixed herbs and whispered a protection spell from the dragon days, then returned to the interior. It wasn't enough to prevent the cockatrice from seeing the motorhome, but it would prevent it from entering.

"Helen?" Eric said faintly. "That smell."

The atmosphere rippled with energy that didn't belong on Earth.

"I'm feeling sick." Eric whispered.

"Turn off that light," Helen told him.

With a shaking hand he closed the laptop, the only light source, leaving them in darkness.

Helen could hear movement circling the motor home. It was quiet for a few moments then the clicking of the talons moved across the top of the motor home.

Eric began to pant.

"Breathe deep and slow," the woman suggested.

The clicking stopped. A sliding sound came from below the motor home. If Helen had time to make a proper protection amulet it wouldn't have been able to come this close to the motor home.

Then its energy dissipated.

"What..was..that!" Eric grabbed the side of the couch.

"It was something to elicit fear in humans," Helen said. "Are you able to pull yourself together, Eric?"

He nodded.

"Who are you?" Helen asked the woman.

"A neighbor. I was looking for..."

"You invited her in?" Helen demanded of Eric.

"Well, yes. She knows..." Eric stopped as if he was trying not to get ill.

"Why did you want to come inside?" Helen asked.

"I like to know who my neighbors are."

"Our business doesn't concern you," Helen told her.

"And that thing you brought here isn't something I should worry about?" she asked cynically. "I wasn't born yesterday."

"I don't know if I brought it here. It could have already been here. Just like the crows. Eric, you need to lie down before you fall down," Helen said.

He was looking pale and drained. Eric dropped onto the couch barely able to stay upright.

"And next time you come over for a fix, ask *us* first," Helen said.

"I don't know what you're talking about," she said breezily.

"You're done here," Helen said.

"She's a friend of Howard's," Eric said softly. It sounded as if it took great effort for him to speak. Helen stared at her. "She doesn't know Howard. What is your name?"

"Rose. I'll see you around."

When Rose left Eric fell unconscious. Helen lifted him easily and dropped him on the bed in the back of the bus. She went over the entire motor home, finding all her protection spells within the motor home were disabled, and her amulets were charred remains. She didn't even feel it when she entered the motor home. How lucky were they that she thought to add something for the outside?

Eric's own amulet was on the floor. She picked it up and dropped it next to him. Protection amulets worked only if they were on the person who they were designed for. How Rose got Eric to remove his amulet was something she wanted to pursue further but later. Her suspicion was Eric had met her before. Once invited in, any entity can bypass amulets and protection spells. Eric had to have met her before Frank's amulet was created.

Helen worked on new protection spells starting with one for Eric to put him to sleep. He needed to replenish his energy and stay out of trouble.

By the time she had the motor home protected again, and with different spells from an older time, her energy was low. She couldn't use Eric for psi or blood. Opening the refrigerator she could feel the blood had been contaminated. Bertie kept a reserve in her container. Helen checked on her reserve and found it also contaminated. She removed both, least Bertie be too drained not to examine the quality.

As erratic as the vortex was, she could get a charge there or maybe from one of the humans. *I'll be very discreet. They'll never know what bit them*, she thought in amusement.

Helen left the motor home when she was sure Eric wasn't going to slip into a coma from a lack of life energy. There was something about Rose that was familiar but she couldn't remember seeing her before. She was crossing the field when she felt Rose approach, and she was going at a fast pace.

"I think you should reconsider and not leave me out of this," Rose said. "I have a lot of inside knowledge of what's happening on the farm." She easily matched her strides to Helen's, which to a human would have been too fast to be seen, so Rose wasn't human.

"Why did you burn out our protection in the motor home and drain Eric of energy?" Helen asked.

"I did you a favor. Your security was compromised. You don't trust that hu-man do you?"

Helen considered her suspicion of Eric confirmed. She would get back to him later. Now, she had a more pressing situation.

"What do you know about the farm?" Helen asked slowing her pace to a walk.

"The Benji Vortex is on the Anderson's property and right now, the guardian is absent from his post. A portal has become destabilized and is now along the vortex and is destabilizing it. That cockatrice is from a dimension the dragons were driven to."

"The dragons can't return to Earth," Helen said with conviction.

"Vampires can't be out in daylight," Rose mocked. "

"Some vampires can be out in daylight and dragons can't return to this dimension," Helen said with certainty.

"You're being closed minded about dragons and what they can and can't do," Rose said.

"The only way anything resembling a dragon can move back into this dimension is if their chemical composition changed. Earth has changed immensely in its vibration since dragons left. I can feel the difference from then and now. We've had thousands of years to adapt to the changing vibrations because we remained. The only way any of the dragons can get to this dimension safely is if they reincarnated as another creature, and dragons have no souls so reincarnation is out...unless something has changed the last thousands of years."

"How do you know? You're new out of hibernation. A lot has changed. Maybe the planet they migrated to is similar in vibration as Earth. You don't like dragons much, do you?"

Helen wondered where Rose heard about the dragons because Rose didn't feel that old, in fact, though she sucked up the psi energy from Eric who usually gave blood not psi energy, she didn't have the feeling of a vampire. What else was there?

"Where are you from?" Helen asked her.

"A commune up in the Siberian Alps."

"Kuznetskiy Alatau."

"You know of it?" Rose asked.

"Mueller's mother was from there."

Rose smiled. "It's a small world."

"Are you related to Mueller?"

"No. His mother died before I came to be. If anyone is related to him it's not spoken of. I was with the Borjas Sept."

"The Dragon Slayers? Strange that you should speak of dragons as you do when your sept was known as the Dragon Slayers."

"There are over a hundred splinter groups that use that title. I wasn't present during that time. My lineage is from shape shifters that were never vampires but work alongside of the Borjas. We are dimension jumpers and tend to not stick around in one era for too long."

"Just what is it that you intend on doing about this vortex that's missing it's guardian? Since you know so much about it, I gather that's why you're here."

Rose grinned. For a few moments as they walked she was quiet. "Garug needs a way...."

"The dragon?"

"Yes...he..."

"Garug of the Ruger Valley in the Lost Lands?"

The Lost Lands were what vampires referred to as the planet the dragons disappeared to and then hid their path so any enemies', including the Anunnaki, would not be able to follow.

"Will you let me finish with this?"

"Yes, go on." Helen stopped walking not wanting to get too close to where there would be a sentry posted and their conversation would be overheard, though anyone interested could listen. There was really no such thing as a secret, not in the real sense.

"The dragons' home is dying and they need this vortex energy to open a passage to their new destination in the portal."

"So?" *Now the truth is coming out*, Helen thought.

"No one trusts the dragons," Rose said.

"Dragons are what they are. Are they responsible for this vortex acting so strange?" Helen asked.

Her knowledge of portals was about what most vampires knew. All planets had portals that connected them to other planets and dimensions. The portals vibrated at different energy levels and

depending on an individual's vibration they could or couldn't see the portal. Any one or thing that passed through the portal had to vibrate at a level that was complimentary to the portal. Entering a portal at one energy level didn't mean when it reached the planet point of exit that it would be the same. So it meant that the person in the portal had to come back and hope they could, because portals were living organisms and prone to change.

"When a change occurs in one dimension it affects other portals and naturally, the vortexes."

"Just what is happening?"

"Planets realign, change orbits, and life starts over," Rose said, making it sound simple.

"You sound like their agent," Helen said.

"I am a broker of agreements," Rose said. "A messenger as well."

"Who are you working on this agreement with?" Helen asked.

"You."

"No."

"Why not?"

"I have no authority and I don't want to have anything to do with dragons."

Rose held out a leather pouch. Helen recognized it as an official message pouch from a Vampire Council. She didn't care to see whose seal was on it. Since she hadn't registered with any since her return to vampire life she was wondering who would be asking for her assistance. Of course, councils never asked.

"I'm not interested," Helen said not touching the pouch. Once she touched it she would be obligated to read and be judged.

"Your mother already accepted the pouch and assigned you as her agent...since you are in the vicinity."

"I don't believe you."

She offered Helen the pouch again.

"I'm not touching it."

"It's all in here. You know the consequences of refusing."

"I know if I say no there are consequences...but I haven't acknowledged receiving any orders."

"Mothers. They complicate our lives with their business," Rose mocked. "As I said the message is considered delivered since your mother accepted it and assigned you as her agent."

Helen resumed her walk toward the vortex, wondering how she was going to get out of being forced to participate in dragon business. Her mother was probably doing this to get her interested in something meaningful. The general belief was that a vampire should have a balanced life in order to not go off the deep end and become isolated only to come out at night and feast on some unwilling donor then disappear again. It gave vampires a bad name and created fear among the humans.

Suddenly it occurred to her that maybe her mother didn't accept it. Her mother could be very cryptic if she was looking for a delay in making a decision. It was important not to be jumping into dragon and vampire business without knowing all the facts. That was what she was taught by her parents and was the lesson of why the war with the dragons resulted...that and the fact that they were eating themselves out of lair and homeland with their numbers and body size. Dinosaurs would have been a better meal, but there weren't animals that size on Earth anymore. Earth had gone through a change, as it was about to again, and what Earth was once able to sustain no longer did and would.

## CHAPTER 6

Helen stood in the center of the farm clearing with Rose standing near. They weren't noticed among the attendees, as was their intention. They appeared as just one of the crowd. The crowd had grown and they were restless, shifting from foot to foot, mostly to keep warm. It was a human gathering with werewolves keeping out of sight. The leaders were gathered near the concrete foundation droning chants and waving burning herbs. Helen felt relieved that they weren't facing the actual exit of the portal.

Helen looked around and spotted Fae standing nearly out of sight behind a tree. When their eyes met he disappeared from view. Rose moved off to get a closer look at the leaders. What was she intending on doing?

"I heard you're the vampire agent in charge of the migration," Fae said.

"I haven't accepted anything," she said. "What bat brain told you that?"

Helen could hear Fae chuckle. She glanced at him surprised, then back at the crowd, alert for any change in the group.

"They tried to pin the job on me and I refused," Fae said.

"I refused too," Helen said.

"Too late. It will take a Council's vote to consider your refusal. That could take thousands of years and the situation requires your presence now."

Helen didn't stop the frown that pulled her mouth down into a silent snarl.

"Give it a try. It could be an easy assignment. You have a big plus in this. The dragons found another planet, which is good so there isn't that old wound being reopened."

"Then why can't they just migrate without a vampire representative?"

"Because dragons can't be trusted. Vampires are the only ones strong enough to make sure the dragons stick to their migration path."

"Vampires? There are others assigned this task?" That was a relief to hear.

"Vampire business isn't my business. The documents in the pouch would say. Or you can speak with the dragon's representative. Perhaps you can get an idea of what reward to use to keep them on track."

"Why do they need a reward to stay on track? They can't come here."

"Can vampires or dragons afford to have another battle over territory? Many planets won't survive it."

"If they try to force their way to Earth they would burn up or something catastrophic would happen." Helen glanced at the crowd that began to chant with the leaders. The energy around them changed. They were beginning to annoy her.

"Whatever will happen, will happen in a big way," Fae agreed. "Maybe an explosion that will blow out the vortex. Maybe a sonic boom that will clear all standing objects in this area for miles. Maybe a fireball that will burn the atmosphere away. No one knows really. Face up to it, Madam Vampire. You've been appointed to the esteemed position of Agent Representative of the Supreme Vampire Council of the Americas. It's been announced on all levels, so there's no backing out now."

"I must have missed the announcement. When did this happen?" If she had a heart it would have skipped a beat. If she had blood in her veins, she would have flushed with shock.

"A week ago. It's in the pouch. The messenger has been having a problem tracking you down," Fae said.

"Why didn't you tell me when we were at the coffee shop?"

"You would have listened?"

Helen glared at Fae.

Fae smiled. "I only found out a few hours ago so I thought I would return and help, just in case you need help," Fae said.

"What a coincidence that the first name on Howard's list should be where the SVCA wanted me to be."

"Howard? He's an enigma. Not quite vampire and not quite Homo sapiens, yet he has both species gifts."

"Just what does this monitoring entail? I gather there aren't any others but me."

"For who are your helpers, you will have to consult with the monitor, but you do have my support. The monitoring involves counting dragons to make sure they all cross over, then making sure the two portals close."

"What's the danger?" Helen asked.

"You may not make it back if the portal energy changes too radically."

"So I may get caught in a portal with no exit." *That's the only danger?* Helen didn't feel Fae was misleading her only that what he saw as dangerous and what she saw as dangerous would be different.

"There's always an exit. Where your exit is will be the surprise."

"What about all these people here?"

"They won't be able to see the dragons because the portal is not vibrating at an energy level they can see, but they will feel the energy. I'll monitor the energy for you."

"What would that do?"

"Prevent the tunnel from collapsing on you."

"And I should trust you because..?"

"Because I'm the guardian of this vortex which extends to the portal. I protect the travelers cleared to pass through. You've been cleared. You've been appointed Agent Representative, VIP they used to call them."

VIP. There it was again. It wasn't what she wanted to hear. She didn't apply for the position. Her attention moved to the crowd. Their chanting was working to a crescendo. "Why are you letting these people play around here when something so worrisome is occurring?"

"It's an ideal time to see if any of them shows a real talent for managing energy. If so, it would be nice to have a backup so I can go on vacation now and then. It's a pity your Connie isn't interested."

"They're Homo sapiens. And Connie is a magician's apprentice."

"You think being a guardian isn't a worthy occupation? When surrounded by the energy of a vortex or portal, the physical body changes and eventually disappears. What you see of me, is an illusion."

Suddenly a dark space opened over the group and from it came a dragon.

"It's about time," a deep voice boomed out and the form of a dragon appeared, looking much like they had appeared when she last saw one. "We don't have any more time to delay."

Fae gave a nudge to Helen. "Just get it done," he said. "When it's done everything will rebalance. I will then be able to return to my work."

Helen reluctantly walked to the front of the portal and realized she was holding her nonexistent breath. VIP? Bertie had asked her but she had thought in jest. Did the Tilda Clan Elders know too? Why didn't her mother tell her? She felt annoyed. Maybe she should read what Rose had in the pouch.

"Well," the voice boomed in her head. "We don't have much time! Step in. Step in."

Helen felt manipulated into a mistake, but she did take one step into the portal and felt the shock on her senses as they were all muted. It took a moment to acclimate and in the moment, if the dragon wished to kill her, he could. By the look in his yellow eyes, he knew that. Something was familiar about this dragon.

How many dragons had she known? None. How many killing raids had she been part of? None. She was part of the defense guard at one of the mountain caverns. How many times did the dragons

attack the mountain fortress? Thousands of times through the hundreds of years the war went on. Why hadn't she met any dragons?

Her memory wasn't reliable. The many vampires and other living things she drank blood from, had something to contribute in memories of times past. Some of the dark and sinister memories were from vampires not morphed into the humanoid form. It was from those memories that familiarity with this dragon was arising from. During the dragon wars, vampires were not in humanoid form.

## CHAPTER 7

In the darkness her eyes had not quickly adjusted which for a vampire was unusual, and sound was so different she could describe it as muted. There were too many disadvantages to her in this situation. She didn't like the odds. Her hand brushed against her sword hilt, reassuring to have though not likely to slay a dragon at first strike.

If the dragons got out of line, how would she be able to get them back? Diplomacy? Dragon Diplomacy as she remembered it took armies of soldiers that swarmed on the most vulnerable dragon and sucked it dry of life force.

The dragon's silhouette grew smaller. She remained where she stood, not wanting to be drawn too far from the exit. Never trust a dragon with a long memory. Until she could identify what past this dragon had with someone in her past or her for that matter, she wasn't going to be going anywhere with him. Besides, she was just a monitor.

A VIP, she reminded herself, though on a temporary basis she was sure.

It wasn't long before the smell in the tunnel was filled with dragon scent. A small one was first. It was twice her size, an adolescent. He held a flag and moved fast through the tunnel with his tail whipping back and forth in nervous excitement. Others followed keeping their distance from each other's tails. A few glanced at her, smoke tendrils came from their nostrils. Hopefully, none of them would fire up or the entire tunnel would collapse. Their fire was a different type of energy...which meant they shouldn't be able to step out of the portal exit to Earth. So how did the cockatrice get out?

It did have its own energy envelope around it. A magician must have created it so it could search for something. Was it searching for her? Why did Rose go after Eric and damage all of the RVs blood supply? What magic did Rose bring that burnt out her spells and amulets? Rose knew she was VIP and was delivering her the message of her appointment and assignment. Could she be both a mediator for the dragons and a messenger for the Vampire Council?

A small dragon, about her size blew flames her way. An older dragon folded its wing over the dragon's flame before it reached her. Helen could see it hurried up the tunnel ahead of its larger relatives as if she were going to harm it for its bravery. She wondered if dragons still hatched their young or had adapted to another method of producing progeny as vampires and werewolves had.

Where was the end to this procession? How many had passed and how many more to go? She didn't feel tired because the tunnel was being energized by the vortex and she was inside it, but she was bored.

Helen glanced back at her exit. It was fading. Either she remain where she was and trust Fae to keep an exit available for her, or she could leave her position and check on her exit. The dragon would have known that the portal entrance for her would close. Was he planning on trapping her in the tunnel?

Her attention went back to the line of dragons. By her count it was coming to an end. There was a long pause between the last two. Where were they? She waited a few moments wondering where Fradja, one of the last dragons was.

Fradja. That's his name. Fradja of Mort Valley. Why had she forgotten?

Helen moved from where she was standing and took up a new place to wait. She glanced back at the exit. Did it change colors, from dark to gray? A sound she didn't recognize had her turning back to the tunnel the dragons had gone to. Again there was a sound from the exit. It had her curious, but not enough to go and look. Her job was to be sure all the dragons left the tunnel and the exits closed.

A dragon came rushing toward her. "Not all have passed over! We are missing two," she said. Her nose was bright orange. She was upset about something. She rushed past her and back down the tunnel.

“Where are you going?” Helen called after her. Her voice was altered in the tunnel. It didn’t carry beyond a few feet from her. She could see the energy of her voice, a purple in a gray environment. Naturally, this big production can’t go without a problem, she thought. She watched the energy of her thought, green in color, move after the dragon. “I’ll keep that in mind. Voice goes nowhere and thought goes everywhere.”

A strong dragon smell came blowing from the direction of the portal exit of the dying world the dragons left. She sniffed again. It was the smell of a dragon getting ready to flame. “Oh, hellfire,” Helen said disgusted. *They are not going to mess up this migration.* Helen moved quickly down the tunnel to see what was happening. She threw herself flat on the portal's floor and could feel the heat scorch the atmosphere above her. If she were more bat-like, it would have been the ceiling that she sought protection.

Looking out the exit she could see creatures throwing rocks and spouting fire sticks toward the portal entrance. In the air was a dragon flying in circles above an area that was teeming with more of the same creatures.

She could hear the dragon’s call to those below her. Fradja and Garug, the two missing dragons, were being driven away from the portal. They had nestlings recently hatched.

“There goes the flawless migration,” Helen said. Her voice carried out through the portal and a pause with those outside. Suddenly they charged the exit.

Helen drew her sword and charged out the portal, thinking she may have made a mistake, but her assignment was to get all the dragons through the portal to their new home. Her momentum took her past the group, with her sword moving faster than she could on Earth. Not looking back she continued toward the group the dragon was flying above. The dragon had moved up higher to avoid shots that were fired toward her.

Fradja and the female dragon surrounded by dinosaur like creatures. Fradja was bleeding and missing scales but he was defending something tiny at his feet. Shells from a fresh opened egg were scattered about. The female was being attacked from above. If she rose to the sky to defend herself, she would be swarmed and killed.

One of the creatures moved to block the portal. Helen drew her sword and was surprised how easy it was to cut off its head.

Fradja and the female dragon moved slowly to the portal but Helen could feel the portal was closing. She was about ready to leave the portal to help when Fradja’s thought hit her hard to not leave the portal entrance; otherwise, it would close for good.

The female dragon must have reopened it to allow Fradja and the hatchling entrance; however, they were not making good progress.

*You must run now!* Helen thought. She could feel the portal pushing to close. She wished Rose was here and if she were she could change into something bigger and more dangerous to help the dragons. It would not look good for her to fail her first assignment, even if she didn’t want to participate.

She took another swipe at the next creature that tried to enter the portal. Whatever made up its life force, spurted on her hands, making her grip on her sword slippery.

*I need to be something as big as a brachiosaurus brancai, but not so slow.*

Suddenly Helen could feel the space around her change. What she had mentally pictured she was shape changing to. Once she was large enough, she stepped out so that half of her was in the portal and half out. Her large form blocked the portal. As a distraction and new threat, the creatures turned on her. She was larger than the two dragons. The female didn’t waste time and had the small hatchling in her mouth and rushed to the portal. Helen barely had time to move to give her the space. Fradja didn’t move at all. He was now involved in protecting himself.

*Leave me vampire. Close the portal so they can’t follow.*

Helen used her head to bat away the flying predators, then knocked away the ones that were getting past Fradja's defenses. Helen couldn't feel the effects of the attacks on her body yet, due to her huge size, but she knew she would soon be losing her ability to defend the portal.

Ignoring the assault against her thick skin, she dipped her immense head to pick up the injured dragon. Fradja was limp, as if his energy was drained. Instead of gently setting him down at her huge feet, she dropped him and could feel her own energy rapidly depleting from keeping up the enormous form. With Fradja closer to the portal he found strength to drag himself across the threshold.

*Get in vampire! I can't hold this open!*

*That's true,* Helen thought to herself. She could feel her shape dissolving. Mentally she had herself jumping back in vampire form; however, it was prehistoric form, when they were more gargoyle than humanoid in appearance.

The portal closed with a snap and vibration shook the sides of the tunnel she was collapsed against. Helen realized too late her new shape couldn't absorb the energy from the tunnel to recharge and repair herself.

Fradja's nostrils flared a small flame, burning Helen's eyes. *You have paid your debt to me and my den by rescuing the last hatching. I held up my side of the agreement by not leaving you on that planet. I owe you nothing more. If you survive or not is up to your own.*

Helen marveled at how fast her self-awareness was diminishing.

Then...

## CHAPTER 8

Tiny red eyes stared at nothing as the world around it was trembling with unfriendly life. Self-preservation coupled with billions of years of memories stored in blood ingested and absorbed by cells that were genetically programmed to survive at all costs, recalled a small creature that could survive the type of energy the tunnel was now vibrating to. There was so little strength left, but tiny red eyes became bright yellow and the shape change left Helen exhausted.

A change of air around her had her whiskers quivering but she lacked the energy to respond. She could feel herself being dragged and then a heavy weight descended on her, causing her to lose her breath.

"It would help if you chose something that wasn't so dangerous," Rose said. "Well, that's the extent of my business here." Something dropped near her nose. "Here's the documents you refused to read. You really should read it before you get into trouble."

Helen heard her say something to someone else.

"Helen, you're getting me nervous. Can you change to something that's not going to bring every hunter out here?" Fae asked. "You can use the vortex energy."

Helen imagined herself as she was when she first met Fae. It seemed a safe image. The change was rapid and with it came the sudden realization that the sun was out and she couldn't remember any real building being on the property for her to seek refuge in.

Helen shielded her eyes from the expected sun and waited for the impact of energy to burn her. Nothing happened. She opened her eyes. Fae and her were in a small shack that could barely hold two people.

"Where are we?"

"In what humans call an outhouse. It's a real structure so you won't have to worry about sustaining the illusion and healing yourself. You're too weak to go anywhere."

"So, was the migration successful?" Helen asked. It was such an effort to ask she decided that would be the last she would say until she felt stronger.

"I only know that the portal has shifted and is no longer here. I didn't think I was going to be able to keep it open any longer so Rose went to look for you. She was obligated as the broker to make sure all those in agreement held to their end of the bargain and it was on her to be sure you came back. Never trust a dragon."

Helen withdrew to a receptive state drawing from the portal's energy and making plans for the evening.

When the stars were bright and night was fully engaged, Helen stepped out of the building and walked to the cement slab to see what was there. Another vampire was near – Bertie.

"I heard you met Rosefla of Ganbog, from the Council," Bertie said. "I also heard you refused to look at the documents."

"You know her?"

"I've heard about her. Rosefla is a dimension jumper. In this world she can shape change. Do we have any more business here?" Bertie asked.

"Not me."

"Do you know what happened to Eric and the protection spells we had around the motorhome?" Bertie asked.

"Eric met Rosefla and invited her in."

"Rosefla is intersexual. No wonder Eric looked flustered when Connie woke him up. He said he couldn't remember anything."

"She had him in the palm of her hand. No telling what she was planning if I hadn't arrived. Right on my heels a cockatrice came visiting."

“They’re companions to dragons and I guess to Rosefla since she’s their intermediary.”

“You know of her how?”

“Uncle Frank told stories of Rosefla’s grandmother who didn’t live past our mutating into Homo sapiens. She loved the dinosaurs and regretted their leaving.”

“I remember the burning of our caves by early humans. They were frightened of us,” Helen said.

“Hanging upside down from ceilings and looking almost human must have been frightening to them,” Bertie smiled. “Frank said a decision was made to finally morph into Homo sapiens to learn about them. Of course, everything had to be done in darkness and in the daytime have dependable slaves to protect us.”

“Werewolves that looked like humans in the day time.” Helen looked over at Bertie, trying to image what she would look like in their various shapes until they reached their present. “We can thank the Anunnaki for adding us and the werewolves to their DNA experiments. Without their tampering, we wouldn’t have been able to change so quickly to our present shapes.”

“And in exchange, we can no longer bring our own into the world. We have to bite someone with the intention of converting them,” Bertie said.

“I, frankly, would rather look like this than our early ancestors. You can change you know,” Helen added.

“Oh, right, if I leave Earth.”

“It’s amazing what chemicals can do. We can change form as we change our environment.”

“You’re not going to start that talk about our next migration, are you?” Bertie asked.

“No. You get depressed.”

“Vampires don’t get depressed. It’s melancholy.”

Bertie followed Helen through the field. Both women were keeping an eye on the werewolves that were watching them. Helen was ready for some quiet time in her container. An energy wave radiated out in a steady flow from the vortex.

“I’ve asked Connie to meet us on the road,” Bertie said. “I can feel the vortex now. Fae must be back to managing it. Two years ago when we visited this area, I didn’t feel this.”

“Did you visit the farm?” Helen asked.

“No. Here comes our ride.”

Eric was sitting in the passenger seat, looking exhausted.

“Are you going to be alright?” Bertie asked Connie.

Helen thought Connie should be asking that of Bertie. She looked tired.

“For about four hours. If Eric doesn’t recover by then I’ll park and all of us will reenergize.”

Bertie stepped into her container, not waiting for Helen.

Helen studied Eric. It looked like he was nodding off. His thoughts were still. She leaned close to Connie and whispered, “We’ll need blood for Bertie but not from Eric. What we have in storage is spoiled.”

Connie nodded. “I’ve removed it. Bertie has a stop marked on our map where we can get a safe replenishment.”

Helen entered her container and checked its security. Whatever Rose had damaged or invaded had been repaired and new talismans created for the motor homes protection. Helen touched her own talisman and could feel her own energy that infused it.

End of this story.