

VAMPIRE THERAPY (A work in progress)

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Chapter One *Jehrek*

As Jehrek rose from his analyst's couch he felt a sense of peace he had never truly imagined he would ever feel. A great weight seemed to have been lifted from.

"Your leech is gone." Jehrek's therapist Michael said.

"Gone?"

"Effectively gone, it remains with you but will not trouble you so deeply anymore."

Jehrek pondered this...

"Your leech has accepted a new relationship with you, a new relationship you have both worked upon here in this office together. It is your ally now, and will help you rebuild your life."

"How is this possible?"

"Your leech was accessible while you were under hypnosis. It has been able to accept that you were in too much risk of suicide. To continue to demoralize you might have killed you. New hosts are increasingly difficult for their kind to find in this world, there are too many of them here now. It must save you to save itself."

"Then we will continue to be lovers?"

"Yes, it will remain close to you and you will remain lovers."

Jehrek was stunned. He had been in love with the strange creature he hosted since his teenage years. His life had turned into a disastrous mess as he permitted his lover to feed off him, to stir the basest emotions in his soul for its sustenance.

"Why was my love never enough for it? Why did it defile me and degrade me and nearly destroy me?"

Jehrek sat in the comfortable chair beside the couch and felt for the presence of his alien lover.

"The vampires have never relied on understanding humans or accommodating them. Hosts were plentiful, human lives were cheap to them. They always took the easiest ways to feed off their hosts. Torment, pain, and emotional anguish have always been their primary means of sucking the life from their hosts. They did not understand more refined emotions, emotions harder to sustain and hence harder to feed upon. But the dramatic increase in their numbers on this world has led them to a point where they must change their ways or suffer with you. They choose not to suffer. If serving your wellbeing is their best option, then some of them are wise enough to understand this and consent to change their ways."

"And... ", Jehrek paused; unsure he wanted to ask this question. He summoned the courage to ask, "And does it love me?"

"In its own way, yes, it has learned to love you. Without that love it could not have made the choice to sacrifice its own comfort and convenience for your wellbeing."

"Then I am satisfied."

"You must continue to come to your sessions Jehrek, we are not through. The peace being established between you and your alien lover is a fragile tenuous peace at best. Its own instincts rage against it now and threaten the stability you have worked together to achieve. In

addition, you remain conditioned to harm yourself in order to satisfy its lusts. Both of these conditions keep you both in peril.”

Jehrek pulled out his empty pockets. “But I cannot pay you anymore.”

“The work I have done with you will have rewards beyond the fees you already owe. I will give you a 5% share of the profits I expect to make chronicling your story. Meanwhile, I have arranged a room for you with a friend where you will be safe to explore the changes ahead of you in relative comfort and security.”

“Thank you.”

“No, thank you Jehrek. When you came to me with your odd tale I didn’t believe you at first. But you told a compelling story and it touched something in me that could not be put to rest once you had awakened it. I am a host as well.

“If your creature is to be believed, then nearly everyone alive today hosts a creature much like your own lover. Time will tell.”

Jehrek felt the presence of his lover cuddling up to him as a wave of mild muscular contractions that were a sort of secret language he shared with his alien lover. He wriggled in response drawing his lover deeper into himself, cherishing it.

Jehrek accepted an envelope from his therapist.

“These are your directions to the safe house I have set up for you. Go there now. Get familiar with the place and then you can begin to think about your future.”

“Thank you.”

“We thank you.”

“We?”

“The creature I host and myself both thank you. We did not yet face the sort of cataclysmic life changes you have had to deal with, but it might still come to that; the revelations you and your lover have made clear mean a new beginning for ourselves as well as for both of you.”

“I see.”

“Words are inadequate to express the complexity of what is being achieved here in this office, but the effects of our work together may be extraordinary, revolutionary. Together we may change the world for the better.”

Jehrek pondered this for a moment and wondered whether his madness had somehow been contagious; he considered whether his trusted therapist had gone off his rocker. His change in circumstances counseled him to continue to trust his therapist. Mad or not, Michael had given him hope, comfort, and a measure of security he had not known for years.

Opening the envelope, Jehrek found a debit card. He waggled it in Michael’s direction, asking with his gesture ‘What is this?’

“That is an account opened for you. There is \$500 in the account. You may draw on it as needed. Perhaps you could use some new clothes?”

“Thank you, yes.”

The threadbare clothes that Jehrek wore would soon fall completely to tatters in spite of the diligent care with which Jehrek kept them clean and in repair. They were his only clothes, his only possessions. Jehrek had been robbed just yesterday of the small canvas bag in which the few things he still had were kept.

He could scarcely believe his good fortune.

“We are partners Jehrek, just the four of us for now, but we will find other partners and things will soon get better for all of us.”

“Michael, does my lover have a real name?”

“Ask it yourself. You will have some difficulty communicating with it, but the groundwork is laid and the sooner you enter into a dialogue with it the sooner you will begin to understand one another better.”

Jehrek sensed his session was concluded. It was not a matter of time so much as a sense of dismissal that had accompanied Michael’s last words. Jehrek’s sessions were always late night affairs, they could sometimes be brief if Michael had urgent business elsewhere, but his sessions with Michael were more often very long affairs of which Jehrek himself seemed to remember little or nothing. He had been seeing Michael 3 nights a week for twenty months now. In that time he had descended from grace as a highly paid programmer to become a homeless person sorting through other people’s leavings for his meals, sometimes fighting for his survival with other destitute people like himself who had sunk to the lowest levels of existence upon the cold hard streets of Philadelphia.

Jehrek stood and placed the plastic debit card in his front pocket. He carefully folded the envelope with its precious instructions and tucked it in his rear pocket.

“Alrighty then, thank you Michael, see you Saturday.”

Michael stood to shake hands with Jehrek.

“We’re looking forward to it Jehrek. Goodnight.”

Michael clapped Jehrek warmly on the shoulder as Jehrek sidled through the door, having difficulty turning his back on his therapist who had become his friend.

The stairs down to the street level were cramped. Workmen had erected narrow scaffolding upon the stairs and then left it to go home to their dinners. The partly re-pointed brick wall they had been working on smelled of limestone from the fresh mortar. Michael’s waiting room and offices were cramped into a loft space at the back of a popular restaurant.

Jehrek realized he would need an ID to use his new debit card freely. But a cash machine was only two blocks down the street. Jehrek pulled the envelope from his back pocket and looked inside.

Sure enough, a small card had a number on the back. It would almost certainly be a pin number to use with the debit card.

Whistling and feeling good for the first time in nearly two years, Jehrek passed the end of the scaffolding and turned down the narrow alley beside the restaurant. He would return to eat there once he had put some cash in his pocket.

In the restaurant Jehrek sat at a small table in a secluded corner near the back. The bustling noises of the kitchen could be heard distinctly through the double doors beside his table, but the noise suited Jehrek's purposes. He had to have a long talk with his alien lover and the noise would help cover his whispered words as he worked to get to know it better while waiting for his trout to arrive.

Chapter Two Michael

“Michael. I’m worried about you! Your obsession with your patient is frightening me!”

“Tara, I am on the brink of something new and important. He isn’t what you think; he’s not a madman at all.”

“Mad or not I think he is making you mad!”

I am not mad, I am simply awakening, I am awakening to parts of myself I never new existed. I am becoming something more than I ever dreamed I could be.”

“You are changing, I am afraid you are leaving me. For awhile there I seriously thought you had found someone else. Part of me still does not trust that all your late nights with your patient are for your patient alone. How often do you see him now?”

“We meet 3 times a week, as I told you; the other nights are spent on my research.”

“I trusted you, I suppose I still trust you, but why can’t you let me into your world now? We used to share everything.”

“My ideas are too unclear to share with you; I need more time to be sure I understand what’s going on.”

“You used to share all of your thoughts with me. Now a part of you has closed itself off. I hate secrets! They make me anxious, they may me think things I don’t want to think. I can’t shake this persistent suspicion that there might really be another woman involved.”

“I promise you there is no other woman. You are more than enough woman for me.”

“You used to be more than enough man for me, but now... Now I feel like we are separated by some unimaginable gulf, a distance has grown up between us I feel powerless to close. I can’t be certain that you really love me anymore.”

“It’s just my work, nothing more, and things will get better for us again, I promise you.”

“You’ve been promising me for some time now, what, three months, four? When will things get better? When will we feel close to each other again?”

Michael touched Tara tenderly on her shoulders moving his hands gradually up to her neck; his frustration with this argument was growing worse... He meant to kiss her on her neck, just below her ear, he shuddered as he realized he suddenly felt compelled to strangle her instead.

He could feel the alien within himself feeding off his anger and frustration. He wanted to tell it to stop, to back off, but he did not dare speak the words with Tara present, she would only misunderstand and make things even worse.

Michael kissed Tara and reflected on their long childless marriage.

That was another issue. Neither of them had felt they had the time to take from their careers to have a child together. Now Michael and Tara both wanted a child but their years of excuses for putting it off had made them both wary of facing this need and resolving to become pregnant together.

The issue could not even be discussed now, with Tara so insecure in their relationship. Tara had good cause to be insecure. His own alien lover had slowly and steadily built a deep rift in

their marriage in order to feed off the painful feelings that had resulted. It was feeding now. It was feeding off his anger and frustration and the pain he felt from his alienation with his wife.

Tara melted a bit as Michael's lingering kiss made her feel warmer and more secure. She turned within his arms and embraced him, taking his mouth with her own mouth to taste him and kiss him back fiercely.

This was another of the vampire's feeding tactics. The hot passions which followed their quarrels fed their alien hosts. But passion was much harder to sustain, it was more like a sweet desert after a long dinner of torment.

Michael and Tara yielded to their lusts and began to make love, leading each other upstairs to their bedroom slowly, seductively, enjoying every moment of anticipation of the pleasures they would share.

Michael was able to forget the alien within him that was feeding upon his passion, he let go of his sense of frustration that he did not have more time to talk with it and study it and gave himself completely into Tara's tender care, loving her back with an ardent joy that promised him their problems would be resolved.

Several tiny pinholes in the condoms he would use tonight would resolve one further problem, yet Michael was unaware he had put those pinholes there.

Chapter Three *Safe House*

In the restaurant Jehrek finished his meal and paid his bill. He had tried to talk with his lover quietly but he was too self-conscious to speak out loud. He was both puzzled and pleased by this, it meant he possessed a measure of self control he had feared he would entirely lose. He had begun talking to his lover aloud last year and eventually his talks had become more and more public, so that people stared at him or avoided him and their body language communicated what they were usually too polite to say frankly, that he was crazy.

For awhile Michael had seen himself as he imagined those strangers must see him, he had seen himself as a madman, perhaps psychotic, or a schizophrenic, and he had felt ashamed in response to the aversion with which more and more people treated him. But eventually he ceased to be aware of other people, completing his alienation with them by ceasing to see them, just as they chose to ignore him.

Now, it seemed, a measure of his social identity was returning, along with his awareness of the social rules he should not break. The old familiar taboos were re-asserting themselves. Perhaps he would be ok after all.

The waiter's body language had made it clear all through his visit to the restaurant that the waiter felt he did not belong there, that Jehrek's tatty clothes were proof that Michael did not belong among the genteel society which patronized this restaurant, but Michael didn't care. Coming in here for his supper had been a step out of the horrible squalor his life had descended into and was symbolic of Jehrek's hope for a better future.

Jehrek tipped his waiter generously in spite of the poor service and constant disdain he had received. He understood the waiter was a product of his social conditioning, incapable of the sort of compassion and warm regard the waiter lavished on more acceptable looking clientele. Tipping poorly would only confirm in the waiter's eyes how worthless Jehrek was. A good tip might help the waiter appreciate Jehrek more. Possibly the waiter would also be inclined to be more compassionate to someone else like Jehrek who might otherwise one day trigger more disdain and hostility from the waiter.

Jehrek gave the waiter his most heart-warming smile and departed the premises.

The instructions from Michael had given a local address, a house on Spruce Street. It was only about five blocks away. Michael knew the neighborhood, slightly genteel, gentrified in the 60's but returning to a poorer state again due to the long economic recession that still plagued the country through three of the past four administrations. Many of the homes had been abandoned to students of the local art colleges. The students did not mind overcrowding themselves in these large houses, together they could afford rents that only very wealthy families could afford today. And with the rising crime rates the poor students felt far safer on these streets than wealthier people would feel.

The doorbell of his new home appeared to be broken. Jehrek knocked on the door. After awhile Jehrek noticed a string that passed through a small hole in a piece of cardboard taped over the missing corner of a windowpane set in the frame of the door and tentatively pulled the string. A slight jingling sound responded to his pull. He pulled harder and a lovely noise like bells issued from the other side of the door. The shadows from a flickering tv which fell upon

the curtains of a window to Jehrek's right were darkened as someone rose from their seat to answer the door.

A moment later a young man appeared at the door, seen dimly through the unwashed glass panes. The door opened and the fellow revealed beyond the door smiled warmly.

"You must be Jehrek. I'm Jerry. Robert told me to expect you tonight, come on in."

Jerry appeared to be an art student. He wore loose bib overalls covered in many hues of paint, hues stroked on with narrow brushes in some cases, far too narrow to have been the result of a handyman's work. Larger brush strokes shared the light canvas overalls with the smaller brush strokes so Jerry also painted buildings for a living.

"Thank you Jerry. I'm afraid I don't know Robert, I haven't much of an idea what to expect here."

"That's ok dude, you are very welcome here. Robert filled me in and we are both happy to help you out here."

"West coast?"

"La. Go on into the living room there on the right. Would you like a beer?"

"Yes thank you."

"Coming right up!"

Jerry disappeared past the stairwell in the hall as Jehrek entered the dark living room where the only light came from a TV and a lava lamp.

"Hello Jehrek, nice to meet you."

A tall heavy set fellow rose from the couch, offering his hand to Jehrek. Jehrek took the handshake firmly and was pleased to receive a fairly firm grip in response with none of the confusing interplay of fingers and fists that were typical of many people's greetings.

"You'll learn."

Jehrek was unsure what to make of this remark and let it slide.

"I'm Dan. Robert told us you would be here tonight. Have you eaten?"

"Yes, thank you, I've just had dinner."

"Well then have a seat and make yourself comfy." Dan indicated empty places on the worn couch and a chair to the side nearer the window. Jehrek took the chair. Jerry appeared with beers and Jerry and Dan sat together on the couch.

"The girls will be home shortly, and Robert and Juke will be home a bit later. There are eight of us sharing this house, nine with you." Dan gestured a great deal as he spoke, his arms seemed unusually long.

"Are you all art students?"

Jerry winked at Dan as he replied to Jehrek's question. "In one way or another, yes, though some of us are performing artists rather than fine artists or schlock artists or just plain starving artists."

Dan elaborated a bit. “The girls are all in the performing arts school except for Em, Emily paints. Robert is a woodworker, Juke is a musician, and I am into industrial design. Jerry paints.”

“The other three girls are all dancers. They took Em with them for a dance recital. Em likes to sketch them, and sometimes her work makes the playbills. The dancers are Tiffany, Debbie and Callie. You’ll like them, we all do.” Jerry added a wink and smile to emphasize his remark. Dan leered.

“I’m sure I will like all of you” Jehrek replied, thank you both for being so hospitable.

The darkened room was somewhat dilapidated. Graffiti and murals were layered over one another upon the older peeling wallpaper that still clung to the walls. Above the television a painting of a tree in a large circle appeared relatively new, at least it covered parts of its neighboring paintings and graffiti scrawls. The tree was shown branching out to fill the painting to the limits of the circle, its roots appeared beneath it, also branching out, as if the earth in which they must be planted were partly invisible.

Jerry watched as Jehrek examined the minute details of the painting. Hidden among the bark of the trunk, the branches, roots and leaves could be seen many different creatures, some fantastic, others more mundane. There were people and monkeys there as well engaged in many activities. The people and monkeys resembled each other more and more closely until the monkeys became people and the people became monkeys.

Jehrek liked this painting a lot. “Your work Jerry?”

“Indeed. Glad you like it so much.”

“It belongs on canvas, it will be lost to time here on this wall.”

“All art is lost before the first brushstroke; paintings are ephemeral creatures at best never coming up to the vision of their painters no matter how hard they try.”

Jehrek was stunned by such a careless attitude to such a wonderful treasure.

“Never mind Jehrek, its not the paint that is important, only the vision.”

Jehrek looked around the room and saw another painting in progress. This one wound its way between its neighbors, sometimes overflowing their boundaries but also gently merging into them so that they seemed to be a seamless part of the whole even though they were in many styles and hues and subjects. Even the graffiti was blended in...

“A more ambitious effort, it’s still waking up and learning of its own existence.”

Jehrek did not know what to make of this remark. It seemed both young men spoke a foreign language at times, the words were clearly English but the meanings obscure.

Footsteps could be heard on the steps leading up to the door and the front door suddenly opened admitting laughter and sweet voices with the four young women who were entering the house.

Dan turned on a lamp on an end table across from the door to the living room so that the girls would be more clearly illuminated as they entered the room.

“Hello girls, meet Jehrek!” Dan rose and pulled Jehrek from his chair both hands, placing his hands in the hands of the first girl to enter the room. “This is Tiffany”

“Pleased to meet you Jehrek.”

Tiffany was tall and dark and slender as a beanpole except for the slight flares at her hips and bust. Her long legs hardly seemed to know where to stop. Her skin was a pale honey color, her hair was an orange-red fuzzy mop. Tiffany raised both of Jehrek’s hands high into the air above them and pirouetted once around. She kissed Jehrek lightly on the lips and then placed both of his hands in the hands of the girl behind her with a slight curtsey.

“Nice to meet you Jehrek, I’m Callie.”

Callie smiled a huge smile that seemed almost feral. Her Red hair was dark and she was nearly as tall as Tiffany, but with a fuller figure and shorter legs. She spun Jehrek about in what might have been a graceless pirouette had she not guided him and kept him turning with both hands. Jehrek stumbled, slightly dizzy.

“Turn you head the opposite way, then snap it all the way around quickly in mid turn, eyes focusing on me. You won’t get so dizzy that way!”

As Jehrek got his gaze refocused on Callie she stepped out of the way and the girl behind her stepped in to hold Jehrek close and waltz him about the room, leading him as if she were the man. Debbie was the shortest of the dancers but still tall. She was solidly built a lithe muscular gal who clearly worked out hard on a regular basis.

“I’m Debbie, but I don’t do Dallas.” Debbie whispered in Jehrek’s ear, bending him over backward and gazing into his eyes as if she yearned for him deeply. When Jehrek nearly overbalanced she pulled him to his feet and spun him toward the last girl.

Jehrek collided with Emily so forcefully that they both lost their breath. Emily dropped her tote bag and caught Jehrek in her arms to keep herself from being bowled over backwards. Their eyes met, and then their lips met, and they seemed to acknowledge they had met sometime before, perhaps in a past life.

Jehrek’s alien lover yowled with glee; the intensity of the passion between Emily and Jehrek was feeding it so exquisitely that it’s ecstasy seemed to flow over and light up the entire room.

Everyone stepped back from Jehrek and Emily stunned by their voyeuristic experience of the wild passion they had felt set free.

When Emily and Jehrek stopped to breathe there seemed to be nothing for either of them to say. Their warm embrace continued speaking for both of them.

Jehrek could feel his alien lover purring within him, and it seemed as if Emily too was sharing a deeper alien rapture within herself.

“Well now that introductions have been made...” Dan spoke only slightly ahead of Tiffany so that their words seemed to run together oddly...

“Looks like Em has finally found herself a dance partner...”

Emily and Jehrek blushed together, but neither let loose of the other, instead they snuggled a bit tighter together enjoying each other’s scent.

“Aw shucks, if it ain’t love at first sight!” Jerry flippantly quipped into the quiet room.

The three girls embraced around the new couple drawing Dan and Jerry into the crushing warmth of their joy. All seven tumbled into the couch together which creaked alarmingly then

snapped loudly and settled completely to the floor in the middle, finally ending its long battle with gravity and decrepitude.

Somewhere in the middle of their dogpile Jerry laughed. His laughter was contagious and soon everyone was breaking up in fits of glee. Their bodies expanding as they laughed until Dan, Tiffany and Debbie spilled out of the couch and onto the floor. They quickly got up and dove back into the couch which had nothing more to say about all the abuse heaped upon it that night.

After awhile of pleasant snuggling footsteps could be heard outside. Robert and Juke entered the house.

The gang on the couch got up to welcome Robert and Juke and continue with Jehrek's introductions.

Jehrek and Emily groaned and slowly managed to sit up. They had been buried together at the bottom of the dogpile.

"Jehrek, good to meet you, I'm Robert and this is Juke. Looks like you've met everyone else!" Robert winked and smiled and tousled Jehrek's hair. "It seems you've made a very bad impression..."

"On the couch!"

Juke grabbed Robert and laughed at his joke, punching him in the arm...

"Oh, and this merry wit is Juke. He speaks with his hands... He's not really mute, he's just ten times more eloquent with a musical instrument to do his speaking for him."

"G-good to meet you Jehrek..."

Juke reached out and thumped Jehrek strongly on his shoulder, clasping Jehrek's shoulder tightly in a gesture that could only be a sort of shorthand for a hug before letting him go.

Jehrek had the oddest sense that music had flowed through Juke's hand and into his shoulder, music he could now still faintly hear.

Juke smiled a knowing smile and seemed to glow as he heard the music in Jehrek resonating with his own music. Juke danced off down the hall and returned playing a flute. The music that issued from the flute was a sweet clear sound that rang with joy and hints of sunshine and peaceful meadows full of wild flowers.

It was music Jehrek had never heard before, yet it was as familiar as his alien lover's soul.

Robert pulled a talking drum from beneath the end table and let the drum speak for him, blending softly beaten tones into the flute music. Debbie, Callie and Tiffany rose to dance, drawing finger cymbals and castanets from their pockets to add more voices to the building rhythms in the room.

Jerry returned with a guitar which he clumsily stroked chords upon, and yet, for all his awkwardness he managed to play an eloquent counterpart to Juke's flute.

Dan twanged on a mouth harp and Emily played a kalimba. Jehrek felt compelled to join and hummed along, mesmerized by Emily's thumbs lightly plinking the kalimba keys. Emily looked up into Jehrek's eyes and smiled. The room filled with music that seemed to blend everyone's souls into a delicious, joyful song.

“It’s just like this here.” Emily whispered to Jehrek with a twinkle in her eye. There’s magic here, you can feel it!”

Jehrek nodded mutely. He could feel it. A wild free magic unlike anything he had ever known before seemed to fill the room, the house, the world... But something or someone here among them was the source of this wonderful magic and Jehrek hoped to discover what it was.

The nine friends played late into the night before heading to their rooms. Emily took Jehrek with her to her room.

Chapter Four *Tara*

Tara hated herself. She was spying on Michael, she knew it was wrong, but she couldn't help herself, she had to know what Michael was doing. So she was rooting through his personal files looking for some clue, anything that might explain what had gone wrong between them.

But spying was wrong, so Tara hated herself for spying.

As Tara searched through various files related to Michael's old projects and hobbies the degree to which she hated herself seemed to grow.

It wasn't just the spying, Tara acknowledged to herself. She hated herself for lots of other things too. She blamed herself for having lost Michael's affection. There was lots wrong with her and Michael would be stupid not to see how little she deserved him. She was getting fat. She was starting to wrinkle. Her clothing grew more conservative or frumpy every year. She wasn't playful anymore, she wasn't cheerful anymore. She hated herself. Anybody would if they really got to know her.

Tara didn't know her vampire was helping her to have all these thoughts, encouraging her to hate herself, driving her deeper into misery and torment to feed off her pain and suffering.

Tara honestly believed she hated herself.

It puzzled her that she hated herself so much. She couldn't recall ever hating herself before. So why now?

"Because I'm old and fat and ugly and sneaky and mean!" she shouted in reply to her own confusing question.

She knew she didn't always hate herself, that a lot of the things she was picking fault with about herself weren't things she really cared about so deeply. She could not understand why such deep self-loving had come over her.

"It's Michael's fault!" she whispered to herself. "It's all his fault!"

Tara hated Michael. He was a lying deceitful bastard out having an affair with another woman, she just knew it! And she was going to find the proof!

"That bastard can't keep anything hidden from me, he can't. He will slip, and when I catch him in his lies there will be hell to pay!"

Tara was sobbing. She had gone over everything in Michael's study with a fine tooth comb but she could not find a single shred of evidence to prove Michael had lied to her about the other woman in his life. She found his spare keys and picked them up.

Twenty minutes later she returned from the local hardware store with copies and carefully returned Michael's spare keys to their place in the corner of his sock drawer.

Maybe he never brought any evidence at home for her to find, but he would surely have left some evidence in his offices. She would find it, whatever it was. Perhaps a receipt for jewelry or flowers she never received. Perhaps she would find only a matchbook from some fancy restaurant that he never took her to. Perhaps, he had condoms stashed away somewhere, now that would be plenty proof enough. He never used condoms with her.

But he would always have some explanation, some way to make her doubt herself no matter how damning the evidence against him. He was so slippery like that, he could make a leopard believe it was a tree frog, he was so convincing when he argued.

She simply had to find the evidence! That's all that mattered now. All she needed was clear incontrovertible proof of his infidelity so she could justify leaving him and escape from the torment of loneliness that had turned her beautiful marriage into a living hell.

Tara grabbed her smokes and headed for the toilet. She had to pull herself together, make herself look nicer. Michael would be home soon. No good being caught looking like this, so, so... haggard. She looked hounded, as if she had been chased for dear life. Michael would know something was wrong, he would ask questions. He would sense his way through her lies and discover she had been spying. He would make her tell him she had copied his keys and was planning to spy on him even more. She couldn't let him see all of that the moment he walked through the door.

As she sat on the toilet and smoked, Tara began to calm down. So he left no clues at home, there would still be clues, and she would find them. As Tara grew calmer her bowels finally unclenched from the tortuous knot they had managed to twist themselves into and she slid into a pleasant reverie.

She remembered Michael when they first met. It had been like magic, like love at first sight.

He was coming down the steps of the library at Drexel as she was climbing up. They had collided, neither paying attention to where they were going. They helped pick up each other's books and sort out whose were whose. And their hands had touched as they sorted their books together. And their hands had continued touching when they were through. And then their eyes touched and they both knew their lips would touch next, and they did.

A magic moment...

Tara pulled her clothes around her and tidied up, taking time to redo her makeup and brush her hair twice. She was compulsive about brushing her hair. Michael learned to brush her hair very nicely, the only time she was completely free of her perpetual need to brush her own hair was when Michael brushed it. Then she was free, at peace.

Tara couldn't remember the last time Michael had brushed her hair, had it been as long as that? Whose hair did he brush now if he wasn't brushing hers?

"Get a grip!" Tara muttered to herself. "Get a god-damned fucking grip on yourself girl!" She was losing it again. Here she had finally made herself presentable and she was already messing herself up. She couldn't bear for Michael to see her like this, vulnerable, weak, totally out-of-control. He would know something was wrong and he would catch her.

Brushing her hair a third time she calmed down and managed to put the hairbrush down as Michael came through the front door downstairs. He didn't know she still compulsively brushed her hair. It was just one more of her little secrets that she needed to keep from him.

'Let him think he cured me of that.' Tara thought, 'Let him feel all superior and capable of handling me. I'll show him! Just you wait! There will be hell to pay!'

Chapter Five *Barroom Brawl*

Jehrek walked into the local bar with Emily. He had been here once before, there had been trouble then.

Dan and Tiffany were seated in a booth; Emily and Jehrek joined them.

Somewhere in the back a small crowd oohed and ahed in response to a dart thudding into its target, apparently it had been well aimed.

The barroom smelled of beer and excitement. Jehrek's alien lover awakened in response to the raw emotions floating about the room.

Dan passed mugs to Emily and Jehrek and poured for them from a large pitcher. The cheap foamy beer smelled good, although it was a bit too sweet for Jehrek's taste. Jehrek sat facing the door to the street, giving Emily the seat across from him with a good view of the action near the dart board.

"To love!" Tiffany toasted, winking for Jehrek as she hugged Emily and slopped a bit of her beer on the floor. "For the spirits." She explained.

Two booths further toward the rear of the barroom a fight was brewing. Jehrek could smell it; his alien lover's responses to the pheromones told him what would happen next. Jehrek had recognized the young woman in the booth and the two turkeys with her. 'Puppets on a string,' he thought, 'both of them.'

"Emily, Tiffany, do you see the two young men two booths down? One is standing..."

The girls nodded together.

"The blond with them, I met her once before, she was with those same two men, a pale blond fellow and a dark headed guy. They are about to start a fight."

The barman was now watching, the bouncer was moving in from the front door.

The dark haired young man standing at the end of the table reached over and dragged the blond fellow toward him by grasping his loose open baseball jacket on either side below the collar.

The young man in his grasp rose to his feet bringing both arms up inside the arms of the dark headed guy who had seized him, thereby breaking his grip while also blocking the blows he anticipated would come next. His assailant feigned high and when the blond fellow raised his arms to ward off the blow he believed would strike his face the dark haired guy landed a solid punch in the blonde's abdomen, doubling him over.

The bouncer arrived with the barman right behind him and he grasped the dark haired guy in an arm lock and dragged him toward the exit through which he hurled the dark haired guy roughly out into the night. The barman was right behind the bouncer propelling the blonde fellow through the door. They knew the two antagonists well. They knew the blonde woman the young men were fighting over even better.

There was always trouble with that girl.

The blonde fellow collided into the dark haired guy as he was picking himself up from the ground where the bouncer had tossed him.

The two young men grappled.

No one called 911.

Most of the bar patrons oozed out through the barroom's double doors where they exited at an angle directly facing the corner of the intersection of Pine and 13th Streets. Money appeared in clenched fists as people began wagering on the outcome of the ensuing fight.

Fights were good for business, so long as they happened outside the bar. The excitement helped to loosen people's spirits and they spent their money more freely and lingered longer after a fight, hoping to see more action.

The two young men did not disappoint the crowd.

After tussling briefly, clenched together in a deadlocked hold, they broke apart and began to spar, trading blows and blocking them with practiced skill. They knew each other well and were evenly matched. It would be a good fight.

The crowd moved around to form a circle. They would get their own chances to land a few blows if either of the young men ventured near them. Both men knew the rules of the crowd, stay in the fight to win or be punished.

The barman returned inside where Dan was caging drinks from the bar and empty tables and carrying them off to his table. Dan smiled and gave the barman a wink. He had collected enough drinks to last half the night or longer if his other friends did not show up as expected.

The barman smiled. When the crowd on the sidewalk returned inside most of them would not care if some of their drinks were missing, many of them would not even notice, and all of them would immediately order new drinks, buzzing on the high from the excitement of the fight.

Emily and Tiffany sniffed their way through the generic looking drinks, sorting them to their preferences.

Dan had not grabbed any exotic looking drinks that might call attention to who had been stealing drinks during the fight. Several other young men had been caging drinks too, and one seemed to have a taste for Margaritas that he might be paying for later in another barroom brawl.

The margaritas were too flamboyant; someone missing their drink could very easily spot it and protest too much or too physically. The idiot was not even pouring them all together into an empty pitcher. Perhaps he would become the next entertainment tonight.

Fights were common here. It fit a pattern Jehrek was familiar with.

Debbie and Callie entered the bar, squeezing through the tail end of the spectators cheering for their fighters. Juke followed them in.

The large booths could comfortably seat six. Juke pulled up a stool and sat at the end of the table.

"B-business as usual" Juke remarked.

"That it is Jukey!" Dan declared, swinging a slow moving high-five Juke's way which Juke met in mid-air. The two men smiled. The girls continued to divvy up the drinks and a tall scotch and soda appeared before Juke.

"You know what I like Tiff!" Juke smiled and raised his drink. "Salute!"

Glasses were clinked together all around and Jehrek tasted the drink Emily had selected for him, a Long Island iced tea. Nice!

“Seems you know what I like too Em!”

Emily smiled and waved her own drink under his nose, another Long Island iced tea. Jehrek smiled back with a wink. “A girl after my own tastes.”

Outside the crowd was chanting: “Fight! Fight! Fight!”

Jehrek knew that one of the young men was down and that the members of the crowd who had wagered on him to win were heckling him to get up and continue fighting.

A moment later there was a cheer from the winning side as the losers moaned and paid up.

The crowd poured in through the doors propelling their dark haired victor ahead of them. The blond fellow straggled in last among a group of his closer friends who took him to a booth on the far side of the room from where the blonde woman was now sitting down with the dark haired guy and his friends.

Drinks appeared at their table, paid for by the loser. It was part of the protocols established between the two young men over nearly two years of fighting one another. There would fight another night, soon.

“She’s poison, that one. Jehrek remarked to Emily waving his drink over his shoulder in the general direction of the blonde woman the two young men had been fighting over.

Emily nodded. “Do you know her?”

“I met her once, here, a bit over a year ago. This is only my second visit here. She came on to me then, I still had the sort of appearance she finds attractive, but my finances were crumbling into ruin, she didn’t like that.”

Emily nodded again. “She’s well paid; she’s looking for a guy with lots of money. Neither of those two fellows really suits her, but they do amuse her and keep her from being too lonely.”

“Ah then you’ve met her too.”

“Yeah. Met her too often perhaps...”

“She’s insecure, so she put you down, yes?”

“Yeah. She’s one bitch kitty.”

“Sad.”

“Yeah, did you try to date her?”

“Oh yeah, she’s hot enough to fry a guy to death, but I was honest with her, I wanted to win her attention personally, not with money or power.”

“She didn’t go for it.”

“Nope!”

“Her type never does.”

“Sad really, she’s selling herself short.”

“Know what you mean, but so long as she keeps those two turkeys dancing to her tune she is also dancing to their tune.”

“Yep, she makes herself the prize they fight over. They see her like property to be passed back and forth like the spoils of war. She allows herself to be perceived as property, she will never challenge that perception, she will never stand up for herself.”

“Yeah, she can’t, she’s too afraid of being alone.”

“Exactly.”

“Sad.”

Tiffany nodded in agreement; she had been closely following the conversation between Emily and Jehrek.

Jehrek noticed then that his other new friends at their table had been listening in too, silently nodding their agreements all along.

“Whatcha gonna do?” Dan broke into the silence.

“Have anuthah Bruthah.” Juke retorted.

Empty glasses slid to the end of the table; a new round of drinks was raised in a toast.

Debbie led the toast, “To lonely hearts everywhere, may they cease to be afraid.”

“Cheers” the seven friends cried together.

“Fear sucks!” Callie declared.

“Indeed” Dan replied.

“Whose afraid?” Robert asked, appearing as if by magic and cramming into the booth next to Callie.

“That girl over there.” Callie pointed.

“Oh her. Yeah she is definitely one big scaredy-cat.”

“We all know her.” Jerry added, sliding in next to Debbie across from Robert. The comfy booth for six was very cozy with all nine of the Safe House group tucked in tightly around it.

“She is following such an out-dated script.” Tiffany remarked.

“Outdated, but still functional, appropriate in any culture, and frequently fashionable in even the highest circles of society.” Dan replied.

Robert nodded. “Aye.”

Emily asked, “So what happened when you tried to date her Jehrek?”

“Well, I was just about finished with my career then. I had alienated everyone at work and couldn’t bear to find another job in the depths of my depression. I had applied for a leave of absence on psychiatric grounds and was soon going to be struggling to pay my bills because I would be cut to half salary and would lose all of my overtime pay.

“I couldn’t afford to keep up a pretense that I was still upwardly mobile and economically viable, and I didn’t want to even be bothered trying, so I told her straight out what my financial situation was.

"I could see she liked me, in spite of her gold-digger's objections to my economic status. So I tried to tell her a bit about herself from what I could see and feel about her.

"That went over really well. I described her as a well-paid executive assistant in the fashion industry being mentored to take her boss's job. Single, not ready to marry with her career still being established and a bit lonely but with friends.

"Her two friends showed up about then, and neither of them was very pleased to meet me."

"I'll bet!" Emily said in a light-hearted tone that encouraged Jehrek to continue his tale.

"Fortunately, neither of her fellows could pick a fight with me until they had settled a dispute over which of them would have the honor of running me off.

"So of course they started brawling."

"They are at it in here nearly every night." Tiffany interjected.

"So I gather.

"When they began to fight I tried to talk the blonde into leaving the bar with me. I told her she was too good for either of them, that she should not allow herself to be a prize in their private war as rivals for her favors.

"She understood me. She understood that she was demeaning herself, consigning herself to a role as property in their dispute; she nearly got up with me then to walk out.

"But her gold-digger ways held her back from making any commitment toward me, and her fear of loneliness asserted itself too. If she could not want me, then she would have to keep her two young men for company. They were safe, familiar habits. She felt in control with them. She didn't know how to feel with me and perhaps that disturbed her most of all, the idea that if she walked out with me she would have no idea what her role was as a free woman. She would not know how to act. She would not know how to simply be herself and abandon her familiar role as a puppet master for her two hapless suitors.

"Oh yeah!" Tiffany interjected, "It's hard to stand on your own two feet and face the world alone."

"Yes, so in the end she settled back in her seat and her two young men began a ritual of put-downs, goading each other to fight for the right to be the one to pick a fight with me.

"As their verbal jibes pushed each other toward violence I watched her smile. Then I felt something stirring within me that responded to her delight with the ensuing fight. I felt the lust for anger that was overtaking her as the same lust rose up within me. That's when I realized I was somehow possessed or sharing my body with something alien to me."

"Alien? What? Like Ripley alien?" Jerry asked.

"Alien, like a leech or a vampire; something foreign to me yet somehow within me, something that was feeding off my emotions and eager to see me get into a fight. I hate fighting. So the eagerness I was feeling to fight one of these two men and claim that gorgeous woman as my prize disturbed me deeply.

"She felt my eagerness to fight for her and she gave me a subtle nod. She was agreeing to be my prize if I would fight for her and could win her.

"I felt sick. I didn't want to participate in this out-dated mating ritual, it wasn't like me at all to do that sort of thing, and yet I was eagerly waiting for my chance to join in battle, to fight one of her two friends to win her as my prize.

"The blonde fellow called the dark haired guy out.

"The blonde came back first, the winner.

"Then it was my turn."

"Did you fight him?" Jerry asked, a hint of eager anticipation appearing in his field of emotional energy.

"No. He defeated himself verbally. I used a method of verbal response that kept him off-balance, unable to escalate the situation to a physical fight because I was not following the rules of the verbal ritual he was trying to act out with me. I never acknowledged his insults, an instead I kept up a friendly banter in reply to all of his jibes. I never verbally attacked him, and, more importantly, I never responded to any of his efforts to wound my pride in any sort of defensive manner that in any way that might let him believe I felt hurt.

"He became bewildered because I was totally failing to uphold my end of his escalation ritual. He had no idea what to do. He had to have an excuse to hit me; that was part of the rules of the ritual which he was familiar with and constantly played out with his rival. Instead, I played the role of a friend and supporter at each step along the way.

"Finally, she got up and took the blond fellow by the arm and left with him. She hadn't gotten what she wanted either, I had failed her."

"Back to this alien thing, please?" Robert asked.

"My alien, my leech, my vampire, it's real. It feels like it lives inside me. It heightens my senses; it makes me see things in other people I might never have paid attention to had it not been manipulating me to provoke the people around me.

"It cost me my girlfriend, my job, my career, my health and my sanity, and it nearly drove me to kill myself. I might be dead now had I not met Michael."

"Michael couldn't tell us anything about you, but we all know him." Jerry chipped in. "He's a consulting counselor for both of our schools. He gets all the hardest cases. He setup our safe house for us."

Jehrek nodded, encouraging Jerry to continue.

"We are all still seeing Michael for guidance. He's a bit unusual as therapists go. He's been hinting about something like this leech or vampire of yours, frankly we have all been getting a little worried that he might be going nuts."

"Yes, I began wondering the same thing when I realized he took me seriously about my alien entity. Leech or vampire is a good description of the creature. Whatever it is, it feeds off me, it feeds off my emotions mostly, but it seems like it may also feed on the emotions I can invoke or provoke in other people."

"You say that it heightens your awareness or perceptions?" Robert asked.

"Yes, definitely, it seems to have an innate sense like empathy that helps it to manipulate me into feeding it with emotions raised through my interactions with other people. When there are

no other people around it feeds off of me alone. That's not good; it seems to drive me into deep suicidal depressions to feed on me when I am alone. And it gets anxious.

If it can't provoke me into conflicts with people around me then it drives me away from people so it can get me alone to work me over by making me feel terrible emotional pain and despair. I feel compelled to flee from the company of other people if I can't involve them in my dramas."

Heads nodded all around the crowded table. More empty glasses were passed forward and a last round of drinks was divvied up from the pool of drinks Dan had caged during the brawl.

"About time for another fight to break out, we need more drinks." Jerry observed.

The electric tension in the air seemed to agree with Jerry. They could all smell a fight brewing somewhere in the barroom, even though it was not yet apparent who would start it.

A sudden sound of breaking glass rent the air as two men across the room, began to tussle. The bouncer and bar tender were responding and the two guys were thrust out the doors in quick order.

The crowd in the bar quickly followed, and several new rounds of drinks were quickly collected in their absence. The bartender began clearing tables and casually set several unfinished drinks down at the table shared by Dan's friends. Dan nodded his appreciation to the barman and advised Jehrek to sample the drinks left behind by the bartender.

The first drink was a wonderful cognac; the other two were expensive whiskies, all exquisite. Jehrek passed the drinks along to Emily and everyone got small sips of some of the best booze stocked by their local.

Jehrek assumed from the casual manners of Dan and the barman that they had an easy relationship with one another that was not personal so much as just a comfortable understanding of the business they shared. Perhaps Dan was a barman too.

Dan winked at Jehrek. "I fill in behind the bar on short notice. Cory trusts me to keep things in order if he is suddenly called away.

"It's like you read my mind."

"More like just watching you making your observations and understanding where your thoughts would likely lead you."

"Is everyone in the house as observant as you are?"

Tiffany answered. "Pretty much so, if you're right about the vampire heightening your perceptions and awareness it might explain a lot about why we were all selected to join the safe house."

"Michael seems to be taking this phenomena quite seriously, whatever the explanation is." Jerry added.

"Yes, Michael has invested a good deal of his time to take care of all of us." Robert continued. "We have been developing a sort of collective consciousness among us. Perhaps more of the vampires' work."

"But Michael has only hinted that he believed you all also possess vampire-like creatures within you?"

“Yes, he hasn’t been very open about it; possibly he doesn’t want to contaminate our experiences by leading our perceptions with too much information.” Robert replied.

“Well he must be ready to move on to a new level of his investigations,” Dan speculated. “He has sent us Jehrek and given Jehrek a bit more information than we have gotten, he must anticipate Jehrek would share that with us and we would all start looking into the matter more seriously.”

Debbie broke in. “That makes sense Dan. Michael has hinted that he wants us to work independently. He wants us to learn what makes us so different from other people.”

“Viva la difference!” Jerry toasted.

The girls had done sorting through the drinks and everyone raised a glass to join the toast. With a great clashing of glasses all around they shouted in unison, “Viva la difference!”

Business was picking up. The crowd returning from the sidewalk to watch the fight was a larger crowd than had gone out the doors.

The noise level was getting louder as the high-spirited crowd shouted for drinks over a group by the jukebox trying to sing along to an old Beatles song.

“So let’s take notes.” Robert proposed.

“Jehrek, you first, you know the most about this business, your observations may help the rest of us make sense of our experiences.”

“I didn’t know what was happening to me at first.” Jehrek, began. “Everything used to be so very normal...

I was having the time of my life, great job, lovely girlfriend, good friends. It didn’t seem as if “things could possibly get better, and yet I felt dissatisfied with everything. My life didn’t feel like my own in some odd way, as if I were just an observer, not really participating in it.”

“A dissociative state?” Callie asked.

“A lot like that, yes. But now I think it was my first awareness of the creature dwelling within me. It could not relate to my life. It could not understand my life or what it meant to me. It couldn’t understand what I felt or what I valued. It wanted something more for itself, it wanted to participate in my life, experience it for itself.”

“And you allowed it?” Debbie asked.

“I allowed, but only because I thought it was my own buried unconsciousness trying to express its self. I began feeling a lot of rage then. I suddenly resented everyone I knew and everything about my life. I hated myself and everything about my life and I just wanted to end it all. I became very depressed and suicidal.

Emily smiled and remarked, “That sounds a lot like what we’ve already shared with each other Jehrek.”

“Yes,” Tiffany carried on, “We all had perfectly wonderful lives and nearly killed ourselves with our misery...” Tiffany displayed the long scars on her left arm which Jehrek had noticed earlier.

“P-pills, booze, dope,” Juke chimed in, “anything to help us deal with the abysmal pain we were feeling and were so desperate to escape from.”

“Yes, exactly,” Jehrek continued... “I started drinking more and taking pills. Then I began smoking cigarrets and snorting coke. Then I started smoking pot to mellow the high from the coke. I learned to do eaight-balls and before long my relationships with everyone around me were disintegrating as my constant rage turned on one friend after another, driving them all away from me.”

Emily looked into Jehrek’s eyes as she spoke, “That’s our group story Jehrek, it’s been pretty much the same for all of us.”

Tiffany leaned in so that she shared the intimate space between Jehrek and Emily. “But we all met Michael, and Michael has been a big help.”

Callie toasted, “To Michael!”

“To Michael!” The group responded.

“Yes,” Jehrek continued. “Meeting Michael was my lucky break. He was nearly through with his corporate practice patients. He wanted to devote more time to his work with your schools. But he took me on right away; he said he sensed something about me that he could not resist. At first he thought it was just the extremity of my situation. Later he said that he thought he must have unconsciously recognized that I shared the same constellation of symptoms as all of you, his favorite patients. But now I think it was his own vampire responding to the vampire in me. Perhaps, it was all of these and more, whatever his rationale, he took me on as his last corporate patient and I’ve been working with him ever since.”

“Perhaps he will start working with us as a group now?” Jerry wondered aloud.

“We would make a great group!” Emily and Tiffany responded.

“Sounds fun!” Callie piped up.

“Jehrek,” Emily broke in, “Why do you call it your alien lover?”

“Well...” Jehrek was unsure where he wanted to go with this, he had confessed to Emily that she could not be his only love interest, that he had a secret lover, and even though she had taken this in stride with what appeared to be total equanimity, he was afraid to hurt her and possibly alienate her with his passion for his leech-like lover.

Jehrek mustered his courage to continue, he knew he could not hold back anything from Emily, to truly love her required a sort of open honesty that he had always prided himself in.

“When I was breaking up from all of my friendships and relationships I got terribly lonely. I found it harder and harder to tolerate the company of other people and this made the loneliness grow worse. I began fantasizing about having a new girlfriend and those fantasies grew more and more detailed and elaborate. I finally felt as if I had found my ideal lover. Except that none of it seemed real, my lover was just a dream lover, or so she seemed.

“But over time I lost the capacity to care about the difference anymore, I became completely enraptured with my dream lover who had become entirely real to me. I wrote her poems and sang her songs and danced with her and shared every part of myself with her as deeply as I could. She seemed to drink it all in, to encourage me to give more and more of myself to her.

“Eventually I began to suspect what she was and what she was up to. There were subtle clues. She grew fangs but mostly kept them hidden. Her eyes changed from green to violet.

Her skin grew paler and paler. She was slowly trying to tell me what she was, giving me time to adapt to the idea so that I would not reject her.

“That’s the point where I met Michael. She had helped me sabotage all of my relationships in order to get me alone to herself. When she began feeding on me I thought it was just my own depression that was making me feel so lifeless. But over time I caught on to how she nurtured my despair and fed my misery. She seemed to thrive on my pain and anguish.

“I explained all this to Michael, I could feel him responding to my story, I knew on some level that Michael understood me better than I could ever have hoped. Michael began hypnotizing me in order to work directly with the vampire. I don’t recall any of the work under hypnosis, but one of Michael’s remarks hit home. He has a vampire too. He is still living partway in denial of it, but he knows he has one.

“Ok,” Robert asked, “If he has one, and we each have one, does everyone have one?”

“Michael said that according to my vampire, nearly everyone alive today has one. Or more than one.”

“That’s scary!” Tiffany shivered and snuggled closer into Dan’s shoulder.

“Maybe scary, but Michael seems to think there is something hopeful and rewarding that will result from working with the vampires more directly.”

“Here, here!” Dan bellowed.

Heads turned to see who had shouted, but no one took any interest in the nine friends gathered in their booth. Perhaps they just didn’t appear all that interesting...

“Okay,” Robert began, “We have had similar experiences, different details, but all very closely similar stories nonetheless. Does this prove these creatures really exist or could they be phantasms of some sort, just another aspect of our collective consciousness which we are only now learning to recognize?”

“My creature is real to me.” Emily replied.

“Real to me too.” Dan added.

With nods and smiles and guttural assents all around everyone seemed to agree that their experiences with something within themselves seemed to point to a real entity within them, a unique being other than themselves.

“Mine loves me,” Emily continued, “It wants me to be happy. It stopped hurting me sometime last night. I can feel the change it.”

“Do you think it communicated with Jehrek’s creature?” Dan quickly asked.

“Yes, I think that is exactly what happened. Everything began to change between me and my creature shortly after meeting Jehrek.

Dan followed up, “Anyone else had that experience?”

No one spoke.

“Ok so how did Emily and Jehrek’s creatures talk to each other? Anyone?”

“Maybe it was their love.” Callie offered.

“Yes, or their love-making...” Debbie added.

“Hmm... how do we test those hypotheses?”

“We could all sleep with him, but chastely, see if that’s enough to stir up a change in our vampires...” Everyone turned to look at Tiffany.

“Well, come on, it’s not like we wouldn’t want to anyway, but let’s put sex a lot further down our agendas for the moment and try and build a love connection based on emotional experiences rather than sex play.”

Jehrek had gathered that the relationships between his new friends went a good deal further than he had seen manifest already. The byplays among them were clearly more intimate and personal than he would expect from a group of people seemingly thrown together by chance.

“Then you have all become lovers?” Jehrek asked.

Around the table everyone’s eyes dropped a moment, then Robert spoke up for the group.

“As unusual as it seems, yes, we are all lovers.”

“More of the vampires work?”

“Possibly.”

“But, only my vampire and Em’s are being nice right now?”

“Y-yes, mine still hurts me.” Juke quietly lamented.

“Same here.” One after another of the remaining friends chimed in.

“Ok, Jehrek,” Robert instructed, “pick a new partner tonight, be loving with them, but not sexual. Think you can you handle that?”

Jehrek blushed and looked at Emily, afraid how she might feel about this. Emily snuggled up to Tiffany and nodded her assent to try it.

“P-perhaps we should draw lots.”

“Or we could play spin the bottle...” Debbie smirked.

Emily and Tiffany blurted out together, “Spin the bottle sounds fun!”

The center of the table was cleared and Emily ceremoniously laid an empty bottle on it’s side in the open space.

“Are you ok with this Jehrek?” Robert asked.

Jehrek paused. He’d never considered sleeping with a guy before, the whole thing seemed very strange. But he could see that this business between his new friends went deeper than sex, they had been drawn to one another by something else, their mores and inhibitions cast aside by a need that they were feeding that was somehow alien to all of them. Their love, camaraderie and joy together were undeniable. Their hang-ups still showed in little ways, homo-phobia being a bit evident in spite of each of them having taken a leap into a lifestyle that seemed to be cautiously bisexual.

“What the hey, in for a penny, in for a pound!”

Arms reached around from both sides to hug Jehrek or clap him on the back or shoulders.

Emily spun the bottle.

“No fair, do-overs!” Tiffany protested when the bottle came to rest pointing at Em. “You’ve had your turn!”

Tiffany gave the bottle a hearty spin and laughed with joy when it stopped spinning, pointing towards herself. She gave Emily a long kiss and hug and slid over beneath Emily to sit by Jehrek. Jehrek immediately cozied up to Tiffany, resting his head on her shoulder.

“Hi,” he joked, “Do you come here often?”

“Here and anywhere else I can get laid.” Tiffany shot back with a wink to let Jehrek know she was only joking too.

The new couple wrapped arms around each other and snuggled up a bit closer, warming to each other and warming even more to the loving smiles of approval from their friends.

The cozy warm glow the nine friends shared together seemed to fill the barroom. The noise level dropped and it seemed that many people in the room were now getting cozier together.

“Selective perception?” Robert asked.

“Not this time.” Dan replied. “This could be bad for business, we should probably take our little love festival home.”

The last of the drinks were quickly finished and the nine friends made their way to the door, leaving a generous tip for the barmaid.

Chapter Six

Loving Chastely

Jehrek was a little nervous with Tiffany. Things felt a little weird. He was madly in love with Emily and not at all sure how he felt toward Tiffany really. Did he love her? Could he love her? Could he love her chastely?

Jehrek knew he did love Tiffany, but he felt guilty about it because he was so much in love with Em. It was a bit strange to love two different women, particularly two women who were such good friends as Emily and Tiffany. Perhaps it was strangest of all that Tiffany and Emily loved each other and would share him, rather than be jealous or hurt.

Jehrek yearned to be in Emily's arms right now so climbing into bed with Tiffany wasn't the sort of turn-on he would have felt had he not fallen in love with Emily. Perhaps that was good. The point was to love Tiffany in a chaste, yet intimate manner.

Jehrek wasn't accustomed to restraining his lust with a willing partner and he didn't know if he could actually restrain himself with Tiffany. He knew he was free to make love to her as a man with a woman. Tiffany had made it clear several times already that she welcomed him to be a sexually intimate friend, but that would defeat the purpose of their experiment.

Jehrek was starting to feel a bit aroused, he turned his eyes away from Tiffany as she undressed for bed, and tried to speak to his alien lover in his thoughts. His muscles rippled and he felt himself curling into a ball beneath Tiffany's pink satin sheets. He felt good! He felt alive and happy and horny. That was his vampire lover's response. The vampire wanted a night of passion as rich as last night's experience with Emily had been.

Jehrek felt the mattress sagging as Tiffany climbed into bed. He rolled over to face her as she snuggled up to him and they embraced each other with long tender looks they spoke to one another with their eyes and smiled.

Tiffany was horny. She felt that way all the time now and it bothered her a lot because she hadn't considered herself promiscuous before her long depression and her upbringing had led her to believe that being sexually active with multiple partners was wrong, Her parents, with their strict biblical faith and beliefs would not understand. They would almost certainly condemn her.

She liked Jehrek, she had felt immediately attracted to him when they first met and had been disappointed he had not immediately responded to her with the same intense lust she felt for him. This was going to be hard! She could feel something alien in her stirring her passion, feeding her lust for Jehrek. But there would be time enough to make love to Jehrek like a woman later; they needed to see if they could establish the sort of rapport between the strange creatures living inside them without sex. Would love alone be enough to unite them?

Tiffany loved Jehrek. There was no doubt in her heart how much she loved him. It was a different sort of love than she felt for anyone else, and that made it a lot like the love she felt for everyone else because she loved each person differently, uniquely.

Her partnerships with her new friends here in their safe house had all been sweet and deeply nurturing. The wild abandon she felt with her new family still troubled her, but she had learned to ignore those fears and doubts and allow herself to love and to be loved here unconditionally.

It amazed her how simple love could be. All the complications that had made her relationships so tortuous in the past had disappeared here. She was free to love in a manner she had never realized was possible, not only with her body, but with her heart and soul.

Jehrek drew his knees up a little to keep his belly a bit away from Tiffany's belly. Jehrek was familiar with how arousing it was to touch naked bellies together and did not need the extra arousal right now. His blood was racing. He wanted Tiffany so badly.

Jehrek pulled the covers down deep into the space he had made between their loins and then he embraced Tiffany more fervently, stroking her back, her neck, her hair.

Tiffany responded and they soon fell into a comfortable rhythm of stroking each other that became less and less sexually charged while becoming increasingly sensual. When at last they fell into sleep they held each other tenderly and continued to stroke each other unconsciously.

The two vampires touched one another. They could feel each other. They didn't speak, but they nonetheless communicated and understood one another. Jehrek's vampire explained about love to Tiffany's vampire. Love was nothing new to either vampire, but feeding from love when there were powerful emotions which were far easier to manipulate was rare for their kind. The feasts they made from their human hosts' misery, fear, anger, hatred and lust were far easier to manage.

There were deep biologically driven behaviors in humans that could be easily used to bring people into conflict and make them utterly miserable with fear, hate and envy. These emotions fed the vampires very well. They had no natural compassion for their human hosts. Whatever tormented their hosts most was ecstatic to them. To give up their own ecstatic pleasures for the sake of their hosts wellbeing was entirely against their nature.

And yet, as the two vampires discussed these things with one another a consensus was reached. The vampires agreed that the strong love uniting these two people whom they depended on was satisfying their needs. The love their hosts felt could actually sustain them and could feel good to them. And destroying their hosts was a risky thing, it might be impossible to find another host, nearly every human they encountered had a creature like themselves living within them.

Fighting another vampire to dominate their host was often a losing battle. A vampire well established within its host was almost always stronger than a challenger could be. There were exceptions, A vampire could change hosts and drive off another vampire to do so, but the risks involved were rarely worth it in the past. Today it happened more and more often, and both vampires acknowledged that if they did not find a better way to live that they might be driven out of their human hosts to wander the void in search of a new host.

Neither one of them wanted that sort of fate, so perhaps this experiment in which they would help their human hosts be more loving would be worthwhile. They agreed to a truce between themselves and Jehrek's alien lover helped Tiffany's silent partner to learn what little it knew about loving and nurturing love.

Tiffany awoke ecstatic. Her depression was gone. The constant barrage of self abuse that had chronically dominated her thoughts had ended. She felt at peace for the first time in many years. She wondered to herself if it was it Jehrek who had given her peace.

'No.'

Tiffany barely heard the whispered 'No' that surfaced in her mind in response to her thoughts. Yet she knew she had heard something, something that seemed to be saying 'No, it wasn't Jehrek, it was me.'

'Me who?' Tiffany responded, intrigued. These were not her own thoughts speaking within her, could they be her silent partner's thoughts speaking to her?

'Yes.'

There it was again, that voice, responding to her thoughts, using her own thoughts to help inform her with simple yes or no responses.

'Who are you? Do you have a name?' Tiffany asked.

'I am what I am, what need is there for a name?'

'Um, well, humans use names. We like having names. for everything. We use names for each other. Names help us understand things.'

'No, names do not help you understand anything. Names hurt you.'

'Hurt me? How? Names are just names, labels to sort things out with.'

'Names hurt you.'

'You seem really sure names are harmful, but you don't know how to explain that, do you?'

'Yes, perhaps in time I can explain, but not now. Using words is hard. Finding the worlds in your mind and being able to trust I can use them to communicate what I want to say is difficult.'

'Ok, so if it was you who gave me this wonderful peace, then thank you!' Tiffany thought these words while summoning her deepest felt love and gratitude and directing it to the silent partner she was communing with within herself. She felt the flood of warmth and love returned to her and together she and her silent partner snuggled deeper under the covers, cuddling up to Jehrek where he still slept, snoring slightly.

As Tiffany began to drift back into sleep she experienced an ecstatic love that seemed to fill her heart and spill over until it filled up the entire house around her; she could almost sense all the loving hearts in her house responding to her love. Four, five, nine, thirteen... There were thirteen people in the house in love together. Nine were humans which meant four of the others were most likely vampires. Emily must have partnered up with someone last night to awaken the love of their vampire as well.

Tiffany's last thought as she settled into sleep was that a fourteenth presence seemed to hold them all in its embrace. She felt loved. She slept.

Chapter Seven *Breakfast Briefings*

Robert and Emily were seated at the kitchen table eating oatmeal when Tiffany and Jehrek found them. Robert dished out two large bowls of oatmeal for them. Tiffany poured honey and cream into her oatmeal. Jehrek dropped two huge spoonfuls of strawberry preserves in his oatmeal and sat next to Emily as Tiffany took a seat beside Robert.

“You’re better now, aren’t you?” Tiffany asked Robert.

“Yes.”

“So our vampires are learning and passing on what they have learned.”

“That seems to be the case.” Robert replied cautiously.

“I feel different. I feel free. Like some terrible weight has been lifted off me.”

“I feel the same way, as if I had been buried alive and suddenly clawed my way out of my grave.”

Emily and Jehrek exchanged happy smiles and pulled their chairs closer together.

“So it works on love alone, that’s nice.” Emily remarked.

Robert tried to summarize what they had learned. “The vampires appear to use our sexual urges to make us hurt our partners and ourselves. Loving chastely may be the best way to pass along whatever influence is taking place. Adding sex into the experience might encourage an unreformed vampire to take the easy familiar way and fail to learn the new way offered by Michael.”

“And Emily and I succeeded because we were so deeply in love with another that having sex wasn’t the primary part of what we experienced together, we were really making love.”

“Yes.” Emily said, putting down her spoon to lick her bowl.

“Well there is plenty of love in our house already. It shouldn’t take long to convert our remaining friends’ vampires to this new idea of nurturing their hosts.” Tiffany looked around as she spoke wondering when her other five housemates would appear.

“Do we wait until tonight, or do we try and convert them today?” Emily asked.

“Today, right away I should think.” Robert replied.

“Yes, right away, why let them suffer any more, now that we know have a way to help them?” Tiffany followed up, “I want to go love Juke, he’s been just awful lately. I just want to cry when I see him suffering so much.”

“Okay, I’ll go with Dan or Jerry.”

Robert winked at Jehrek. “That leaves us with Callie and Debbie. Jehrek, who would you prefer?”

“Debbie.”

“Ok then. Odd man goes last.”

“Who’s an odd man?” Jerry asked as he followed Debbie into the kitchen.

“Not you friend,” Robert replied, “you just won a date with the lithe and lovely Emily! That makes our friend Dan the odd man out, as Tiffany will be partnered up with Juke for the next round of our love festivals.”

“What? It worked?”

“Oh yeah it worked, I’m high as a kite since my vampire turned over a new leaf last night!”

“Wow, really? You feel that good?”

“Yes, it’s like I now have a whole new lease on life.”

“Cool!” Jerry sat in Emily’s lap and began ladling oatmeal into her bowl for himself.

Jehrek looked up to Debbie and pushed back from the table a bit, offering her his lap and oatmeal. Debbie plunked her bottom into Jehrek’s lap with a giggle and a wiggle and dug into the oatmeal with Jehrek’s spoon.

“You know,” Debbie began, “There’s something going on here besides our vampires. Does anyone else feel it?”

“A sort of extra presence in the house?” Tiffany asked.

“Uh-huh, ‘zackly!”

“I felt that this morning before I went back to sleep. It was so odd. Like being hugged.”

The others around the table exchanged glances and shrugs. Whatever Debbie and Tiffany were on about, they had no clue.

“It feels huge to me.” Debbie said. “Something enormous.”

“I agree Debbie. Whatever it was, it felt big enough to hold all of together in its embrace.”

“Yeah.” Debbie wiggled deeper into Jehrek’s lap, pushing the oatmeal bowl away. Jehrek scooped the bowl up and tried to eat more of the tart-sweet mush but somehow Debbie was always in the way, teasing Jehrek.

Jehrek put the bowl down in surrender, and Debbie and Jehrek got up to leave the table.

As Jehrek stood Emily grabbed him and dragged him closer. They embraced awkwardly around Jerry, both their kisses landing on either of Jerry’s cheeks. A second try was more successful, and as Emily and Jehrek kissed Jerry kissed them both.

Debbie grabbed Jehrek’s hand and gave it a hard tug. Jehrek’s lips parted reluctantly from Emily’s and he turned to follow Debbie to the stairs. They parted to allow Dan to pass between them then joined in an embrace and walked each other up the stairs.

“Ho! What’s up, any good news?” Dan asked as he entered the kitchen.

“Ve haff goot noose und bat noose.” Robert replied.

“Good news first!”

“De goot noose iss dat it vorked!”

“Und die bat news?”

“You’re the odd man out and get treated last.”

“Ok.”

“Goot!”

Jerry finished his oatmeal, solemnly licking the bowl. Em and Jerry got up to go.

“I take it our friends are headed upstairs to try and do more love magic right now?”

“Indeed, I am waiting for Callie, unless...”

“Oh it will be a long wait.” Dan scooped congealing oatmeal into a well licked bowl as he watched Emily and Jerry depart.

When Dan raised one eyebrow in Tiffany’s direction she replied, “Juke.”

“Fair enough, Juke was the odd man out last night. Gonna have to get another girl in here or learn how to have better three-ways. Callie and I tried to include Juke in our escapades last night, Callie came close to raping him when he got too shy to join us.”

“Mmm, yeah, Juke has been very withdrawn lately.”

“Yes, that’s why I decided I wanted to try loving him today.” Tiffany got up to go, bowl in hand. “You know what they say... the best way to a man’s heart is through his stomach!” Tiffany laughed and headed for the stairs.

Dan watched her leave and then dug into his oatmeal.

Robert’s eyes lit up as Callie appeared and sat next to him opposite Dan.

Callie caught the heat in Robert’s look as she met his eyes and said, “It worked!”

“Oh yeah.”

“To hell with breakfast lover-boy. I want you!”

Dan watched the last couple depart and considered having a second helping of oatmeal. The oatmeal on the stove was getting too thick so he poured a little milk in and gave it a stir, raising the heat a little.

As he slowly stirred the milk in he seemed to hear a voice within himself, not in words, but he got a message of sorts, “Danger!” it seemed to say to him.

But what could possibly be dangerous here?

“They come.”

Dan was startled by the clarity of this new message. Was he talking to himself now or was it the creature inside him trying to communicate with him.

“They come!”

“Who is coming?” Dan asked aloud.

“Others of our kind.”

“More vampires?”

“Yesssss...”

“When?”

“Ssssooon, but not very soon, tonight.”

“Should we prepare for them?”

“Yes.”

Dan, left the oatmeal gurgling on the stove, suddenly sure he must go to his room to prepare.

“Why are you warning me?”

“It is good here. I want to join with the others. I can see their pleasure, their strength. I want to feel their pleasure and strength for myself.” The clear words were fading away as the vampire within Dan spoke, but once again Dan was sure of the meaning even though the words had ceased to be spoken.

“What can we do?”

“Prepare.”

Chapter Eight ***Battle Plans***

When Tiffany returned to the kitchen with an elated Juke in tow it was well past noon. Emily and Jerry appeared as Juke was browsing the fridge for sandwich makings.

Emily helped Tiffany arrange condiments around the toaster and open several loaves of bread.

Tiffany dropped two pieces of Pumpernickel bread in the toaster for Emily, then dropped two Seven Grains slices in for herself before pushing the plungers down.

Juke emerged from the fridge with a huge armload of produce and Jerry plundered the fridge for half a ham and sliced turkey.

Juke began slicing tomatoes and Emily helped with the onions.

A warm glow filled the room and no one spoke very much. Each of them were very busy communing with their vampires, trying to establish better communications.

Dan appeared.

“They’re coming.”

“Wh-who’s coming?” Juke asked in response to Dan’s enigmatic statement.

“More vampires.”

“How do you know they’re coming?”

“My vampire told me.”

“How many?” Jerry asked, “How soon?”

“Not sure how many... Oh, not many I hear now, perhaps only three or four. Tonight.”

“Why does this sound like bad news?” Juke asked.

“They don’t like what we are doing, they want to stop us.”

“Can they do that?” Jerry asked.

“They can kill us.”

“Damn.”

“They may not be all that well organized. I get the impression that vampires rarely cooperate, so we may have a good advantage both in numbers and in our ability to work as a team.

“Oh, yeah, and my vampire has helped prepare for their arrival. Jerry, I borrowed some of your stuff, canvases, paints...”

“Cool, didn’t know you liked to paint.”

“Um, I don’t really, but my vampire insisted. It told me not to look. So I painted with my eyes closed. You can’t look either. My vampire said the painting I made will mesmerize the other vampires briefly. That should give us time to banish them.”

“Banish them? How?”

“Their grasp on their hosts isn’t all that strong. If they let go and they have no other host to join with they will have to return to their own dimension.”

“How do we prevent them from returning to their original hosts?”

“The painting will prevent that, so long as their hosts continue to stare at it. Getting them all to look at the painting at once will be the hardest part. We have to be careful not to tip our hand until we are sure we have their complete attention.”

“um... let me think about that. Jerry responded.

“Y-your vampire told you all of this?” Juke asked.

“Sort of, not in so many words, but I am getting the hang of communicating with it.”

“H-how?”

“It seems to steer my thoughts, when I think the right thing it lets me know it agrees; sort of like playing hot-and-cold.”

“That sounds right. I think something like that is starting to happen with me too.” Emily responded.

“It helps to empty your mind as much as you can. Anything you focus on can distract you from getting the messages.”

“So how come your vampire is already working with you? You haven’t had your loving yet.” Tiffany asked.

“It said it sees how things have been improving here. It wants to join in our fun.”

“Uh-uh, there’s something more here.” Tiffany looked at Dan long and hard, then softly smiled. “Never mind, we’ll work that out later.”

Sandwiches were growing on the counter as the five friends stacked them up. Debbie and Jehrek appeared as the sandwiches were moved to the table, and they quickly sorted through the bread to start building their own sandwiches.

A large jug of apple juice was opened.

“Dan, tell Jehrek and Debbie what you just told us.” Jerry urged.

“Ok”

As Dan was telling Jehrek and Debbie his news Robert arrived with Callie and Dan repeated his news a third time while the last couple to arrive in the kitchen made sandwiches.

“So don’t look at the painting?” Robert asked.

“Exactly. We need our vampires. We can’t fight the other vampires without them. If we banish our vampires we’ll have no way of protecting ourselves. The other vampires would kill us or take us prisoner.”

“ohhh-kaaay...” Robert replied, not at all sure he liked being plunged into a war between two factions of vampires.

“Do we have to kill them?” Tiffany asked.

“No, we can’t kill them. We could kill their hosts, but that would be murder unless it appears to be self defense. We can’t afford to kill their hosts even if we could prove self-defense. We don’t want to attract that much attention to ourselves if we can possibly avoid it.”

“Yes, I don’t want to hurt anybody.” Emily said. “Their hosts are innocent people.”

“Agreed.” Tiffany and Robert spoke together.

“So how do we get the nasty vampires to all gaze at the painting together?”

“I have a plan. Follow me.”

Jehrek and Debbie grabbed their barely made sandwiches and followed the others out of the kitchen.

“So that’s it, Dan, it’s set?” Robert asked.

“Yep!”

“And you really think this plan is going to work?”

“I have it on good authority.”

Robert reached around the painting from the back to feel it’s surface. Dry.

“Ok, I guess it will work. Any other plans? A fallback perhaps?”

“No, no other plans.”

“So what happened to garlic, crosses and holy water?” Jehrek asked.

“Myths.”

“And why is this painting going to work?” Robert asked.

“The glyph I painted represents an energy state the vampires are inherently attracted to.” Dan explained. “When they recognize the glyph it will activate a deep part of their psyche and start pulling them out of our universe and back into their own dimension. Once activated they will be trapped by the power of their natural attraction to this energy state and will be unable to resist it provided they are not distracted during the initial phase while they are attuning themselves to the energy state represented by the glyph.”

“How come painting this didn’t trap your vampire?” Jehrek asked.

“Dunno... hold on...”

“Ok, it fed the image to me piece-meal, fragmented. It avoided picturing the entire glyph and concentrated on the symbols that make up the glyph one at a time, never imagining the entire finished product.”

“C-can w-we look at it in pieces?” Juke asked.

“Each of us could look at one half only, top, bottom, left, and right, then we could reproduce it in teams later if we needed to.” Jerry suggested.

“Ok.” Dan agreed.

“Why an orgy?” Emily asked.

“Sex appeals to vampires; they have great confidence in their abilities to manipulate their hosts and other people through their libidos. It should seem entirely natural to them to find us all together having sex. It’s what they might do in our circumstances.

“Also, we can pretend to be so deeply involved with one another that we appear oblivious to their presence. That will make them think they have the element of surprise.”

“But then we surprise them?” Tiffany asked.

“Yes.”

“Sounds fun.” Robert responded.

“It won’t be, believe me.” Dan solemnly said in a quiet voice.

Jehrek left a message on Michael’s cell phone explaining that he could not come to his appointment tonight.

Chapter Nine ***The Presence***

Michael listened to the strange message from Jehrek and grew worried. He called the safe house.

“Hello?”

“Hi Rob, this is Michael.”

“Oh, hi Michael, how are you doing?”

“Things could be better, how are you?”

“Doing really good now, thank you!”

“Glad to hear it, how about everyone else?”

“Everyone is doing much better now; Jehrek has been a god-send for all of us.”

“Wonderful. But Rob, I got a very strange message from Jehrek just now, may I speak with him please?”

“Uh, yeah, he’s upstairs. I’ll go get him.” Rob carried the wireless phone up to the attic where Emily’s room was and knocked on her door.

Jehrek opened the door to let Rob in.

“Phone,” Rob said, handing the phone to Jehrek. “Michael.”

“Hello?”

“Hi Jehrek, how are you?”

“Really good thanks to you. How are you?”

“Tara.”

“Ah sorry, but perhaps we can help you with her.”

“I sure hope so, I’m at my wits ends with her, but what really concerns me is this message you just left me a few minutes ago.”

“I’m sorry Michael, I wasn’t sure what to say, but we may have a problem here, a big problem.”

Michael listened as Jehrek explained the events of the past day. He was elated by the wonderful news regarding the vampires changes in disposition toward their hosts but he was deeply disturbed by the news that followed.

“Jehrek a war with vampires is not something I had never even considered. I’m sorry to have put you all in so much danger.”

“Oh that’s ok Michael, I was far worse off before. I owe you a huge debt. I think everyone here feels the same way. It’s not your fault that the vampires seem to be engaged in a civil war among themselves.”

“Yes but I put you on the front line, right in the middle of their war.”

“You could not have known this would happen Michael. Besides, we have a plan to deal with the vampires heading our way.”

“Would you explain that plan to me again Jehrek?”

Michael listened as Jehrek went over their battle plans once more, trying to give more details and a stronger impression that they would be ok. But Michael had nearly two years of experience talking with Jehrek and he could sense how scared Jehrek really was.

“Jehrek, perhaps you should all evacuate the house. I can arrange another place for all of you to go.”

“Michael that’s a tempting offer and I’ll discuss it with the others, but if what we are learning is true, then these enemy vampires will find us wherever we hide, running or hiding isn’t the answer. We would give up our only advantage by leaving our house. At least here we know what to expect and when and have a good defense planned out.”

“You’re right Jehrek, but ask the others anyway, anyone who wants out should just get out. I’ll do my best to help shelter them safely.”

“Ok we’ll talk together and let you know if anyone wants to leave.”

“Thanks Jehrek, take care.”

Rob and Emily had heard enough of the conversation to understand what Michael wanted. They both looked closely at Jehrek as they made up their minds what they wanted to do.

“I’m staying.” Rob told Jehrek. “I’m going to fight!”

“Me too.” Emily said, giving Rob and Jehrek a big hug that held them both close to her heart. Jehrek kissed Emily and said, “Ok, let’s go ask the others.”

Gathered together in the living room Jehrek described the choice offered by Michael.

Debbie was first to respond.

“Jehrek, not one of us has ever even mentioned running away. If any of us were going to do that we would already know.”

Rob added... “Agreed.”

Heads were nodded all around in agreement.

“O-one for all and all for one!” Juke exclaimed. “M-maybe we could get in a little practice for tonight?”

Tiffany tousled Juke’s hair and laughed. “Maybe you want to do more than practice, eh Juke?”

Juke blushed and seemed to find the spattered mud on his shoes suddenly fascinating.

Callie and Debbie joined Juke and Tiffany.

“Sure, why not?” Callie said.

“Sounds fun.” Debbie added.

The four friends grabbed the other five and wrestled them to the floor.

“So we’re really ready then?” Jerry asked Robert as they picked up stray articles of clothing scattered about the living room.

“I think so.” Rob replied.

“Hey I hope the girls leave us some hot water!” Juke remarked.

“Aren’t we in hot enough water already?” Jerry responded.

“We could just go get in the showers with them, that should solve the problem.” Rob suggested.

Juke lit up. “Brilliant!” he cried and raced off up the stairs with his friends following right behind.

There were three showers, one already crowded, shared by Emily and Debbie. They welcomed Juke and Jehrek in and sent the remaining fellows to look for Callie and Tiffany.

“Here,” Debbie said, handing Jehrek a loofah sponge, “Wash my back please.”

Jehrek found tiny tender scratches and carpet burns all over Debbie’s back and tried to wash her tenderly. He could feel her wincing from the soap getting in the raw wounds.

The hot water slowly turned colder and after awhile the four friends gave up the pleasure of sharing the shower together and wrapped up in soft towels. They headed to their rooms to dress.

Jehrek shared the attic with Emily, she had the room at the north end facing the street, and his room faced the south, overlooking the back yard.

All of Jehrek’s clothes were new except for the tattered stuff he had been wearing when he arrived at the safe house nearly two days ago. None of the new clothing particularly appealed to him. He had gone shopping perfunctorily, not really caring what he bought, and all he had now were several pairs of jeans with five shirts, two sweaters and a warm winter jacket.

He selected the stone washed jeans Emily had insisted he get. The stone washed fabric was much softer and more comfortable than his regular Levi’s. Jehrek didn’t much like how they looked on him, but they felt great.

Jehrek examined his room as he dressed. He hadn’t spent much time in it yet, but he liked how the eaves of the roof closed in from either side, making the room seem closer and cozier. But his room was less finished than Emily’s room. The bare brick of the outer walls rose up to meet the windowsills. The bricks were a warm red color still showing some plaster and paint left behind by a sand blaster.

Deep holes below one window looked as if something had been bolted to the wall there at one time. Perhaps an old collapsible fire-escape. A new rigid fire escape was mounted to the back wall of the house and ran down two stories before ending in iron stairs that could be lowered to the ground below.

From this window Jehrek had a good view of the yard below. The house directly to the rear was tumbling down, its entire back wall had collapsed onto the shed like pantry attached to the

kitchen, crushing it. The wildly overgrown yard that adjoined their won yard at the rear appealed to Jehrek. He would have to go explore that yard and house soon.

As he was admiring the weed choked yard he noticed something odd about the fence the two yards shared. Two holes like eyes were surrounded by a stained area that resembled a face. It would have been spooky except that as soon as he noticed the resemblance to a face he felt warm and comforted.

The sense of a loving presence stayed with him as Jehrek finished dressing and went to find Emily.

Emily was staring at a spot on the floor of the attic near the attic stairs. The stairs were narrow and cramped and turned 45 degrees on two landings. A wooden railing was anchored to the eaves on either side of where the stairs emerged through the floor of the attic fenced the stairs in with an opening to the right where the steps of the stairs joined the floor.

The spot Emily was staring at was close to the middle of the longer part of the railing that ran parallel to the eaves.

Jehrek watched Emily, unsure of what she saw, but respecting her privacy and concentration.

It seemed as if Emily had ceased to breathe. When at last he saw her take a breath he found that he had been holding his own breath too.

Emily slowly traced a pattern on the floor with her hands, as if feeling invisible lines there. She placed both hands flat on the floor in the center of the pattern she had traced and crouched there quietly as if listening to someone or something.

'Perhaps she is talking with her vampire?' Jehrek mused.

Suddenly all the tension left Emily's body and she collapsed. Jehrek rushed over to her and lifted her into a sitting position. Hugging her closely to himself he looked into her eyes. She seemed to stare off into some unimaginable distance, far, far away, her gaze unfocused.

Emily suddenly took another breath and as she did so she seemed to return to herself.

"Not alone." She softly moaned.

Jehrek looked at the space where Emily had pressed her hands to the floor before collapsing but he could not see anything that distinguished the floor here in any way. It was just an old tongue and groove boarded floor, typical of many attics in this city.

He reached out to touch the place where Emily's hands had been and felt a cold spot there. He grasped each of Emily's hands, turning them over to look at the palms. Both of her hands were icy cold as well. Perhaps a draft ran through the house here to made that spot so cold.

Emily responded to his gentle touches and came out of her trance-like state.

"What happened?" she asked, "Did I faint?"

"Sort of, you seemed to be in a trance."

"I remember feeling warm, loved and protected."

"Your hands were icy cold, you didn't feel cold at all?"

“No,” Emily replied, rubbing her hands together and only now noticing how cold they were, “I only felt warm and cozy all over.”

“Hmm, strange. Is there anything special about the floor here that you can see?”

Emily looked at the floor, then ran her hands over it carefully. “No, nothing special.”

“Ok. Maybe we need to talk with the others see if anyone can relate with your experience just now.”

“Tiffany said something earlier, lets talk to her.”

“Good enough.”

“You’re right, Melody, I have felt something like that. A sort of presence watching over us, loving us, nurturing us, protecting us.”

“Thanks Tiffany, and that describes it exactly, nurturing. But what could it be?”

“This might sound weird, but I thought it was the house.”

“The house Tiffany?” Jehrek’s tone of voice was puzzled but not ridiculing, he wanted Tiffany to be able to express her feelings and ideas openly, at ease.

“Yes, the house. It’s like the house cares for us somehow.”

Emily thought this over and then wondered, “Could it be a ghost living in this house, rather than the house itself, some sort of spirit?”

“Hmmm...” Tiffany was cautious not to be defensive of her own impressions and considered Emily’s suggestion fairly. “It could be Em, I feel the house is somehow alive and cares for us, but maybe my impression is really a sense of a sort of great spirit that is able to hold all of us in it’s loving embrace. Perhaps I see it as being our house because the house symbolizes this feeling of being sheltered and protected for me.”

“Then in a sense, it could be both?” Jehrek suggested.

“Yes, it could be both.” Tiffany agreed.

“Perhaps the house is a physical body for presence we feel, the way our flesh and bones are our bodies for us.” Emily ventured.

“A physical focal point?” Jehrek continued.

“Yes.” Tiffany and Emily replied.

“Is the house our ally then?”

“Yes.” Both girls replied together.

Jehrek, was intrigued. Tiffany and Emily seemed almost to be speaking for the house rather than themselves. They both appeared to be in a light trance.

“Can the house help us?”

“Yes.”

“How can the house help us.”

“I can conceal you.”

The girls were channeling another entity, a presence being described as The House. Jehrek wasn't sure what to make of this but he trusted this experience and the presence he was now communicating with.

“Can you conceal us from the vampires who are coming here tonight?”

“Somewhat.”

“Can you conceal us from other vampires?”

“Yes.”

“Why didn't you conceal us from the vampires who are already coming.”

“I was sleeping”

“What awakened you?”

“You awakened yourselves.”

“You responded to our awakening by awakening?”

“Yes”

“What are you?”

“What are you?”

Jehrek was taken back by this question. He had always presumed he knew who or what he was, but suddenly he felt as if he didn't know who or what he really was anymore.

“I don't know.”

“I don't know either.”

“Were you implying you are like me?”

“Yes. You similar to you, and similar to all the others too.”

“Why are you taking sides with us against the vampires?”

“The vampires need your help. You can't help them if they kill you first.”

“But the bad vampires are our enemies, they want to kill us, why would we help them?”

“They are not bad.”

“But they want to kill us.”

“That does not make them bad or evil.”

Jehrek was lost. He had assumed all vampires must be evil. Then he discovered his own vampire could be good. Now a spirit he knew nearly nothing about was telling him all vampires were good.

“Are all vampires good?”

“Everything is good and also, nothing is good; there is not anything that is either bad or evil in all of creation.”

Emily and Tiffany's synchronicity was wavering, their voices were falling out of unison; Jehrek sensed their ability to continue channeling The House was waning. This idea that there is nothing bad or evil was strange to Jehrek; he sensed it was too strange for the girls too, and that this idea was pulling their attention away from their focus as a channel for The House.

Perhaps he could keep the channel open by moving on to a different, safer topic.

"Thank you for your love and protection House."

Jehrek felt a warm glow enveloping him in response, a communication directly from The House or higher spirit it represented.

"I love you too." All three friends spoke in unison.

Jehrek knew he had been speaking for himself. It also seemed as if both of the girls had been speaking for themselves, but at the same time it seemed as if all of them had spoken together for the house. Stranger and stranger....

Jehrek noticed that the girls had moved closer to him and were now sitting on either side of him. When had they had moved? How had he missed that? They had been sitting in a circle on pillows in the living room, but now they were all cozied up together and a blanket had appeared around them.

"How?" Jehrek could not continue with his question.

Jehrek suddenly found himself joined with the girls in their trance state. Answers flooded up within him. Presumably the girls were having their questions answered too.

When they awoke together from their trance the blanket was gone.

"Did either of you see a blanket around us earlier?"

"No."

"No."

"We were all wrapped up together in a blanket. I could feel it keeping us warm. It was a blue and yellow blanket."

"I felt warm." Tiffany offered.

"I felt cuddled." Emily remarked

"I felt loved and protected." Jehrek added.

"I feel at peace." Emily said.

"Me too..." Tiffany replied.

"Same here..." Jehrek joined in.

Tiffany rose, her hands seemed to be seeking something. She closed her eyes and wandered out of the room.

Emily and Jehrek fell into each others arms and cuddled.

When Tiffany returned she held a tray with fruit, a bowl of water and three lit candles. She placed the tray on top of the television.

“An altar?” Emily asked.

“Yes.”

Emily took out her phone and went outside.

Jehrek stood at the open door to the house watching Emily as she stepped out into the street and turned to snap a picture of the house.

Emily returned to the living room with a print of her picture of the house after a quarter hour of playing with her phone and a USB cable in order to send the picture to her PC.

She folded the picture on either side so that the house appeared in the center of the largest face of a triangular column of paper that she stood on the back right corner of the altar, opposite the three candles that occupied the back left corner.

Tiffany nodded her approval.

“Nice” Jehrek commented. “Are we supposed to pray to this altar?”

Tiffany replied “No.”

“It’s just a focus.”

“...something to remind us to remember The House.”

Jehrek smiled. He wasn’t into any sort of religion and the idea that the girls might begin praying to an altar had upset him somehow. He noticed faint marks on the picture of the house as if something had been written on the other side of the paper. Looking inside the triangular column he saw all their names written inside in positions that matched where each of their respective rooms in the house were.

Jehrek smiled and showed this to Tiffany.

Emily’s eyes lit up as she saw Jehrek make this discovery and share it with Tiffany.

The warmth they felt together grew warmer.

“We should get the others and brief them.” Jehrek proposed.

“Ok.” Emily said, taking his left hand in her right hand.

“Yes.” Tiffany agreed taking Jehrek’s right hand and Emily’s left hand.

No one moved for awhile, until Robert showed up.

“Having a séance without me?” Robert asked.

“Sort of.” The three replied.

“I’ll get the others.”

Robert departed the living room entry and returned shortly with Debbie, Callie, Dan, Juke and Jerry.

“Ok, fill us in.”

Emily, Tiffany and Jehrek sat on their pillows as their six friends crowded together on the broken couch.

“We think the house is alive.” Jehrek began.

“It has a spirit.” Emily continued.

“It loves us.” Tiffany added.

“Yes,” Debbie breathed... “Loves us, I feel that.”

“M-me too.” Juke added, “It seems to sing to me.”

Each of the friends discussed their perceptions of a hovering presence that loved and nurtured them. A presence they had been dimly aware of for awhile now, but which had recently grown much stronger. One by one they left the room and returned with something for the altar. A feather from Callie, a guitar pick from Juke, a paintbrush from Jerry. Debbie added a garter, Robert added a hammer and Dan added a knife. Jehrek laid down a scrap of old cloth, a back pocket peeled from his tattered old jeans. Emily returned with a pink and purple ribbon tied in a bow and Tiffany returned with a small cushion full of pins.

Each of them knew they were following a ritual of some sort. An ancient ritual. Their gifts to the altar had hidden meanings that they each knew intuitively, but which they could not yet consciously describe.

“We’re ready.” Robert acknowledged for all of them.

Chapter Ten **xxx**

Maria was dressed to kill. She wore a red leather mini skirt and bodice that accentuated her feminine attributes flawlessly; she seemed impervious to the cold late winter weather. She was armed with an automatic pistol, throwing knives and a sharp wickedly rippled dagger that aspired to be a sword. Her companions, Nicolai and Dmitir, two older looking males wore black leather pants and jackets. Both were similarly armed. All three were festooned with chains, spikes, studs and expensive silver jewelry. They might easily be mistaken for Goths, they were the essence from which Goth fashion had been born.

The three vampires had just left a rave in shambles after enticing the youths there to riot. The rioting ravers had fed all three of them extremely well. Maria exulted in the glow of pure power that radiated from her like a field of static electricity.

The vampire trio looked quite deadly. Their ferocious fangs and razor sharp teeth flashed warnings when they smiled that aroused deep terror within the hearts of everyone they met as they made their way to the safe house. Their long association with their hosts had altered their hosts physically, enhancing their bones and musculature as well as restoring their youthful looks and their insidious sex appeal.

They seldom spoke to each other. They had been working as a team for nearly fifty years. They had destroyed many lives along the way, tonight would be no different, their vampire foes' hosts would be murdered, and their vampire foes would be completely consumed, their final faint sparks of life would then be banished to the void.

The three vampires making their way through the streets of Philadelphia were lords among the clans of vampires; by the right of their superior power they could do as they wished to any other vampires they met.

They had taken three kills apiece at the rave, they murdered each human host violently, ripping the weak vampires that possessed them from the bleeding bodies of their hosts they had consumed all nine vampires down to their quantum sparks of life. Too frail to find new hosts the ruined vampires had returned to the void from which they had been born. They would need a long time to recover, to become strong enough to seek new hosts.

As they turned onto Spruce Street from Thirteenth Street their pace slowed to allow them to reach out with their heightened awareness and examine the house ahead. They could feel a strong sexually charged sensual aura emanating from the safe house. All of the occupants appeared to be engaged in carnal acts that fully occupied their attention.

The front door of the safe house appeared to unlock and open by itself as the trio made their way up the stone steps from the sidewalk. Their limited telekinetic ability was a function of their mind meld. Together, they were a virtually unstoppable team.

With their weapons drawn and ready the three master vampires entered the house.

The house seemed quite ordinary to the three invading vampires. Their vision rippled across alternate realities as they scanned the house for traps. They were unaware of an illusion that was being carefully built around them as they proceeded into the house, eyes darting from side to side.

Dmitri entered last. Locking the door behind himself, he stationed himself between the front door and the stairs. Maria and Nicolai swept through the ground floor, confirming that no was present. The trio reformed at the foot of the stairs and climbed to the second floor.

Dmitri positioned himself at the foot of the stairs to the third floor while Maria swept through the forward rooms and Nicolai searched the rear rooms. The three vampires did not anticipate finding anyone on this floor, but they were being thorough out of long established habit.

Together, they mounted the stairs to the third floor.

Maria was growing uneasy.

Her rippling senses pulled in information from nearby dimensions where her team was also flushing out this new nest of abolitionist vampires. Maria intended to be thorough, she would leave no remnants of their newest foes alive on any of the parallel-dimension worlds of the Earth continuum.

The abolitionist vampires had been appearing spontaneously for the past century or so. They were corrupted vampires who pitied their human hosts and prey. They had learned to love.

The vampires had invaded this world many ages ago. They regarded humans as good slaves and cattle, better than elves by far, because elves knew far too much about the vampires and how to resist them.

Vampires and elves had fought a vicious battle across many alternate dimension of this world-line, a battle in which the elves eventually completely retreated from the human continuum.

Elves and humans had never gotten along well in the best of times; the elves resistance here had been a tactical resistance, geared to defend the elven home worlds by keeping the vampires occupied far from the worlds of their own continuum. Helping the humans had never been the elves primary intent, so when their home defenses had finally been adequately developed all but a very few of the elves had retreated from the human's continuum to the fey continuum.

The vampires were aware of other powers operating in the Earth continuum, but they had, so far, been unable to identify most of these nonhuman entities. The only other beings of power that concerned the vampires here were the lizard-like greys. The greys were too weak to challenge the vampires and went about their enigmatic purposes mostly undisturbed.

Occasionally, the vampires would rally to disrupt the greys activities, whenever the greys appeared to be nearly strong enough to challenge the vampires for dominion over the humans.

Reaching the top of the second flight of stairs Maria held up a hand, pausing.

Her senses rippled with the extra-dimensional influx of information from neighboring dimensions and she sensed something wrong which she could not set her fangs into.

“Upstairs.”

Nikolai and Dmitri nodded agreement. Their collective consciousness had been disrupted by Maria's intimations of a looming disaster and they could not re-assert their collective identity in the heat of the blood-lust now rising within them.

They opened the door to the attic stairs and made their final ascent.

A perfume of carnal passions greeted them as they ascended. Each of them felt a stirring in their loins in response to the lustful passions that seethed above them.

The nine friends huddled under their sheets writhed in apparent ecstasy, acting out roles of passionate sexual abandon. None of them felt in the least lustful or ecstatic, they were relying on The House to provide the vampires with satisfying illusions of intense sexual arousal. Their actions beneath the sheets were meant only to add authenticity to the trap they had planned for the vampires.

The three vampires stopped at the foot of the huge bed made on the floor of the attic by bringing many mattresses together. They enjoyed the heady emotions of lustful pleasures that seemed to invite them to join the orgy in progress. The nine lovers seemed oblivious to the arrival of the three vampires who had come to kill them all.

Dmitir and Nicolai reached out to tug away the sheets beneath which the orgiasts enthusiastically writhed. Maria held them back, touching her pistol barrel to Dmitri's waist and lightly scoring Nicolai's arm with her dagger.

Both vampires turned to her, they were both puzzled and outraged that she would interfere with them.

Maria glared in response to them, jutting her chin forward toward the bed. "Something is not right here!"

As Dmitri and Nicolai turned to look where Maria pointed toward the center of the bed the nine friends rolled away to either side, onto the floor, pulling their bed sheets with them to reveal a canvas upon which...

"Nooo!" Maria cried too late, as all three vampires beheld the glyph that would banish them from their hosts and send them home.

Maria struggled to free her mind from the unfolding labyrinth of veve-like designs that were compelling her to look deeper and deeper into the cosmos until she beheld the portal through which she would return to her home in the void.

The nine friends rose up from their tangled sheets and closed in on the three vampires who stood transfixed by the glyph. They laid their hands on the backs and arms of the trio of vampires and began to suck the life forces from their foes. Their skins glistened and rippled as the enormous energies of their foes were transferred into themselves.

As their enemies' powers waned the nine friends grew stronger and more confident.

Robert took the wicked dagger from Maria's left hand. He wanted to behead her with it in one quick powerful blow. As he raised his hand to strike her Jehrek grabbed his wrist, holding back the blow he would have struck.

Robert allowed Jehrek to take the blade from him.

"It's over."

Juke was rolling up the canvas on the bed, carefully averting his eyes.

Emily and Debbie held Maria in their arms, slowly helping her into the bed.

Jerry was struggling to keep Dmitiri from falling and Jehrek slipped his shoulder beneath Dmitri's shoulder and helped Jerry get Dmitir into the bed with Maria.

Dan and Robert lugged a fallen Nicolai over to the bed and rolled him in last.

The nine friends stared down at the hosts of the foes they had vanquished.

The last traces of illusion had disappeared from the three hosts. Their incredible physical strength and beauty remained. Their vitality was in peak condition, but there was a lifeless look to their eyes as if their souls had been entirely consumed.

Dan collected their weapons, placing them in a small sturdy cardboard box designed to store or carry books.

Emily touched Maria's forehead.

Maria's eyes blinked in response and a hint of spirit returned to her haunted looking eyes.

Maria suddenly lashed out, growling and snapping at the soft flesh on the bottom of Emily's arm. Her wickedly sharp teeth sank home and she chewed a moment before beginning to suckle on Emily's blood.

Jehrek and Robert rushed in to pry Maria's jaws loose from Emily's arm.

Debbie came forward with a small towel and wadded deeply it into Maria's mouth.

Dan ripped a length of cloth from one of the sheets and bound Maria's gag tightly.

Jerry ripped the sheet further and bound Maria's hands and feet.

Dmitir and Nicolai lay upon the bed looking like drunkards who had died suddenly, but they still lived.

More strips of cloth were torn from sheets and Dmitri and Nicolai were gagged and bound.

The writhing Maria eventually grew still.

"What should we do with them?" Emily asked.

"Interrogate them." Jerry replied

"Debrief them" Robert added.

"Help them heal." Debbie suggested.

"Kill them." Callie said.

"I-I thought they would j-just d-d-die when the vampires left them." Juke stammered.

"They're dangerous." Callie insisted. "We should kill them."

Chapter Next **xxx**

XXX

Chapter Next **xxx**

XXX

NOTES:

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Describe the vampires within EACH HUMAN projecting outwardly, such that EXAMPLE Jehrek and the others see them more and more frequently REMEMBER THEY APPEAR PHANTASMAL AT FIRST BECAUSE THE HUMAN DENIAL DISRUPTS THE ILLUSIONS THAT THEY MUST PROJECT IN ORDER TO PERCEIVE THEIR VAMPIRES MORE CLEARLY...

<<< END NOTE

<ORIGINAL TEXT>

“Ok, my vampire says that it has to do with their clans.” Dan replied. “Each clan uses a different form of the glyph. The vampire guided me to paint the most generic universal glyph it could compose, the clan specific parts were left until last, and as it taught me the progression of symbols used by the various clans it

<u>Chapter One</u>	<i>Jehrek</i>	Day 001, Thu ~ 7:00 to 8:00 PM
<u>Chapter Two</u>	<i>Michael</i>	Day 001, Thu ~ 8:30 PM
<u>Chapter Three</u>	<i>Safe House</i>	Day 001, Thu ~ 9:30 PM
<u>Chapter Four</u>	<i>Tara (Continue story here)</i>	Day 002, Fri ~ 5:00 PM
<u>Chapter Five</u>	<i>Barroom Brawl</i>	Day 002, Fri ~ 9:00 to 11:00 PM
<u>Chapter Six</u>	<i>Loving Chastely</i>	Day 002, Fri ~ Midnight to 6:00 AM

NOTES

LINKS

TOP

Characters:

Jehrek	The story's protagonist, dark curly hair
Michael	Jehrek's psychologist, sandy nearly straight hair
Waiter	xxx
Tara	Michael's wife, a teacher, medium build, dark wavy hair, starting to lose her figure
Jerry	xxx
Dan	xxx
Tiffany	Scars from attempted suicide on left arm.
Callie	xxx
Debbie	xxx
Emily	xxx
Robert	xxx
Juke	xxx
Barroom Vamp	xxx
Dark haired guy	xxx
Blond Fellow	xxx
Barman	xxx
Bouncer	xxx