

Chapter 1

I checked my watch to counter the lethargy that I felt taking over. My arm movement was sluggish and clumsy; more evidence that I needed fresh air and exercise. A walk around the block comes to mind, which proves I'm not in total stupor. I squinted at the watch face but there's not enough light to make out the numbers or hand positions. Not wanting to chance anyone seeing a light come on in a parked car, I cupped my gloved hand around my penlight before switching it on.

My watch reads at 5:17 AM. Soon it will be sunrise, and I can head home.

When my eyes readjusted to the dark, what had been colorless shapes outside my windshield are now distinguishable outlines in shades of gray. Hours earlier I had cracked my windows so the only warm thing in my car, my breath, didn't fog up the windows. Along with the cold air came the smell of rotting trash from the abandoned house I parked next to. Both drifted in as a mist, coating my upholstery and me and plugging up my sinuses. It didn't occur to me that I would need a spell for keeping the odor of human bio waste and whatever else was rotting in the weeds from invading my space. However, I wasn't totally defenseless against this intrusion. There are occasions when passengers leave an unpleasant odor behind so I carry a can of air freshener in my trunk.

To prevent any of the chemicals from the can getting on me I sprayed the air freshener on a rag to wave it around when the stink gets to be too much. It helped in the beginning, so now I automatically wave the rag to lessen the intensity of the stench. It's not working anymore. My sinuses are now crying for mercy by plugging up more. At this rate in minutes I'll be breathing out of my mouth. I needed to take a walk in fresh air - now.

I rolled up the windows and after looking around I used other senses to feel out who is concerned with my presence.

Nothing came up on my radar.

My protection spells, backed up with amulets and advisors from the astral planes, and I'm not saying that tongue-in-cheek, keep me safe. Any safer and you may think I would get bored. Trust me when I say the people I meet and the places I go are not for the faint of heart. I'm not saying I'm any braver than most, only that strange is how most of my life has been.

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I slid out of the car and closed the door as quietly as possible. I do a bobble-head glance around me as I crossed the street. Not an apparition in sight or any other stranger than strange vision is about. As I walked, I could smell both the rotten odor and the sandalwood air freshener clinging to me regardless of my efforts to not get either scent on me. The combination of smells is terrible, and it makes my intention to be undetected nearly impossible. I hope my cloaking spell isn't diminished too much by this unpleasant touch of reality.

My name is Victoria Handle. I'm a private investigator and on occasion I locate things -- or *some* things. When I first started out on my own in the PI business, I balanced investigative jobs with finding objects because it was fun. That is, until my clientele moved from exclusively human to a mixture of *supernaturals*. Yep. They're out there and a lot of them look no different than...well, I don't really know what normal is anymore, so I'll just leave it at that.

What I learned from supernaturals who want things found is that there are *things* that should stay unlocated. For those objects or entities, out of good conscience, I warn my client there will be consequences if I find or retrieved what they are seeking. For the client that ignores my warnings I've made it a policy to no longer deal with them, though, I have been known to change my policy if it's for a good cause. Thanks to a group I joined, I can ask members that are supernaturals how to detect on other levels what it is I'm asked to look for and recognize the consequences before *I* suffer the blow-back of messing with things outside of my expertise.

My present stakeout is for a *beastie* client. She's a bartender that works nights to early mornings. Beastie's are nonhuman entities that can shape shift to human form. And just like with humans and any other species, some are good, some bad, and some you don't want to know. Though not all are dangerous they do disturb a person's peace of mind. When I asked one client why beasties need to take on a human form he said the human visual field can't register all life forms that share 3rd dimensional earth. I've found that many that can see, especially human children, don't admit to all of what they see. Remember elves, fairies, dwarfs, gnomes and all sorts of entities told about in children's tales including talking animals and plant life? All exist, including dragons and a lot of other indescribable beings and still more to discover. The majority of adults have let others indoctrinate them to stop seeing and hearing everything that is about them, including the immense and beautiful stars in the night sky, blocked out by city night lights. I'm purposely leaving out humans that can see and hear but torment themselves by not embracing the gift given to them by Source.

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But I digress.

My assignment is to watch apartment 304 on Avenue B on the South Side and to see if my client's current love interest visits when she's working. So far, he hasn't showed. What I've deduced is that the resident of apartment 304 is an artist. The gender of the resident and type of art practiced I haven't been able to find out, but that's not my concern. Every night the bartender works I stake out the artist's apartment. That's four nights a week.

I get paid by the hour.

Sweet deal.

So far, I've noted that a different person visits the artist each night I was there and I haven't seen the visitor again on my watch. The visitor arrives at dusk and stays till midnight. The light in what I found to be the studio stays on until one hour before dawn. If I haphazard a guess, I would say the visitors are models for the artist. I don't sense any energy of deceitfulness. I think whoever pointed the beastie in this direction was purposely misdirecting her. When I had suggested this to her after two weeks of staking out the place, she insisted I continue my stakeout. If she had an ulterior motive to keep me here, I would have detected it in my daily meditation or my support group of spirits and others would have informed me. She really believes what she's been told. Since it's her money I'll stick to the job until my conscience tells me enough is enough, or when she comes to her senses and lets me do my work without her interference. I would rather follow the lad and see what he's up to at night that causes suspicion.

In my month-long stakeout I've become in tuned to the energy of the neighborhood and my presence is familiar to the neighbors. I know how to give off the right vibes to lull most, including those that have something to hide. I also carry talismans that enhance my nice and fuzzy energy and to ward off the annoyance of a handful of resident ghosts. I'm not a violent person or a person liable to steal or harm another - unless I have a reason. Karma is my motivation to be good though I also have a kind heart - usually.

Every evening of my stakeout I do a reconnaissance of four blocks, looking for said lover boy's vehicle and anything that will be a threat to my concentration on this job. It's important for me to notice any changes that may affect my stake-out like a breakout of violence from lovers or family squabbles or possibilities of police visits. In situations where violence has the potential to breakout, I'm tempted to interfere to lessen injuries that no one can afford yet I mustn't. Though

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my intentions are good I'm not here to change everyone's life lessons and course. However – occasionally, for the greater good, I will nudge here and there.

Yesterday, the energy was different when I arrived in the neighborhood at dusk, about 8:30PM. There was a quivering in the air causing a different rhythm. I parked a few blocks away to sense out the source of the change. The neighborhood is a mixture of old bungalows, duplexes and eight storied apartments, with two apartments run down and one three-bedroom residence left for whoever can claim it as their own squat.

The closer I got to the apartment I meant to scope out, the quivering intensified. It's like the anticipation of athletes waiting for the gun to start their race, so I waited a few houses down from my target apartment. Nine PM on the dot a dark van rolled to the front of the house. I felt an emotional bonk on my consciousness and for a moment my vision altered.

Greek soldiers dropped from the three storied Trojan Horse and swarmed into the drugged and sleeping city of Troy. I had to shake my head a few times to get rid of that image. What really happened was that deputies dressed in full combat gear jumped from a van the moment they came to a complete stop. A canine cop arrived dressed in full gear including his dog with his own Kevlar vest, thanks be to God. Bright search lights blinked on from the van's roof and lit up the front of the house like a movie set. The deputies disappeared into the house where shouts and barking ensued. The occupants were herded onto the sidewalk where there weren't weeds, trash and other smelly things. Quickly and efficiently the deputies sorted through their collection of a dozen trespassers.

A drug dealer, users and illegal squatters including their pets were inspected, pictures taken, and the less dangerous were sent to find another spot for the night. That was the cost-cutting part of this raid-- incarcerating the dangerous ones and letting the others go with their identities downloaded in a police database. I will admit some influence was exerted on my part. Those with pets I did encourage the kindness of the deputies to not take away their companions. There wasn't any abuse of their dog companions in this homeless group that I detected or any from my previous stakeouts or I would have done something about it. I soothed the dogs on both sides to be kind to each other.

I joined some of the apartment residents as they gathered on their building stoop to watch. It should have been on my radar because I was warned that the sheriff's office was getting complaints that criminals were taking refuge in abandoned houses around the city, making

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nuisances of themselves. It takes money to get a lot of people and resources to multiple locations, and it takes additional money to support more people in an already full jail. This is election time, the one-time where the sheriff will push his strained budget to make people feel safe.

While neighbors were in a talkative mood as the activity unfolded, I listened for any information on the artist in 304. They only talked about the raid. When the deputies left and the last resident returned indoors, I walked through the neighborhood to see if the energy returned to normal. There was still a residual of energy that I wasn't able to identify. I didn't sense any danger from it nor was I able to locate where it was coming from. Perhaps there was a portal to another dimension nearby. They're all around the city, some new and some exclusive to species due to the vibration of the portal. There's nothing to worry about. All planets and stars have portals. Before the Annunaki and not nice grays were forbidden further visits to Earth, they used the portals to transport their slaves and minerals they mined from earth to their various bases on other nearby planets, like Mars, the Moon, Venus and their home planet, Nibiru. Of course, the ban wasn't taken seriously by the worst of the worst, but there was enforcement when necessary.

After my walk I re-parked my car in the only space available in front of the abandoned house and got out, walked across the street and kept to the darkness. I moved my surveillance position around the apartment many times during the night and finally settled in my car for the last few hours in the morning. As long as I don't do something that breaks the cloaking spell that changes the energy around me, I'm okay for the most part.

Sunrise is scheduled for 5:38AM according to the internet, which meant all night creatures would be seeking refuge from the light of day about now. At 5:30AM my client, Marilyn, bartender/manager leaves her bar. Her duties of cleaning up, tallying the receipts, and getting the bar ready for the afternoon shift to open up, would be complete. Marilyn's schedule is clockwork like the OCD that she is. I don't know if obsessive compulsive behaviors are usual for beasties, but of the ones that I've had for clients they could be described as having that behavior, but then, human sports figures, and what could be termed normal humans have behaviors that could almost be said to be compulsive. How many people's days have been ruined because they weren't able to stop at the same place for a cup of coffee on the way to work, or sit in the same seat during a meeting, or park in the same parking place... What I'm getting at is, it's all about comfort. We all have set up habits for our own comfort, a way of grounding ourselves in what we feel is an unpredictable world. Why do we need to have predictability? Who taught us

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predictability is good? It's just another labeling social behavior that aids in relationships and hampers.

What was that? I leaned against a wall and strained my hearing and other senses.

Nothing.

So where was all this thinking going?

A light pops into my head. I have been accused of being OCD and it obviously has worked its way under my skin so in my spare moments I regurgitate the hurt. Of course I have rituals to start my day. I practice them to protect myself from harm. Why should my habits be anybody's business but my own?

I do dislike these long hours of sitting around because I spend too much time thinking of little slights and broken promises and things that are not important in the big picture. For some reason my brain must be kept busy and picking things of no consequence apart is becoming a new habit.

I shake my head to get back on track. It's early morning and nearly time for me to end this stakeout. Night Owl, my cat familiar, describes this early morning hour as counting returning Toms, which he would know better than I. In human terms I translated it to mean anyone who spent the night elsewhere would be returning home so I should be careful. Some people returning early in the morning may react with guilt if a stranger is found nosing around. However, as I said before, I'm prepared, though I'm not relying totally on spells and charms. There are so many varieties of supernaturals that I can't be sure I'm hidden or protected from them all. To those immune to my charms, I trust my other senses and spirit guides to warn me.

Mentally and physically, I made an effort to blend in with my environment as I walked around. Turning the corner to check the back of the apartment the air changed as if a door opened. Before I could register anything else I felt myself lifted off the ground and slammed over a railing with enough momentum to hit the laundry room's wall a good four feet from the railing. I'm not light weight so either it's a supernatural or a linebacker.

I hit the wall with so much force that it's no wonder that my brain stopped functioning. I'm conscious enough to know I'm sliding down the wall into a sitting position. I'm lucky I didn't fall face first. That type of bruise would be difficult to hide.

My assessment is I think therefore I am alive and gratefully so.

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Then she or he is gone and I'm leaning precariously to the left. A pain in my side causes me to try to move to a less painful position but nothing is responding. It's difficult to breathe. I'm lucky that I bundled up for warmth or I would be hurting more.

Daylight came swiftly, or so it seems. I'm half sitting and half lying near the trashcans just like the morning drunks I pass on Mission Street and First. At least my pants are zipped, and I haven't soiled myself, or I hope not. I attempted to roll to my knees, but I rolled back to a sitting position and reflexively held my side. Propping myself to sit up straighter I felt enough pain to take my breath away. I glanced up at the stair railing I flew over. It must be the railing that bruised my ribs.

Trying again, I used the stone wall and a trashcan as support to stand. I dragged myself to a standing position, puffing to let the energy of pain out. Leaning forward and holding my side, I stumbled like a drunk to my car.

I made it to my vehicle without falling and my keyless fob in my sock unlocked the door. Victory.

I collapsed in the driver's seat, groaning like a wimp. I turned the big five 0 this week and getting slammed has made me worried. What if I have a broken rib? The older one gets the longer it takes to heal a broken rib, and it will ache forever afterward. That type of injury will slow me down for sure. I need to change that train of thought to something more positive.

I look at my watch. Six thirty. Breathing shallow so it will hurt less, I slowly moved my right arm to get my water bottle that sits in the beverage holder. Not too bad. Peripherally I can see my ear bud in the other cup holder. After taking a few sips of water, I reached for the ear bud, insert it and then press it on.

"Call Victoria Handle's Office."

Allie Bonamici, my new office manager, picked up on the first ring. "*Victoria Handle, Private Investigator's Office. How may I help you?*"

"This is Vic, Allie." I breathe a few times shallowly before continuing, "You're at work early. I was expecting the answering machine."

"*I'm halfway through with your last shoe box of bills and receipts. I discovered a pattern to your 'gut feeling charging method' so it can be programmed into a fee chart.*"

Can she program a gut feeling? "Whatever you call it; it works for me. I'm eating well, paying bills, lease a new car each year and I was able to hire an office manager to boot," I joked.

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“Good thing I came cheap.”

“I thought it was my bonus options you liked so much.”

“If you didn’t throw in the detailing job once-a-month, I still would have taken the job. You already had me with the offer of me working my own hours.”

“Do I have any messages I need to deal with this morning?”

“Nothing that I’ve put down. I know you sleep in the mornings. I think your night clients chased away the normal people. You did have a call late last night. It’s a prospective client that wants a face-to-face meeting with you tonight at the MidNight Club. At midnight, to be exact. I couldn’t tell if it was male or female and no referral was given.”

“MidNight Club is supernaturals and whatever. Any idea which is my prospective client?”

“My very question so I can code it in the fee chart. No clue given. Your customer didn’t leave a return number either. Since your bank account can use a nice infusion of cash to pay this week’s expenses, namely my salary, I suggest you show, if only to collect the consultation fee.”

“Is that Night Owl making that racket?” I asked.

“I banished that cat to your room. He tried to spray my purse.”

“Did you two have a disagreement about something?” I asked that before I could sensor it. Allie isn’t a pet person. She thinks Night Owl is a rescued Tom that should be neutered and not something that warrants any form of conversation except orders of Get off that.

I don’t take Night Owl with me on most of my jobs so I leave the door between my bedroom and office open so he can wander around and protect it while the office is closed.

“I’m less likely to carry on a conversation with your cat than you with a door-to-door evangelist.”

“Since you’re in early, I take it you plan on leaving early.”

“I am. You’ll have peace and quiet for your morning nap.”

“You don’t disturb me.”

“I was kidding. You sleep like the dead. Correction, you’re difficult to wake once you’re asleep. When will you be back?” Allie asked.

“I’m leaving now so less than an hour.”

“I’m watching the morning news. The freeways aren’t looking good this morning,” Allie said.

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“I don’t like driving freeways. Too many dead people are hanging around them. I’d rather face the stop-and-go of traffic lights and risk a few dead at problem corners.”

“*Aren’t you the sensitive one,*” Allie teased. “*Doesn’t that talisman you have dangling in your car prevent that?*”

“Not from all. It’s not funny when my car gets crowded with the dead all demanding to be heard.” I shudder recalling the claustrophobic feeling of being surrounded with voices pleading and demanding my attention and being trapped in a bumper-to-bumper car press so I couldn’t escape off the freeway. It was like Whoopi Goldberg’s character in *Ghost* getting swamped by those that crossed over who want someone to speak for them. On some jobs, I feel like Bennie in *The Mummy*, holding up all his talismans, looking for the right one to keep the mummy from hurting him. My belief is that if something is determined to get through, where there is a will there is a way. My talismans are to keep the ones not so determined away.

At an early age I learned to set a limit to what type of spirits can contact me. Angelic beings are at the top along with my guardians, and then the sprits I ask for assistance from. However, once I began to work with *supernaturals* it opened up or enabled me to hear other *things*. Most respect my boundaries; however, when I’m tired, I get a few that get past my defenses which is why I don’t like driving freeways when I’m tired.

Allie laughed so loudly I removed the ear bud and held it away from my ear. I pressed the ignition button, and my hybrid Ford Fusion starts up. I know the engine started because the lights on the dash came on and my GPS started up. Electric vehicles are so silent that the dashboard’s console is the only thing that tells me the car is on. I used to be able to stamp on the accelerator to get a good varoom out of a well-tuned car, but now there isn’t that. But all the goodies I get in my fully loaded lease car makes up for the missing varoom, including the fake leather seats that a good detailing job can remove lingering odors, like the one still filling my car interior.

“*Do you want me to fix anything for you to eat?*” Allie asked.

I put the ear bud back in my ear. “No, thank you. I’m still trying to make peace with what I ate last.”

“*Sounds like an exciting night,*” Allie says. “*Anything else to report?*”

“No, just another routine surveillance. I’ll write up my summation on it and see if we can close the books on this, unless she lets me do it my way.”

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I'm not going to tell Allie what really happened because she's been trying to get me to hire her son, Richard, as my assistant so he could eventually open up his own business. Without warning he moved in with her, bringing his family of five to her three bedroom house. What I intuited was that he was a crooked cop easily influenced to go to the dark side of business. He previously worked in a small town in another state and was asked to resign before the new police chief, a fellow officer, arrested him. Allie said he quit because police work just got to him. She didn't mention the details but perhaps he didn't mention them to her.

I'm happy to work alone, I tell her whenever she brings it up. And that's the truth.

Night Owl, shut up! I shout at my cat via our mental link. NO's howling in the background stops.

"Now I'm worried," Allie says. "That cat has become too quiet."

"Praise the Goddess Bastet. Maybe he scared up a mouse to chase."

"That's not funny, Victoria. I hate mice running around. I'll go ahead and sum up her bill. Marilyn Richs, is it?"

"Marilyn Leigh Hyphenated Rodriguez Hyphenated Jones Hyphenated Richs."

"Ah, yes. That one. Should I arrange messenger time to set up an appointment?"

"Yes. See you soon."

"Drive safe."

Since Marilyn has no electronic devices that put out electromagnetic smog in her apartment, we would have to send someone to her place to set up a meeting. That someone is me, since I like to stay in physical touch with my clients.

I looked back at the apartment. One month and no visits from Marilyn's love interest is enough for me to end this investigation and deliver my findings to her. I could suggest she wear a turquoise bracelet since it turns color with unfaithfulness, however, I don't know if it works the same with nonhumans. If she asks, I'll recommend it and see what she says. If she's familiar with what stones work for a beastie perhaps she will share the information with me and I can add it to my notes.

I pulled out from the curb and headed for home. My left side is beginning to throb and my knee is a steady hurt. I don't want to go over what went wrong until I'm out of the neighborhood where the energy from my thoughts might be picked up and something follows me home.

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To keep my attention on other things, I go over preparations for my afternoon job. It's one of my few day jobs, though I'm not paid for it; rather, a debt is removed from another beastie's IOU book. All I have to do is deliver a message to a werewolf before dusk. So far, for the last six days, the intended recipient of the message hasn't shown up at his day job or his apartment. Two nights ago, it was a full moon but I don't think he was on the prowl for a mate. Instinctively, he probably knows someone is looking for him. I don't like to cast a finding spell until I know I can't locate him by simple sleuthing. Supernaturals, especially werewolves, can follow the scent of most spells cast in their direction to the one who cast it.

Just as I care for my clients, I also feel some responsibility to those I spy on. To keep myself from sinking into the dark side of PI business, I say prayers, listen to my spirit guides, and never sell information on my clients or what I find while on a job. It's tempting to make financial ends meet with selling someone out that is a lowdown piece of trash, which the werewolf Nicolai doesn't fall under. Ethics in my line of work is important to stick to because it's all about energy. If I start making exceptions, I'll start getting clientele that are dregs and soon I'll be just like them. I've seen enough dark business and damned people to know I don't want to be a part of it. If everyone could consciously see auras, there would be a lot less violence. I'm sure of it.

My method of making extra money, should I need it, is to take on part-time jobs in businesses that improve my PI skills. I put out the need, and it comes, though not always the kind of jobs I would have preferred. I learned early in life to let Spirit guide me and not stress over what the job is. I've worked in occult shops that catered to people that work primarily in curses and conjure up scary accomplices, to a car wash where reputed gangsters had their vehicles cleaned after a particular messy night out. I've also worked in a dog wash which gave me insights into the rich and famous by the way they treat their dog companions and, to my embarrassment, what the dogs thought of the households they lived in. I've rescued over a dozen dogs from bad situations and their favorite companions from people, horses, dogs, cats, weasels, bunnies, etc., without giving myself away. There are some whose fates I'm willing to risk interfering with their life lessons. I feel I was meant to help and I thank my angels and theirs that I was able to. Lend a hand or thought to someone who needs it, my street friend Margaret Mary used to tell me. No heart felt action goes to waste, she would say each night as we settled down

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in our shelter cots. While we were together, I don't recall that we ever slept outside in bad weather. Space for a mother and daughter was always available. Bless Margaret Mary's soul.

All in all, it pays to know the particulars as well as the people and things I want to avoid. My guides always come through for me. I haven't starved, missed paying a bill, or died trying, and I've been living on my own since I was sixteen. That's not to say I haven't had near scrapes with death and terrifying experiences. Unrequited love interests I'm not counting, which is a testament to my upstanding character in that I don't use magic to make someone fall for me. The consequences to that type of interference are and would be more than three-fold.

I've been labeled with the generic term psychic. I've heard people's thoughts for as long as I can remember and knew from my previous past lives not to tell anyone what I knew. It sounds odd that if I wanted to, I could remember my past lives but I can't recall my life younger than five in this life. My memories start at five when I went to live with an aunt and her family. I was fed and clothed and given nothing more. My aunt's husband was a truck driver. We didn't stay in one place for more than a year. I learned to close off hearing any thoughts from them. My intimate companions were in spirit form, and they kept me safe from any physical and emotional abuse from them. Any love and affection came from meetings with people I met during this stage of my life. They weren't constant in my life, but I believe because I preferred being a loner they came into my life when I needed the support they could provide.

Shortly before my sixteenth birthday I met a fellow psychic, Jeffrey Carrie. Jeffrey and I stayed clear of each other during my short stay in Danielsburg. As long as I said nothing, I knew he would leave me alone. His energy was chaotic with the colors in his aura, a reflection of his emotional turmoil. He was the pride and joy of a local church which my aunt joined. My aunt had to belong to a church wherever we set up home, and it was always the type with negative energy. What would Jesus say, was her favorite phrase and then she would spout Old Testament hate. I don't think we ever belonged to a church that preached from the New Testament. What *would* Jesus say?

Before we arrived in Danielsburg, for seven years the Danielsburg's Church of the Divine Light Fellowship exploited Jeffery's talent for healing minor ailments and his predictions the pastor claimed as his own. Three weeks after we joined Jeffrey turned sixteen and the proverbial devil in the hormones got him. Some might say he became schizophrenic, but he actually became too unbalanced from living in two worlds, the intangible psychic and solid mundane. He had no

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spiritual mentor to guide him. Not only was he a teenage boy in love with an older woman, carrying on a torrid affair with her, but the pastor was pushing him for more information, like nasty secrets about church members.

The last church service I attended Jeffrey did his own show and it was mind boggling because he aired out the congregation's dirty laundry instead of letting the pastor use the information for his own nefarious designs. My cousin and uncle were among his targets. I was doing some of my own juggling of two worlds to keep those two creeps from molesting me.

Jeffrey, at that moment on the podium, believed himself omnipotent – indestructible in both worlds. He left a messy aftermath of energy which I felt my aunt thrived on.

It wasn't too long after that that I turned sixteen. My Aunt Alicia informed me on my birthday that she could no longer afford me. There was to be no more money for my care. That knocked me for a loop. What money? Why hadn't my guides told me about this money? I nearly missed hearing the rest - something about which I was going to be picked up by a social worker because I was too much of a problem. I'm sure my mouth fell open. That was the first time I heard about me being more of a problem than her son from a previous marriage.

There was an instant change in the family dynamics, like a veil had been lifted and motives became crystal clear. What lifted the veil I don't know but it firmed my resolve to leave where I wasn't wanted and on my own terms. While the three sat before the TV mesmerized with a little encouragement from me, I walked to the public bus stop, got on and haven't looked back. I'm sure that was a great relief for Aunt Alicia who didn't have a mothering bone in her body toward me. I've done my Ho'oponopono's chant, "I love you; I'm sorry; Please forgive me; Thank you", every time I thought of them. They're on their own paths that will never bisect mine again.

Learning to live on the streets is not all that difficult *if you're psychic* with a good relationship with your angels and spirit guides to avoid *most* dangerous people and situations. Since life here on earth is like a schoolhouse, I didn't have a problem free life, but I did avoid what I could. I was lucky that in the beginning I paired up with an older woman who needed someone to look out for her. We passed as mother and daughter in order to get in the safety of overnight shelters that offered showers, a change of clothes, laundry service, a new backpack if needed, food and water. She was a visionary. Most of her youth was spent in a mental hospital where her well-to-do 'Christian' family locked her up. She was saved when states cut back on

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locking up and drugging people like her and her family ignored her release hoping she would disappear, which she did.

Margaret Mary, she called herself. I called her M&M, which she laughed at and said that it was alright with her. She thought the M&Ms with the nut inside suited her 'just fine Almighty'. She called me a lot of names because she couldn't remember what name I was going by in this life. M&M could see people's past lives and future and that there were too many different names to keep track of. She had many spirits about herself, and she carried on conversations with them all, which is why most everyone feared her. She and some of the spirits that hung with her taught me a lot. There is evil out there and she in her small way was keeping it at bay. I stuck with her until her heart gave out four years later. She sat on her favorite park bench in the rain with a tree blocking most of the downpour and holding my hand. I held a broken umbrella over her giving her some protection as she crossed over doing what she loved best, sitting in the rain. Rain was a blessing from the Almighty she liked to say.

After M&M's death I sometimes missed meals and slept outdoors a lot. For the people that watched my back I returned the favor by giving them things they needed. What better place to learn how to help the needy without paying attention to myself than to work among the homeless? There were a lot of unbalanced psychics out there and with Margaret Mary I found we weren't the only ones on the streets trying to give the lost peace of mind.

I picked up lessons here and there and continued to hone my skills in the mystical and mundane worlds. At twenty-two I was guided to work at a spiritualist church where someone would teach me the social graces I needed to move out of the homeless culture. I made the age-old error of falling in love with my mentor, twenty-nine years my senior. We traveled across the country in a church sponsored bus, lecturing and sharing our psychic experiences with those that wanted to hear us, but mostly they wanted psychic readings or to hear from people once in their lives who have crossed over. My hormones were on the march then, producing more serotonin than a sensible person can handle. It was my first experience with lust, and I confused it with love.

When a person falls in love or in lust, one's entire world becomes filled with that object. I still blush at what I would have done for love if asked and grateful there was no selling my body for money or drugs. Jealously and possessiveness were my lessons, as well as how to share space and not drive the other crazy. It was difficult to trust when I knew what people were thinking

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about the person I lusted for and knew she was interested in them too. I can understand why some men hate the object of their lust or love since they become so obsessed. If you think about it, as a preemptive strike, what better way to have the upper hand than by condemning what you know you are powerless to control – lust - which makes strong people do some pretty stupid things that are against their better interests?

I can't say my love interests since then have been more balanced or longer lasting, but I haven't been looking for a permanent partner to learn the hard-earned lessons people live through in relating to each other. I'm meant to be a loner and I'm fine with that. I know I'm getting up there in years, but I'm in no hurry to give up my interests, space, privacy and time that I feel I would have to give to another out of fairness to my partner.

One of my most fun phases of life was when I was in my early thirties in between love interests so I didn't have to account for my whereabouts at all hours. I would go out looking for where I could perform a civic duty with no one knowing. I wasn't a cape crusader leaping into dangerous situations. I don't like violence, hate physical pain and for sure don't look forward to being shot, stabbed or violated.

I did things like foil rapists in bars by locking them out of bathrooms, spilling the drinks they drugged, arranging for a taxi for a target victim, and I prevented a handful of group attacks against individuals. There's a lot of pent-up frustration among violent lowlifes, you know. I stalled out a few gangsters' cars so the police could catch them and their entourages.

I also knew when a bank holdup was going to happen and depending on what was available, foiled the robbery or the getaway. For a good laugh, a few times I made the turnstile keep turning with a robber in it as he tried to enter the bank. That was a lot of fun. Or the bag of money would suddenly rip open and the money dropped out on the pavement. The money didn't fly anywhere since the bills were bundled. Sometimes I had them trip over their own feet in the bank, or fumble and drop their weapons, fire off a round and nearly shoot themselves in the foot before they were ready to present themselves as holding up a bank, or their shoe came off while they were fleeing the scene. Another good laugh was having the perpetrator's pants fall down around his ankles while he was either fleeing the scene or trying to rob someone. I am creative. For the tough girls trying to be gangstas I would mess with their makeup; like the ones with the pasted-on eyelashes that suddenly loosened and dangled in their eyes when they were being mean. Or they would break a nail. Those partial nails were great to mess with. For the toughies

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that dressed as boys, they would lose their pants or a shoe, since they didn't tie them. I just loved messing with them. They have no patience whatsoever.

I stayed out of politics since they have very complex energy around them. Some aren't totally bad. They have a whole different type of support group, both negative and positive and I wasn't that powerful or patient to work magic for them.

My civic duty-stint didn't last long, though. My guides told me I was messing with too many life lessons. It was alright to give someone choices to make but not to make the decision for them. There are wrong ways and right ways to assist someone through their life lessons. That involves lots of endurance and better left for the person's guardians unless asked. It was potentially bad karma for me, so I moved on.

When I turned thirty-five, I was guided to work for an old man that was a PI and what's so interesting about him was, he was what I wanted to become. Johnnie was wise, funny, ageless and generous. I knocked on his office door and asked if he could teach me his trade. Without blinking an eye, I was in training. He always had enough clients to keep us busy. I was always paid though I don't know where the money came from. He never kept notes or files on his clients, and he didn't speak of them once the job was finished. He also didn't have any electronics in his office. When I arrived at work, we had a bus to catch or his favorite taxi driver to take us where we needed to go. He kept a low profile. He honed my psychic skills to use in Private Investigations and instilled in me ethics and morals, just in case I forgot to bring them with me.

Hancock and Sons, Private Investigations was the name on his door. People called him Uncle Johnnie or Johnnie and there were no Hancock and sons. His first directive to me was to never interfere with another's life lesson unless asked. If I felt so compelled, let my Higher Self talk to that person's Higher Self. He reminded me at the beginning of each new job my first year that if I do interfere with another's life lesson without asking, I'm bound to that person as a babysitter until the person learns the lesson I interrupted her or him from. I was living in a small studio apartment over a garage and there wasn't enough space to share with disturbed and unsanitary roommates, so it was easy-peasy to stick to follow that guideline.

Years after Johnnie and I parted company my clientele changed from exclusively human to the world of weird. Once I found the weird world, I found my niche and as long as I walked the straight and narrow, life is good with all its never-ending surprises. One of the downsides of

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my interesting clientele is that because I deal with a peculiar side of reality it makes it difficult to hang on to a steady worthwhile office assistant. I've had humans and supernaturals for office assistants and none had worked out. I needed an office assistant to do the side of business I detested. Johnnie never taught me the paperwork side of the PI business because he never did it. I don't think he even filed tax returns or had a social security number. I have a social security number, and I pay taxes because I feel it's only right to since I use a lot of the things taxes pay for. I also hired a tax consultant, Ginger, so I can say I also stimulate the economy. She's the one that recommended Allie, a retired grandmother, who wanted a part-time job to get away from her son's family that moved in with her. Allie is working out better than I had ever expected and she's been with me longer than any of the others.

I parked under the carport alongside of Allie's Ford Mustang convertible. She told me when she retired this was her present to herself. It was still shiny red with no dings. Someone had put a protection ward over her vehicle, and it wasn't her or I. When I offered her a once a month detailing job as an incentive to my minimum wage, she gave me a big smile and came to work for me. It's not like I was taking advantage of her. She works whatever hours and as long as my phone is answered during business hours, my books are kept up, and clients are followed up with, she is a jewel. I supply health insurance, and a week's paid vacation. Why sweeten the pot? Because my angels and guardians said she was the one for the job and it's for our mutual benefit. It's not like I can't afford her.

From the trunk I removed my duffel bag and pulled out a plastic bag with a catnip mouse. I keep a few bags of catnip toys in the trunk of my car. I never know when I'll need a peace offering for Night Owl, because sometimes he ticks me off and I say something that hurts his feelings. He can make sleeping miserable for me by finding ways to not let me sleep if I don't make peace with him before my bedtime. I zipped the duffel bag closed and dropped it back in the trunk.

As I walked around to the front of the building, Marvin, my neighbor, was arranging his briefcase, newspaper and coffee in such a way that he can comfortably carry them to the corner where he waits in the cold for his ride to university. He's studying to be a writer. He wants to write romance novels for gay boys. If he asked me, I would tell him he could start by having a website where he could post his stories and get feedback that he could use to help him gain the

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following and practice he needs. But he hasn't asked nor will he. He's embarrassed to speak of his dream. I've dropped a few cards of clairvoyant friends in his mailbox but that's as far as I can meddle without him asking. I like sweet Marvin. Let me add here, he also has a nice body to look at. Not too bulky and no fat. Sometimes we run together and his outfit is skintight, so I know there isn't any fat on him, unlike me. My body is definitely in the matronly shape with round padded curves.

Our building was once a two-bedroom house that is now separated with a soundproof wall, required by building code. I know it's soundproofed because I tested it. For the area the rent is reasonable, and our landlord doesn't take forever to repair anything that stops working or gets funky, such as backed up pipes. That's because I worked a spell to make sure he is an attentive landlord that keeps his tenants happy which in turn makes him happy. Happiness is a spiral of colorful energy.

Climbing the steps to my side of the porch a religious advertisement is folded in the door. I look over at Marvin, and he shrugs his shoulder. "I didn't get one," he said. He's thinking it's because he's gay. He has rainbow flags and wind chimes hanging from the eaves on his side of the porch. The chimes were my suggestion for keeping away negative energy.

"Lucky you. You don't want that type of negative energy clogging up your doorway," I say to him, smiling and beaming love energy toward him so his day starts out right. Either my spell to ward off solicitors and hate advertisements needs recharging or it isn't a solicitor that left it but someone taunting me. Whispering a ward off, I pull the advertisement off the knob.

"Let me see that," Marvin says. He takes it and folds it into an airplane and tosses it toward the curb. We both smile as it lands in the gutter. It's street cleaning day so it will get washed up. He gathers up his things again and steps off the porch feeling good.

"Good shot. Thanks, Sweetie. Have a great day." Stepping into my office/waiting room the heat indoors makes me realize my nose is cold. I began to peel off my scarf, gloves, hat, and coat and kick off my shoes at the door. Allie was at the kitchen counter drinking tea and regarding me over her reading glasses. When Allie works the kitchen counter morphs into her desk. It's very convenient to have the stove close by to warm up her tea.

"Morning, Allie."

"Good morning, Victoria. What's wrong with you?"

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“It’s nothing serious. How’s the computer work coming along?” I try to straighten up and look like I’m fine. With a small puff of air at the twinges and stabs of pain I think I’ve straightened up enough.

“Good.” However, her eyes look like she wants to refute my health report. “I opened up an online subscription with Carbonite for you,” she went on, “so there won’t be any lost files if your computer crashes. After all the hours I put into organizing this year’s financial information I don’t want it lost because some blasted genie or gremlin got it in their small minds to mess with your computer. Would you like tea before you go to bed?”

“No, thanks. Can you call Herbie’s Mobile Detailing to clean up Margaret Mary?” All my lease cars are given her name. “Unless you need my attention at the moment, I’m going to take a shower and fall into bed.”

“No hot water. I found this note in your mailbox. It’s from your landlord. The water tank replacement has been set for tomorrow at the latest because pipes under the house need to be replaced too. The plumber is due between 9 to 11 today and no telling how long he’ll have the water turned off.” She held up a leaflet with a comical picture of someone taking a cold shower. The landlord had his signature below it showing it was official.

“What’s that noise?” I looked around to see where the noise was coming from.

“It’s from the pipes. A blockage of some type.”

“No wonder NO is upset. It sounds like there are gremlins beating out messages.” I opened the glassed French doors that lead to my bedroom and private domain. NO’s orange plumed tail was twitching where his large body was enclosed in the tube on his cat pole. He was ignoring my arrival. It *was* rude to tell him to shut up but he needed to stop annoying Allie.

I pulled out the catnip mouse from the bag and tossed it to the top of the perch on the cat pole and congratulated myself in getting it right where I wanted. If NO wants the catnip he’ll have to put out some effort. I went to the closet and put away my things.

“That is encouraging his bad behavior,” Allie remarked.

“It makes him sleepy,” I said.

“It will save you from the consequences of your rudeness,” NO said.

“You were being a drama queen,” I said in thought to NO. *“You need to stop irritating her.”*

“What fun is there in that?” he returned, sounding smug in my head.

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That confirmed my suspicions that he was purposely annoying her. I was aware that Allie was contributing to the negative energy in their prickly relationship as well. This was a situation where they would have to be the ones to put the energy into getting along rather than me running interference. They obviously ignored my suggestions of saying the Ho‘oponopono mantra that worked well for me.

My ritual on returning home is to check my amulets that I have scattered about the apartment to see if any were disturbed and test protection spells to make sure, they’re still active. I never know what type of entity or entities may follow me home. Since that religious cult leaflet was left on my doorknob I needed to know if I had to relocate or recharge my sardonyx stones that have been placed around the apartment for protection. To relocate them I would have to redowse the apartment to see if the apartment energy has changed and maybe other stones would need to be added. That much work would have to wait until after I get some sleep time. Being tired and working spells isn’t wise because if it isn’t done right, I may whistle up a hungry dragon or an annoying cricket and all before a much-needed nap. If it’s just minor recharging I can pull some energy from Mother Gaia and replace weakened stones with charged ones sitting on my shelves amidst crystal clusters, citrine and carnelian stones that don’t need cleaning and recharging. They clean and recharge stones around them. I have a good recycling and recharging station of my own right in my bedroom. That’s not to say I don’t smudge and spend time with my collection of stone spirits. I’m not neglectful of my tools and allies.

“Sleep well,” Allie says. “Check your To-Do-List after you get up. Your calendar has a list of follow-up calls you need to make as part of our customer service and promotion plan.”

There’s something in her voice that made me turn to study her. I easily pick up her irritation with her son who has her taking his wife and children to the free clinic. He told her he’s going to be looking for a job so he couldn’t do it and that he needed gas money from her. The only thing Allie stands firm about is that he can’t use her car which she parks in a rented garage that is only for her car. That’s her tipping point to throwing him out. I can feel he knows that. Personally, I would call his bluff of taking the grandchildren out of her reach. I could mix up something to take care of that situation without interfering too much with their lessons but Allie’s firm with me about not intruding in her family life. I wonder what Ginger told her about me.

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If you're thinking that PI business *is* intrusive in others' business keep in mind that my clients ask me to assist in a problem they have. They already suspect the truth of what they are asking me to look into so the consequences for the wrongdoer have already begun.

It sounds like I'm trying to justify my job to myself, but I love PI work, and I know whatever I do there are always consequences. It reminds me of the pointing finger with three pointing back. Perhaps that's where the saying of whatever you do it will return to you three-fold comes from. It's a good truism.

"Thank you, Allie. Have a nice day," I said as I closed the glassed doors. I can hear her planning for my car to be detailed.

The extra key fob in the bowl will be handed to Jimmie Jay or JJ and his partner Calvin the Bean Man who are the only two I allow to touch my car and Allie's. Some low wage earners play negative music that attaches itself to our cars and they have sticky fingers, but not these two. When finished, our vehicles are not oiled up and slick and reeking of some perfume to cover their disgusting energy, but clean and shiny with love energy. JJ and Bean Man like their work. When they are finished they drop the key fob in my security mailbox or hand it back to Allie. Of course, to show them our appreciation of them doing it the way we requested, they get a tip.

I shake the curtains over the doors to reinvigorate the protective energy which shuts out most light from the front room as well as mutes sounds, like phones ringing or Allie's voice talking to clients. The darkened shades over the two windows to the yard I pulled down and then tug the curtains across the two windows leaving the bedroom in further darkness. I turned the mattress warmer on then began checking all entrances and exits to make sure my protection spells are strong. I turned the light on in the shower room and check vents. I removed my jewelry and amulets I'm wearing and lay them on one of my quartz crystal clusters to clean and recharge. I lifted the carnelian stone and for a moment held it in my palm enjoying its warmth and soothing energy. I placed it back on the shelf and notice it's time to dust my shelves and stones.

Satisfied, everything is in order I glanced at the cat pole. NO is purring loudly, and his feet are in the air as he rolls on the catnip mouse. NO will be in a good mood by the time I get to bed. I stepped into the shower and braced myself for the cold. Under the water spray I whispered prayers for enlightenment while I sleep. Sometimes I wake up remembering a visit to Mars or some other distant planet, but I can't remember exactly what I learned there. You can laugh all

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you want, but I've walked on the moon in my dreamtime and saw things earth's governments don't want to admit to. Have you? Of course you have. Everyone wants to go to the moon or distant planets, so at night, when no one is watching, including our conscious critic the waking mind, off one goes on a night trip.

Before going to bed, I selected a bracelet of hematite. It has good energy for my out-of-body journeying while I sleep. I don't always know what my higher self has planned for my nightly lessons. I also checked under my pillow to make sure that my dreaming charm, a bag of herbs and stones, is also there. When I can enhance my spirit experiences, I would be foolish not to.

I put on socks to keep my feet warm, dress in sweatpants and a T-shirt then slide under the covers, relishing the warmed sheets. I thanked my higher self for the lessons I had learned today and for the lessons I will learn in my sleep. I say prayers for the world in general and anyone I have added to my prayer list. For me, this practice keeps me grounded so I'm not spaced out and forget mundane things or know the difference between physical people and supernaturals.

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Chapter 2

My eyes opened and immediately I'm aware of any and all living presences that are in the room. NO has a distinct feel and he is the only presence sharing my room. All is in order, nothing is disturbed. My brain then starts to rattle off my to-do-list. Already my dreams have faded and whatever was accomplished in dreamtime is of no matter to me at the moment. I have more pressing issues in another reality to deal with.

Add to my daily To do list to do a find spell on Nicolai. Today I will find that werewolf and deliver the message.

With a clear affirmation for the day and plans made I tossed my covers to the side, or that was my intention. My arm fails to rise, and my legs don't swing out of bed. Just shifting my weight brings pain. The last time I felt like this I had slipped on black ice and landed flat on my back and for two days wasn't able to move any further than to and from the toilet, and it took a long time to cross that bit of space. For times like this I wish I had a bathtub. An Epson salt soak would make me feel so much better ...so would a few of those pain pills I save for days like this.

I counted to ten and couldn't sum up enough willpower to make the effort to move.

"This is ridiculous. Just move one leg and then the rest will follow," I said aloud.

NO hopped onto the bed and surveyed me. His orange plume swayed back and forth. He's amused.

"Can I get you something?"

I angled my head to see if he's smirking.

"Can you get me the pill bottle for pain? It's in the bottom drawer in the shower room."

NO is perfectly capable of telekinesis so it's not an unreasonable request, it just depends on how motivated he is.

"You emptied the bottle on your last job for that beastie, Gartha. You should charge her for refilling your prescription. My advice is to wear pads on dangerous assignments. That would prevent bruised body parts the next day. Right now, smearing goop on your sore muscles would be better."

"It was a stakeout, a simple observation. It didn't warrant wearing a Kevlar vest. And I'm not using mentholated goop with you around. You sniff it like it was an opiate. What do you have against the pain pills?"

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“Pills aren’t good for your psychic senses. You could use the Arnica oil with lavender Allie gave you the last time you were like this.”

“I forgot about that. It smells like pine sap and lavender.”

“Or you can always moan and groan and be miserable all day.”

I pictured myself moaning and groaning and sounding like a linebacker the day after a game. I’m not in the habit of using profanity or curse because I know the power of words backed by intention. I usually stick to pitiful sounds until NO relents and the bottle of pain pills appear within my reach. However, as NO reminded me there are no pills. I forgot to refill the bottle.

Without any more thought on it I rolled and landed on my hands and knees, too late remembering I bruised my knee that morning. When I opened my eyes, NO is right there in my face.

“Ship High In Transport!” I wheezed between gritted teeth.

I leaned back and pushed up. It made my side hurt more and I nearly fall flat on my face. I gripped the bedding and hauled myself up then stiffly moved into the shower room.

“Why don’t you just break down and say it,” NO asked.

“Shit, shit. Are you happy now,” I mumbled as I turned on the water. “I rather like the historical link to the word.” The water spluttered for a few moments before it runs smoothly. Pipes have been replaced and steam rises. I’ve been blessed. They replaced the water heater a day early. My spells are holding and producing good things.

“I saw you look up that other word,” NO says mockingly. “Fornication Under the Consent of the King. Why don’t you use that one?”

“It’s overused by the immature,” I said. “Besides, I don’t like why it was used. Bad karma. The threat of wet fertilizer in a ship if not moved to a higher shelf is more amusing.”

While hot water flowed over me, I focused on it as cleansing energy and tell myself that any negative emotions and any foreign and unwanted energy as well as the pain in my side and knee are going down the drain. Stepping out of the shower, unable to briskly dry off, I realized this will be a long day.

I looked through my collection of oils and salves and find the arnica and lavender jar. I slathered my side and everywhere else I hurt that I could reach. I smell like lavender but it’s better than the scented air spray of sandalwood and rotting trash from the stakeout.

While I brushed my teeth NO is in the doorway watching me.

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“How was your night prowling? Find anything to howl about?” I asked.

“It was a quiet night out. Your night prowling looks more exciting.”

“Too exciting. I’m going to close Marilyn’s case. It’s been a month with no visits from her boyfriend, not even in disguise.”

“Where did you get the bruises?” NO persists.

“I’m going to work on clearings and spells before I go out on my afternoon job.”

“By the bruises on you, I think you’ll need more than spells.”

“While I’m at it, I’m going to put out a finding spell for Nicolai. I was able to find something of his. I know he’s hiding out to avoid accepting the message. I don’t want to spend any more time on this messenger job. It’s not like I’m getting paid for it.”

“Sure, you are. You get to erase one more ‘IOU’ that beastie has on you. Perhaps there’s a good reason you can’t locate him, more for your sake than his,” NO said.

“What makes you say that?”

“So far jobs for that beastie have been turning out to be complicated and dangerous...to you.”

“What fun would life be without challenges?”

“I would think last night’s experience would caution you to speak with less bravado.”

“I’m being positive, NO. You’re right that I’m erasing IOUs from *that* beastie’s account, but I also have paying clients, and the bruises were on that job, not...”

“Another beastie. Do you think they have something against you...like bad karma from a previous life?”

I glared at NO. He has a lot of fun poking at beasties which surprises me because I suspect he’s a beastie that for some reason has appointed himself as my familiar in cat form. “My business has gone from making ends meet to having enough to hire someone to do the bookkeeping. Ginger is going to love me this year. All my financial ducks are in a row. I may be able to take a vacation this year and if you’re good, you can come too.”

“What fun would there be without challenges?” NO mocked.

I can feel he doesn’t know what to do with that offer of vacation, but it does silence him.

I began collecting what I need for my meditation. When I had what I needed, I unrolled my meditation rug, set up the foldup corner table, and added stones - stauroilite, tourmaline and obsidian. I lit a white candle, then sat in the center of my rug. Mentally I formed a blue

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protection bubble around me. I sprinkled sea salt water, then invoked the four elements and the angels of those four corners and said prayers to gather energy. I touched bases with my spirit guides and asked for guidance from my helpers. At the end of my meditation my senses are wide open.

I asked who attacked me. Images flashed through my mind with none sticking with me. Then the images stopped. I waited for clarification. Silly me. I should know better. If I don't get it right away, then I have to look for signs for the next two days or hope I get something during dreamtime. Hopefully I'll know before the same person attacks me again.

I blessed those I've put on my prayer list and then sent out blessings to the world at large. Next issue.

Though I know the incantation for 'finding' and what to set out to protect me and those involved, I still go over my journal notes to review. I placed stones, colored candles, anointed the candles, and picked out jewelry to wear. From my containers that hold various colors of sand, I scooped black sand, seeking information from the unknown, and while I poured it into my vintage amethyst bowl, I murmured another incantation that will protect me and Nicolai from any psychic attack. I stated my intention three times. I set the button I found at Nicolai's apartment that has his energy on it in the sand. The energy from a werewolf in human form is different than one in transition. The button had a combination of the two, confirming my belief that he is a werewolf.

I settled back on my carpet. I expanded my blue light to include the entire residence. I felt something lurking just out of my reach. Its intention is unclear.

Standing, I selected a bundle mix of lavender and sage and lit it. With the bundle and a bell, I smudged the corners in the apartment, including the front room and kitchenette. I rang the bell over all drainpipes and fanned smoke down the drains. That will take care of the gremlins. Finished with the house cleansing I once more called in my spirit helpers. They informed me my house was secure.

I sat on my carpet.

To compel anyone to do something they don't want to do is against my morals. This job is just dropping off a message to an elusive werewolf. I had divined that the message would not harm Nicolai, though there were confusing signs related to the message. It's like looking at a spider's web and my link is not anywhere near the center, but it's on the web and when touched

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sends vibrations out to the rest of the web. I can't see the whole picture and what that vibration will do to the rest of the web. My guides aren't contributing much. I decided to go ahead with the assignment.

"I place this object in my protective circle." I dropped a pinch of herbs and made a circle around the sand bowl and button. "I wish no harm to the owner. I only wish to know of that person's location." My eyes moved to the mirror near my ritual table and for a moment I see an unclear reflection of me. "Open the veil betwixt and between, so I can see this other's location," I say to my reflection in the mirror. I returned my gaze to the button. I relaxed my eyes, staring neither at the mirror or bowl as I waited for a vision.

Peripherally, I see a blur and the button is gone and something is partially buried in the sand.

"What the..." I felt a tickle of energy on my fingertips as I touched the sand. My heart beats rapidly. The last time that something like this happened the case steadily went downhill. Not wanting to touch the lump in the sand I tried to guess what it is. I looked over at NO for a suggestion; after all, he's my familiar.

"Well, that went well," NO said. He dropped from the cat pole with a loud thump and leaped on the chair near the French doors for a closer look, staying out of my protection circle.

"What is it?" I asked him.

"A turd in its previous life and a fossil in this life," NO said.

"So, it won't hurt me if I remove the protection bubble?"

"What do you think a fossilized turd would do to you?" NO asked.

"Why a turd?" *Stink up my house,* I thought to myself.

"Maybe with the sand in the bowl, the powers that be think it's a litter box."

"A pile of shit in my ritual bowl isn't funny."

"It's not from this timeline or dimension so perhaps it's from a place with different customs," NO said.

"That complicates things." Though NO can sound mocking he does bring new ideas to solving problems, which in this case has possibilities.

"Perhaps Nicolai crosses dimensions." NO offered. He jumped off the chair and went to his cat pole, scratched vigorously then stretched and leaped into his tube.

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The mention of dimension connects to something in my dream but it's too illusive to see what it's about. I caught a whiff of an unclean litter box. I sniffed the air. "Is that smell from your litter box?"

"Did you clean it like you're supposed to?"

"Can't you use the pet door in the kitchenette to go outside?"

NO poked his head out of the tube and sniffed the air disdainfully. *"The smell is from the fossil in your sand bowl."*

"How can something from the past smell so bad?"

"Ask a historian for a lesson about how the past affects the present."

I opened my circle and cleared whatever spirit might be hanging around. I got a plastic bag from the kitchen and poured the sand and turd into it, sealed it and took it outside and dumped it in the trash on the side of the house. Back in the apartment I washed my hands then cleaned up my ritual table. With a brush I swept up the herbs I used in my protection circle and burned the pile in a Chinese temple urn. I extinguished the candles murmuring a prayer to thank all who have helped me.

To prevent anything from wherever the turd came from to cling to me I smudged myself.

I moved the stones from my table back to the bookcase. On one of my quartz crystals clusters I keep a collection of stone bracelets and rings. I picked a bracelet for protection against psychic attacks. It's made of amethyst, hematite, carnelian and aventurine. I also slip on my blue Tiger Eye ring. For a necklace I pick my smoky quartz and pyrite. Among the larger stones are scattered smaller ones that I can carry in a bag. I pour out what I have already in my bag and put some back on the shelf and pick out new ones.

"You're not going to run mindlessly around the block?" NO asked.

"It's not mindless. I organize my day and then enter the zone. The zone is like meditation on the run. No. I won't be running today."

"Don't forget to wear that vest, just in case Nicolai gets upset about a message he's avoiding to receive. Werewolves even in human form are strong."

"I'm feeling a lot better with the Arnica ointment."

I opened all the curtains and left NO sitting in the window, watching birds feed from a neighbor's bird feeder.

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It's after seven PM. I'm driving by Nicolai's apartment looking for a parking spot. I want to speak to the manager again. Someone is picking up Nicolai's mail because when I peeked the previous day, there wasn't any mail in his box including junk mail. Every mailbox gets junk mail whether someone is using the box or not, unless like me they know a spell to make the mailperson forget to put junk mail in their boxes.

I switched the view from GPS to rear view camera as I slowly passed for the third time by Nicolai's apartment building. No parking space is available. Usually, I find a spot by wanting it.

Usually.

Instead, five blocks away I find a space that hadn't been there on my previous passes. There's a reason why I didn't get the space I wanted and I'm sure I'll find out why soon. After a few blocks of walking my sore muscles loosened and my knee is feeling better.

Two more blocks and the hairs at the back of my neck prickle and my left bracelet heats up. I touch my necklace of pyrite. I can feel my protection incantations and stones being tested.

Predators.

I've spent years learning to control my emotions and facial expressions. What is difficult to prevent is the sudden upbeat of my heart where an energy reader will pick up on right away. Predators, the best energy readers, locate their prey in that one instant. It's all about energy and thought is energy. I feel the focus like a beam of light hitting me. I waved it away like I would swat at a fly and for a moment it stops. My Tiger Eye ring probably absorbed the energy, but it could also be my own ability to protect myself.

I turned down the next block and head back to my car, feeling the tightness in my muscles return and my knee is hurting, causing me to limp. The urge to run is building up. I know it's a mental thing. Running from a predator, especially when injured is a sure way to excite a hunter's blood lust. I hum a mantra to lessen the intensity. Om is simple and it rumbles in my throat like a growl since I have no voice for song. My hand automatically slips into my pocket, and I hold my protection bag. The threat diminishes then disappears as I get within view of my vehicle.

I now know the reason why I felt it was a threat and he's standing near my car. Artie Langstrom, another PI who has some nasty associates, has become pretty nasty in his own right, though I'm sure he's kept in line by his master. What does my message delivery to do with

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Artie? Artie was at one time a ghoul, a blood donor to a vampire, or a slave, or a savory apple, sweet and tasty. I'm being cynical. Pomme de Sang is what my ex-girlfriend Betty calls a favored ghoul. She felt it was a romantic relationship to have with a blood sucker. I should have looked it up on the internet right there and then instead of waiting until she left me. But that's in the past and we've both moved on with our lives. She moved into a world of vampires and me...into doing business with nonhuman clients, though not with vampires. Maybe it's because Betty became one of them or maybe it's just because they creep me out, but vampires are a big no as prospective clientele.

Artie is one of the strangest people I met at a nightclub Betty liked to visit when we started dating. That whole bar scene was so bazar I thought none other existed. Naïve me. That's what I tend to do when sex is a driving factor; I visit places I would rather not under normal circumstances. I'm lucky she ended the relationship before I became too entangled.

As for Artie, he's a visual contradiction. I can see my reflection in his sunglasses and the way his eyebrows are moving, his eyes are probably darting everywhere but at me. His beard is unkempt with holes showing his pockmarked complexion; however, his clothing had to be tailored to fit his skinny frame so well, and his tennis shoes were the latest Nike's sports figure's product, not matching his clothing at all. His right hand is shaking so much I'm surprised he's able to get the cigarette butt to his lips. He took a huge lungful of smoke as if it were a reefer, held his breath, and then exhaled. That suck burned the cigarette down to the butt.

Someone should have warned him bad karma isn't the only thing that gets you when you do bad things for bad people. Since Artie avoids the daytime as much as possible, I wondered who is twisting his proverbial tail to work before dusk.

"Looking for a referral, Artie?"

"You're making a stink in the neighborhood. Literally. You smell like you've stepped in dog-crap." Artie's not so pretty face takes on a sickly look. He backs away from my car and starts fanning the air in front of his face as I get nearer.

A few steps from my car the driver's door unlocks. The keyless fob in my pocket is spoiling me in not having to put a key in a lock or ignition. It's a great invention, especially for those occasions when I'm scared out of my wits and I'm trying to make a fast get-away to my car. Trust me when I say that trying to get a key in a lock or ignition is something our body's DNA hasn't evolved to automatic knowing so when I'm running in primitive flight mode where

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keys and locks don't exist yet, I'm grateful someone has thought of another solution. I also like to think it's saved many women's lives that are being stalked or escaping from a predator in a parking lot.

I sniff but don't pick up anything smelly, not even the arnica and lavender on me or a whiff of any perfumes the detailers may have scented my car with. It's my protection spells and stones that he's unable to tolerate, I decided.

"What do you want, Artie?" I opened the car door and study him, feeling in better control of the situation; however, there's something wrong with this picture of *him* delivering me a message. With the background of a shadowed yard, I can see the typical aura of a beastie around him. That takes me by surprise.

"I was told to deliver a message to you, and I quote, tell *that* female PI to clean up her mess." He points his shaking hand at me. He gave a jerk to his cigarette to knock off ashes on the end, but it had no more tobacco to burn. His fingers were burning but he made no move to acknowledge it. Was it because he was a beastie or that he was drugged up?

"Who do you work for these days?" I asked.

"I delivered the message and now I'll be on my way." He hurried away as if he had another appointment that he was late for. I watched his figure fade away.

What is he into these days? He has the energy of a beastie, but I've never seen one fade away, but then, I've only seen beasties in buildings. Something to add to my notes.

In my car a strong odor of poop engulfs me. I rolled down all the windows and checked my shoes and car interior. Nothing. I flap the rag sprayed with sandalwood air freshener. It's not making much difference. This is irritating. If the smell clings to me, getting into the MidNight Club tonight will be a problem, to say nothing of someone sticking me with an unpleasant nickname.

I hit the road and was a block from the freeway on-ramp when one of the bracelets turned on my wrist. Glancing at my wrist then back to the road who but Nicolai appears heading below the freeway underpass where a different culture exists.

"Yes! Thank you, thank you, thank you." I pulled over, parked, and ran to catch up with him.

Weeds and cast-offs from non-living to living were strewn along the dirt path. I passed a group of street people. No supernaturals amongst the group. A few more yards and I catch sight

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of Nicolai. He's speaking to another werewolf. From the direction of a shadowed part under the bridge I felt the collective energy of supernaturals. I need to get to him before he joins them. I have no fear of them transforming since its daytime but a group of unfriendly supernaturals to one of me, no matter how many talismans or spirits I may have with me is not something to take on unless my life is on the line...even then my chances of leaving that group unharmed would be slim. So, I chased after him.

"Hey, you stink!" one of the people said as I hurried by. I gave him a quick glance and caught a whiff of him. How can he smell anything outside of himself?

Glancing back at Nicolai, his friend moved further into the darkness. It was a portal to another dimension. I felt it as if it opened. No wonder I wasn't able to find him. Nicolai turned to look at me. He doesn't run, which since he doesn't know my face, why should he? So far, my finders spell is holding.

"Nicolai," I said and quickly tucked the note in his shirt pocket before he could react. I turned and nearly broke into a run. The smell is getting worse, and I left Nicolai looking astonished and fanning the air around his face.

It's embarrassing.

"Hey! I don't want this job! Hey, Stinky!" he yelled.

"Too late. It's delivered," I mumbled as I concentrated on not twisting an ankle on trash. It's no longer my worry. My worry is to get home and return that object that's making my life not so rosy smelling. Back in the car I rolled down the windows and drove as fast as I could to get home. Not being stopped for a traffic ticket proves that my guardians are watching out for me and that the amulet swinging from my rearview mirror still had good juju.

A number of familiar cars are parked around the house as I arrived. I parked under the carport and hurried over to the trashcan. The offending turd is gone, and the trash smells of trash minus the stinky poop.

"This is not a good sign." Running up the steps and into the front room I find five people from my magic group. There on the coffee table was the fossilized turd sitting in its plastic bag on a folded newspaper.

"Oh, oh! Whew!" they all said when I entered the room.

"It didn't stink until you arrived," Harriet said.

"What do I do to get rid of the stink?" I asked.

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“Night Owl told us how you ended up with it. It’s putting out such a bad odor in the ethers that we’re getting complaints that one of our Forum is responsible and we have to see that it’s cleared up,” Junior said.

“We can’t perform spells with that stink contaminating the ethers,” Harriet said.

“It’s not from here. My protection spell had no effect on it,” I explained.

Surely someone in this experienced group has a solution.

“And you put out the protection amulets I created for you?” Lacey said.

I nodded. Lacey was the only one in our group that could make power amulets that covered many of the supernaturals I’ve encountered. She did it the old fashioned way of growing her own herbs, brewing and whatever else it takes to create a powerful bundle. To be invited to her home was a privilege which I was given. She had gardens and a solarium that a botanist dreams of. My only rule with her creating amulets for me is that no living thing is killed for its making. I didn’t want that type of karma on my path. From one of my past lives I do remember, killing for the craft was one of them. I shuddered remembering. I was burned at the stake and thinking about it I feel I paid for the lives I took in that lifetime, no matter how small they were.

“So how do I get rid of it?” I asked again.

“Send it back,” Lacey said.

“You opened a portal,” Meggs said solemnly.

“What about the button it took? I would like that back, so it doesn’t have anything I touched,” I said.

“Oh,” they all said in unison. That sounded ominous.

“*It* removed something from you?” Lacey asked, her voice taking on a different tone.

“That changes things,” Meggs said.

“It certainly does. You went trolling the unknown with your button as bait?” George demanded.

“Of course not! And I don’t go whipping up nastiness for anyone. The button belonged to someone I was trying to locate. I located said person and delivered the message. Case closed...except for this.”

“You stepped into the murky pond of uncertainty and expectations.” Meggs muttered something else I didn’t catch but her hand moved in a blur as she made signs in the air. “You opened up a door to another dimension,” Meggs confirmed. “Nothing you can’t handle yourself.”

“Well then, we’re finished here,” Mike said.

“Wait a moment! How do I get rid of the stink?”

“Send it back!” they said in unison and left without closing the front door behind them.

“Well, that was a lot of good for nothing help,” I said.

“They identified where it could have come from and what to do,” NO said. “You’re the one that has to take it to the next step.”

“How did they know about it?”

“There’s a trembling in the ethers with your energy on it.”

I looked at the front door and wonder how they entered without a key.

“You don’t have a protection spell to keep your magic group out,” NO explained.

“That’s true.” I was tired and I still had a long night before me. Mentally I went back over the precautions I had taken when I set out to find the owner of the button, whom I did find. So, what went wrong?

“What did I forget? This must be from another level of spells and magic Oscar told me about. Oscar will know what to do.”

“Oscar said he doesn’t want to do any more business with you because your problems are too complicated for the effort,” NO reminded me.

“He doesn’t really mean that, NO, otherwise he wouldn’t have coffee with me now and then. He says things like that because he’s warming up to the idea of retiring.”

“He doesn’t want to deal with beasties, and you keep bringing problems that deal with them. They creep him out like vampires do you. He will have coffee with you but no business. You really ought to listen when someone says no,” NO said.

“Well, okay. You’re right about Oscar, but not about the others. As a PI I can’t just give up because someone doesn’t want to tell me something I know they know. I would be out of business if I didn’t pursue leads and hunches. It’s not like I compel them to tell me secrets.” I got up and went to my closet where I keep some of my ritual objects in a trunk with a spell hiding it. “I’ll look it up in my notes on spells. Maybe it’s a simple return and I don’t have to know exactly where to return it to.”

“Hopefully, it will be done before your neighbors call the city to send someone out to see if you have a toilet problem. It was bad enough with the water pipes banging.”

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Maybe I used the wrong herb...like a *come hither* instead of a *seek and you shall find*. However, I don't believe I was that sloppy. Not when it comes to spells and ward-offs.

I leafed through my ritual notebook believing that when I come to the right spell I'll know. I've used the find ritual many times without any strange happenings so maybe there was more than one addendum I had added and forgotten about... I usually don't forget about spells that I use often.

I found my notations. I slowly read the exceptions to a finding spell. Since working with supernaturals I've been adding a lot of notations. I glanced at my stone collection mentally checking off what I had used and the herbs.

"I bet a vampire is behind this. I didn't think to put a protection spell against vamps." I glanced at NO to see his reaction.

"*What a leap,*" NO mocked. "*A missing rock causes you to get a lump of poop from a vampire. Do vampires poop?*"

"I don't think they eat solids so I would imagine they don't," I returned. "It's not just one stone, NO. I didn't have bloodstone, jet and kunzite to keep a vampire away." For sure I was going to carry those stones in my sacred bag at all times.

"*Weak link. Think again, but before you tire yourself out running in a chaotic fashion,*" NO says, "*all you need to do is return it.*"

I went through the notebook again, this time looking for anything I may have written on receiving things from the past. Nothing.

My search stopped at "A Reverse Spell". Maybe it's as simple as that.

"If I reverse my find spell, will the note I delivered to Nicolai be returned too?"

Not one peep from NO or my guides. I glanced at NO but he's in his tube grooming himself.

On my ritual table I laid out the necessary ingredients, smudged my apartment with lavender and sage, lit candles and sprinkled sea salted water. I invoked my bubble of protection, summoned the four elements and with an invocation, set the reverse spell into action. I didn't even finish my third repetition when the button and poop swapped places in the sand dish. There was a wisp of an image in the mirror but too quickly it faded.

Maybe the dimension Nicolai had been hiding in was where all this was from. For a moment I'm again reminded of something from my dream but it's still too vague to tease out.

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I ran the sand through a sieve just to be sure nothing else came back with the button.

“Well, that was quick. Next time look it up,” NO said. NO sniffed the air. His whiskers twitched as if a breeze were passing.

“The stink is gone. What’s that - a flower?” I asked NO.

“Too sweet for me,” NO said and sneezed.

“This goes in my notes,” I said as I wrote down from start to finish about the turd that showed up in my sacred sand dish. I also wrote about the after smell of...gardenias. That’s what that flower smell is. It’s too sweet for me too.

NO sneezed again.

I looked at my notes, thinking I had forgotten to include something, but it didn’t come to me just what that was. I glanced at the clock. I have enough time to get some exercise on my bike. In the front room I rolled out my exercise bike from the closet. I changed clothes and grabbed a water bottle from the refrigerator. I imagined myself riding down a country road until my alarm buzzed. Next time I’m going to take the left road and see what’s down that way. On occasion, my imagined rides turn out to be real places I’ve visited or end up visiting without intentionally setting out to.

As I stored the bike back in its space, I remembered it’s the shadowy image in the mirror that I didn’t put in my notes. I wrote on the pad on my nightstand, mirror image. Later I’ll add more detail.

I zipped through the warm shower, then dried off. In the mirror I saw a marbled bruise on my left side that covers not just my left rib, but upper arm down to my thigh. Is the bruise spreading? It doesn’t hurt as much as it did, so something is working about the arnica and lavender oil. I applied another layer of the salve adding my arm.

For a moment I stared in the mirror in amazement. How simple. I made another connection to my dream. Dimension. Portal. I must have disturbed someone entering or leaving a portal at the apartment complex. It had to be new because for the month I’ve been watching the place, each time casing the place before I settled in for observing the comings and goings of the apartment’s residents, I hadn’t felt any energy from another dimension.

“I need to schedule a conference with that beastie bartender and see if she knows about the portal and that’s why she wanted me to stay there. But why would she care?”

“A portal?”

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NO jumped onto the bed and stared at me. *"You were near a portal and didn't tell me?"*

"I didn't know until now. And what are you going to do about it?"

"I like to know where they are."

I looked at him suspiciously. Maybe that's where he came from. I glanced at the clock and decided I needed to eat something before I get going. I checked the refrigerator and found something to rewarm over the stove. While waiting for it to heat I dressed in dark clothes to fit in with the club's clientele, adding an electric blue scarf to wrap around my neck, mostly to keep out the cold. On each wrist I select three stone bracelets.

Pausing, I sniffed the air. There was a strong smell that had been hanging around the apartment. Gardenias. I added two stones to my pocket, a jet and bloodstone.

I went back into the kitchen and quickly ate the rewarmed spaghetti.

"Do you want to come?" I asked NO.

"And miss out prowling the neighbors' yards?"

"I don't think we've seen the last of that business with portals," I thought as I left NO to his own devices.

Chapter 3

Minutes before midnight I wasn't able to find any parking near the club, so I drove through the chain-linked gate to let a club valet park my car. It meant less time spent in walking blocks by darkened warehouses and worrying about what was lurking in the shadows.

On Wednesdays the only way to get into the MidNight Club is to be a guest or a member and since I'm nodded through the first door. I was expected. I'm guessing it's a member in good standing or someone who tips the doorman big. Wednesday nights is mixed night. All supernaturals and their human guests are welcomed as long as everyone maintains human form and follows the club's rules of behavior. Once a supernatural transitions to his or her natural form their nonhuman nature takes over and it becomes a mad house with fights breaking out and more than blood is spilled. I've heard this from more than a dozen people that were in the know. My one experience of witnessing a werewolf transition, and an angry one at that, was scary on all levels. It was a blow to all my senses, with smell and visuals being the most terrifying.

I can mentally communicate with just about anything, but to *see* some of the entities in a nonhuman form is a different experience altogether especially if they suddenly appear in my passenger seat. Their smell is why I keep a can of air freshener in my trunk.

Meggs is after me to face my fear so I can move to the next level of magic, but I keep putting that off for another time. I'm too busy earning a living which can be dangerous enough without looking for additional heart racing experiences.

The MidNight Club is located in the old warehouse district where the night lighting is iffy, and I suspect that is the intention. The surrounding warehouses are closed during the hours the club is open and when their morning employees start to arrive the club's customers are hurrying home to beat the first rays of light. The supernatural mix encompasses werewolves, vampires, ghouls, succubus, incubus, beasties and others I've only heard about. I've been inside the club during the daytime when the lights are on and all is quiet. That's when the manager of The MidNight Club is handing me assignments I don't ask for. These jobs are an obligation and scrying them merely scares the bejebees out of me, so I just complain about them but complete the assignments.

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The familiar hall I'm shown down leads to the inner sanctum where private meetings are held. I once counted the doors along the hall, nine. A few doors are thicker than others and have spells on the doorknobs. I don't even try to imagine what is behind those doors.

The stones around my wrists heat up as I walk down the hall. My heartbeat synchs with the heavy beat of the music heard just below human lower octaves. Once my heartbeat is at the same beat I can feel my face flush with a rush of blood. Someone pulls me into a meeting room and the door closes, cutting off the effects of the booming.

"Victoria Handle, PI," a deep voice taunted.

"You're my appointment?" My anger brings me out of the stupor that had settled over me. Gartha, the beastie that held IOUs over me and Big Gus her corner apparition is my appointment. We had an agreement that whatever business she gave me it would be done in the daylight hours.

The IOUs Gartha is using to get me to do odd jobs for her were favors I owed to other people that she bought up. Gartha thinks of me as her special servant. NOT to my way of thinking. My agreement with the beastie was I would work off the IOUs when I wasn't working a job. I had to have some type of control over our business relationship.

Gartha's old face on the other side of the heavily carved table grinned, or what I interpreted as a grin. "Maybe," she says.

The same question comes to mind whenever I stand before Gartha; since beasties can form into any type of human image, why does Gartha pick the body of an old, wrinkled woman? To return to my calm center, I remind myself that I'm in her territory and I did come willingly, and I will be wiping out another IOU slip from her possession.

A noise that I always think is like dead laughing came from a dark corner where Big Gus stands. He's an apparition that never leaves the corner.

"You're to escort someone to the Edge of Darkness." Gartha's thin white lips move but the words are out of synch. It was one of the most annoying things about doing business with Gartha which I suspect was why she showed that effect to me. To be truthful, Gartha scared me. If you saw her, she would you too.

"I don't want the job, Gartha. I'm taking a break from your assignments. Every time I do something for you, which isn't putting money in my bank account, I barely escape with my life

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and it takes weeks to recover. That means I make no money during recovery time. My insurance company is going to up my deductible.”

“Oh, pish posh. You’re showing your age when you say that. It’s a simple delivery. Can’t handle it? Getting out of the business are you now?”

“I’m perfectly capable of handling private investigations. Your jobs have nothing to do with PI business.”

“How was your PI spy job this morning?” Gartha mocked.

“I expect occasional lumps with a paying job and how did you hear about it?” I demanded, hoping she knew who hit me.

She made squeaky noises like she’s laughing, then composed herself with a few pouty lip-smacking sounds. To keep from thinking too dark of thoughts, I just filed that away as humorous encounters with the strange.

“Very exciting. Like timelines crossing, making it confusing when you see yourself dressed differently or friends not acting like friends. You know?” she asked, looking over at the shadow in her corner. “I’m just the go-between on *this* assignment,” she went on in a business-like voice. “You’ll be paid your usual consultation fee, plus hours, mileage and...” Gartha made a noise I wasn’t familiar with, “meals.”

“I don’t need you to broker jobs for me,” I said.

The money sounded tempting but not that much. But then again, I would get the consultation fee even if I turned down the job. My time and advice are valuable, otherwise, they can go elsewhere and get diddly squat.

“A delivery you say. If it’s dangerous, I expect hazardous pay. For now on, whatever job you ask me to do, hazardous pay in cash is to be included in addition to wiping out an IOU.”

“What life doesn’t have a certain amount of danger in it?” Gartha lifted her arms and the image of Jabba the Hutt in *Star Wars* came to mind, nearly causing me to lose my train of thought - my interest in self-preservation.

“Nearly being scorched to a crispy critter is not a normal job experience in PI business,” I reminded her.

The shadow in the corner moved. “Everyone knows that you shouldn’t wake a sleeping dragon,” Big Gus says smugly.

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“That was a dragon? I was stealing from a dragon. We don’t have dragons on 3D Earth!” It was supposed to be an easy-peasy job of retrieving a vase for Gartha. Her jobs are darn right not normal PI business.

“Of course there are dragons here! Unless they want to be seen, they’re invisible. They don’t want every want to be dragon slayer knocking on their home with weapons not encouraging a pleasant how do you do conversation.”

It’s not that I’m a coward or only take on easy-peasy jobs. It’s that I’ve got an honest reputation to keep up and her jobs are borderline not right. Also, my third dimensional Earth Magic doesn’t work in a lot of the places I visit for Gartha nor does picking up clients or getting references come into play. With Gartha, it’s a straight up deal of getting rid of IOUs.

Even now it makes me shiver thinking of one job that I was chased by a Fu dog and its monkey companion. Fu dogs come in pairs, and I was hoping it wasn’t going to suddenly appear in front of me and my escape.

“You were specifically requested,” Big Gus said. His apparition showed shadows where his teeth would be, meaning he’s either grinning or anticipating something messy. “Haven’t you always wanted to see what the Edge of Darkness is like?”

“Who asked for me?” Being curious has its advantages in the PI business, but my self-defense instincts should be a lot stronger than my curiosity. I need to keep reminding myself of this, especially since I hit the big five 0, which so far, I have no idea what that means. I keep saying five-0 to see if I get some sort of profound change of view in my life, but no light blinding insights have hit me yet. I don’t feel any different than the day before five-0. What’s supposed to happen?

“I thought with you it doesn’t matter who it is just as long as the job isn’t against your ethics.” The way she said ethics could have been a foul word.

My attention shifts back to Gartha. “How do I know it’s...”

Suddenly, I was standing before the Edge of Darkness. Or I think it’s the Edge of Darkness. I looked it up once and the Edge of Darkness isn’t hell, heaven, limbo or a dimension. It’s a black hole in space, meaning there isn’t anything at the moment that human scientists have that can register the energy from this place. However, I happen to know that a black hole is where all vibratory wavelengths are present making it more appropriately called a black *whole*.

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I can't feel anything or see anything, and that would frighten many people, however, after years of being in strange places, this is just another weird place.

All right. I'll admit my heart is pounding and I am scared enough to mess my panties if my fear goes up one more notch. I have no way of knowing if this is a good or bad place. Energy I can adjust to or hearing weird sounds in the dark I can center myself and not panic, though I'm frightened. What makes me lose my nerve, turning me into jelly, is *seeing* things that I have no reference for. It totally freaks me out.

I realized in my split second of moving from Gartha's office to the Edge I was still holding my breath. Just as that occurred to me and I took a deep inhale and find myself standing outside the club where a valet hands me my key fob. My mouth dropped open and before I could collect myself, he rushes off to help another customer.

I'm not naïve to believe I was really there at the EOD physically. What I believe is someone telepathically sent me the image while my body was manipulated to leave the club.

Gartha is going too far. Surely there is some law board of ethics I can take her to.

It occurred to me that the only species reputed to be able to take over people and their will without them knowing is vampires. My inside turns cold. I've just stepped into the unknown and I haven't any defenses and that panicky feeling isn't lessening. If someone's going to manipulate me, I want to know about it as it's happening not after the fact!

I need to review my magical books on spells against vampire take-overs.

I jam my hand into my pocket where the bloodstone and jet stones are. They're supposed to protect me from vampire influence, and I find my pocket empty. It's a shallow pocket and I realized I may have dropped the stones somewhere in my car. What kind of reputable fashion designer puts useless pockets on women's jeans tempting us to think we can secure an object in them when sitting down?

My thoughts return to this supposed client of Gartha's. If whoever wants to hire me can't make the arrangements directly, then I'm not taking the job. What could possibly prevent someone from meeting with me? I don't trust potential clients to be completely truthful to me about why they want to hire me. Since I have the ability to see behind their story it's up to me to make sure it's not something against my ethics.

Sometimes, when I become obsessive with this ethical thing, I dream of another life where my boundaries had become compromised and life too complicated with the consequences.

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A friend once told me that I was dreaming of another timeline where I took a different path. It's soul fragmenting where many lives are lived at the same time, including past and future lives as well as different timelines. Way too much to worry about. My present life is more than enough to focus on.

So, maybe the reason why this person doesn't want a face-to-face meeting is because I would see behind the request. This really makes me angry at the trickery and wonder if this is a vampire. But then vampires are supposed to be able to influence a person they are seeing face-to-face, so maybe it's not a vampire. But what else can it be that has that much influence?

I'm torn between wanting to know and not.

"I don't want the job," I shout to the darkness. A few heads turned in my direction, but I don't care. I'm at the point where I need to step back and reconsider what type of clientele to attract. I do this once a year when I make a New Year's Resolution List but I'm thinking it's time for an early evaluation. I got into my car and the overpowering urge to floor the accelerator out of the parking lot is a strong temptation and I act on it. As I speed out of the lot I nearly hit a larger-than-life woman dressed in clubbing clothes. Swerving to go around her I bounced over the curb, hitting my head on the roof of the car. I can feel the car sailing through the air, and if I were a stunt car driver it would be an exhilarating feeling; however, I'm seeing stars and my knee collides with the steering wheel column. I'm amazed how much pain I can withstand without screaming ouch. I hold my breath waiting for the car's wheels to hit the road. Instead of the bump, I hear expletives and curses with a few words thrown in that I can't understand come from my passenger seat -- then the car drops heavily on the road. My head again hits the top of the roof. My heart hasn't stopped beating wildly since entering the club and now I'm afraid I'm going to have a heart attack, and I need to visit my chiropractor to realign my spine.

I glanced at the person that materialized in my passenger seat. A scream froze in my throat as I nearly run off the road. My passenger is who I mistakenly identified as a woman dressed in clubbing clothes.

The *man* in drag continues with expletives. I veered to the side of the road and stopped in a slide while releasing my seatbelt. Twisting in the seat I tried to appear larger than he, which physically is impossible. From the glow of a streetlamp he appears hideous with a day's growth of beard and makeup that looks like it was applied by a child. He wasn't even close to looking

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like a parody of a drag queen or a clown to amuse, but rather a bad dream under the influence of drugs.

Some beings get power by tapping into the emotional energy of their prey, like humans who are scared, and in some cases, scared to death because the entity sucked up all their life energy. Fear, as many psychopaths and sociopaths will testify, is a powerful aphrodisiac. However, love is more powerful. But it is rather difficult to call up love when I'm terrified, whereas a call for help from my guides, saints, and higher self isn't. And that's who I'm calling for help at this moment.

"Who the hell are you?" I demanded, trying to keep my chattering teeth from biting my tongue.

"Nothing from hell," he said sarcastically.

For a few moments I let him curse and use crude talk which to me is like listening to a foreign language hoping he would wind down quickly.

I began to feel calm and silently thank my guides.

Now able now to focus on my passenger, what I'm able to translate is, he lost a bet and had to dress as he is to meet someone at the Edge of Darkness. Rather than ask him to elaborate, since I don't want to hear his crude language more than I have to, I'm content to *suspect* there's more to the story. I concentrate on drawing my energy closer to me and add black to the outer rim of my energy field to avoid any contamination.

The Edge of Darkness is also the Edge of Light so he could be going to either one, I think.

Ha! I know I'm kidding myself.

"Who did you lose your bet too?" I asked, feeling I should worry about who is maneuvering me into this job.

"Some weirdo," he says disgustedly, amid a lot of unrepeatable words. Unrepeatable in that I have no idea what a lot of the words he's using mean.

"Why did you make a bet with a weirdo?" I asked.

"I was playing pool with my friends. When I took a break for a whizz I met this woman. We had a mutually satisfying encounter and I went back to the pool table. This weirdo got in my face and told me that I messed with his girl. So, he challenges me to play a game of pool. If I

win, he'll forget the insult. If I lose, I go to the Edge of Darkness in his place. No one beats me in pool," he says laughing, and then sighs heavily. "I lost the bet.

"That doesn't explain why you're dressed like you are."

"These are the clothes she was wearing," he says, making it sound like I should know this.

"So, what's your game?" I asked.

"Game? I told you. I play pool."

"When you're not playing pool, what do you do?"

"I take on contracts," he sniggers. He flashes me images of what he does for a living and a lot of it was dreadful.

"Out!" The outrage I feel that a person without a soul could cause so much tragedy in people's lives and most of all that I am sharing breathing space with him is too much. For sure, I'm going to add a new protection ward-off to my daily meditation. I'll also get Meggs to boil up a new amulet that I can keep in my car for such occasions.

I don't want to tolerate the vibes from this person any longer.

"Hey, hey!" he says angrily. "I need to get to this place and you're my chauffeur. I only have an hour or I'm toast."

I try to unlock the doors to toss him out, but the locks won't unlock.

It's just a delivery. Nothing else. The sooner I drop him off the sooner I can smudge my car and clean anything he may leave behind, I reassured myself.

"Alright." I pulled back on the road and floor the accelerator pedal. I can hear the rocks and stones hitting the wheel well until the tires get onto the solid street surface. The road we're on goes to nowhere that I'm familiar with. The warehouses are merely shadows against a darker background that eventually blends in and then it's as if we're racing through a dark tunnel. My headlamps show only a few feet ahead with reflective lane dividers to keep me in the center. I hope there isn't going to be any bends in the road or another car coming in the opposite direction.

I need a vacation. I need a vacation. I need a vacation. I'm taking a vacation, I'm taking a vacation, I'm going on a vacation, I'm going on a vacation this week, I'm going on a vacation this week.

I settle further down into my seat, steering as if I know what I'm doing.

“So, who is your contract on?” I finally ask.

“I have no business until I get this thing cleared up. This lost bet is taking up my damn time.” Then there was a long line of expletives that I’m not even going to pick out recognizable words. Now I’m sure he is speaking another language.

“What did you do to the woman that got you in this mess?” I interrupt. I really don’t want to know because the images I got earlier weren’t nice, but something is compelling me to ask. The compulsion is driven by my curiosity.

He shifts in the seat. “I can’t seem to remember.” He looked at his hands. I glanced at his hands. They were stained red. I quickly withdraw my interest in knowing any more.

“Maybe you should,” I said.

A welling up of bleakness and sorrow is getting more intense, sticking me in the heart like a knife. The image of a heart with many knives sticking in it came to mind.

This is as far as I’m going. Whoever had given me the image to the Edge of Darkness left out this part – the pain. It gives me an idea of where he’s going. I put on the brakes sliding to a stop.

“We’ve arrived at your destination,” I said hoarsely. I’m having a difficult time to restrain myself from violently kicking him out. I breathed in and out to slow down the repulsive feelings I’m getting. Either I’m going to hyperventilate or I’m going to throw up. All these feelings are nearly overwhelming me.

“This is it? Where’s the person I’m supposed to meet?” He looked around.

If he doesn’t get out now, I’m going to scream.

He opens the door and slides out. “Wait here,” he orders.

Like hell I will. I need to leave now!

I peer out the windshield and dark swirls are moving toward us.

Is it picking up speed? What if this is like a hurricane and sucks me up too?

The intensity of the dark mass increases as it grows in size with flashes of dark purple coming from within it. I can’t move. The man is standing outside of my car looking this way and that as if he can’t feel what I’m feeling. Terror.

Go! Go! I shouted mentally, meaning that for both of us.

I felt rather than heard the passenger door slam shut and reflexively I floored the accelerator. I am out of here. I don’t hear the sound of burning tires nor does my car fish tail as it

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takes off. There is absolutely no sound, just my terror pounding in my ears. I can feel my heartbeat in my arteries, my wrists, ankles and neck, even behind my eyes.

As my car accelerates, I'm pushed against the seat. I know if I imagine the takeoff as a jet plane my face will be plastered against my skull and my lungs flattened. I keep the image of a car speeding. I pray that whatever is waiting for him will not pick up my scent and follow me back to my place. I don't want to find out if my mojo or spells can ward off something feeling this freaky scary. Suddenly I'm gasping for air as if I had been underwater and just came up for breath.

With anger and adrenalin pounding through me I decided to use it to face Gartha. These scary jobs must stop. Her IOU pay-off jobs don't fall under my PI credentials. That is my profession and should be the only thing those IOUs cover.

The suddenness of me being back in front of The MidNight Club didn't faze me this time. The place is packed, and busy outside and the parking lot has cones across the entrance with a sign that says Full. The valet is nowhere to be seen so I drive around the block looking for a space to park. Three times I circle the block and still I'm hyped up on anger and fear. While I stomp my way back to the bar, I chant a mantra to protect me this time from the hypnotizing beat. The dark looming doorway is before me and if I hesitate, I may not be able to keep my focus.

"Ike. I'm going to see Gartha."

The doorman Ike waves me in. I don't wonder how I know his name. My focus is on facing Gartha. Is she expecting me? The booming of the music is louder and causes the blood in my veins to beat raising the level of my anger. I keep repeating my mantra, and then realized I'm saying, "I'm going on vacation this week."

At the same room all my meetings with Gartha take place I knocked and walked in.

Gartha looks like she's expecting me. Why is all this trickery the first thing I want to ask? What is going on is the second, if she doesn't answer the first. It occurs to me that the rule of never asking a beastie what's going on strikes down the second question. Beasties are story tellers and it takes too long to sort out the truth and facts from their entertaining stories, like a few jobs ago of me retrieving an urn from a dragon's lair. No wonder it smelled so bad. Her short story was about the ashes of a family member was in the urn. When I meditated on it, I

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didn't get any warn offs so I had thought it would be an easy job. Next time I smell sulfur and a heavy slime mixed with dung I'll know it's a dragon's lair.

"I want an understanding between us. I'm not suicidal. I value my life and won't do any more jobs for you that I feel are too risky... and if they're not related to my PI job, then don't bother to ask me."

"We're helping you develop your skills," Gartha said with an expression that I've been interpreting as a smile. "Easy jobs anyone can do. Talent is so hard to find," Gartha added.

"With that said, we have another job for you. It's a finder in a gray world," Big Gus said.

"We need you to find someone in a crypt," Gartha says, as if Big Gus hadn't spoken.

They're like that sometimes. It must be a game they play to amuse themselves, speaking as if the other had not.

"Then you can go on vacation. A paid vacation," she said encouragingly.

I don't know which caught me more by surprise, the fact that she knew my mantra or the mention of the Gray World. Gray World is the nickname beasties gave to a place vampires are supposed to go when they lack the physical ability to move in the 3D world. I haven't been able to find out why it's called the Gray World or if it means that vampires have souls to be reborn. It's a whole new subject for me to pursue but I have enough to do in my waking and sleeping hours and can't be adding another curiosity to investigate. Maybe when I get a vacation, I can put in some time on my curiosity list with anything relating to vampires at the bottom of my To-Look-Into List.

"In the Valley of Death?" I ask so I can refocus.

"Well, yes. That's what *they* call it. It's not like we can go there." Gartha leaned forward. "It will wipe your slate clean of IOUs you owe me."

"I'll smell like death warmed over for..." I stopped, remembering not to curse myself by opening the possibilities of something going wrong. Then I registered the promise of wiping out the stack of IOUs Gartha acquired under my name. My eyes opened wider at the prospect of all these goodies being dangled before me. I feel like the proverbial donkey with a bunch of carrots instead of one, dangling before it.

"Good. We have a deal," Gartha said assuredly as if I did agree. "You handled yourself very well getting that close to the Edge of Darkness. The Gray World is much easier."

"Just what is this person doing in the Valley of Death?" I asked.

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“She got lost,” Gartha says too quickly.

I look at Gartha then at Gus. Something isn’t right here...but all those goodies. “The Valley of Death is not a place that someone can get off at the wrong station for.”

“She got lost,” Big Gus repeated.

“What if she doesn’t want to come back?” I asked.

“Then she stays.” Gartha looked down at her hands, hiding something in her expression I was sure.

“Who is she?” I asked suspiciously.

“No one you know,” Gartha says coolly.

“Just answer with the truth,” I said, using my best authoritarian voice.

“That is the truth. You don’t know her,” Big Gus says smugly.

“How long has she been in the Valley of Death?”

“Two, maybe three...” Gartha looks at Big Gus.

“Yes, that sounds right,” Big Gus says.

“Two or three what? Days, weeks, months...”

“Eons,” Gartha says, flicking her wrist as if that is inconsequential, which in truth, for a vampire isn’t long...or so I’ve heard.

“That’s a long time to be lost,” I said, trying on a multitude of levels to read the truth. Like I said before, beasties are story tellers and adding falsehoods to spice up a story is part of the beastie’s story telling skill.

Both nods.

“So does she have a stake in her heart or an official seal by the Council of Vampires to leave her in her crypt?” I know this is too good to be true. Every species or thing has a place where they believe they go after their existence ends in the physical world or 3D Earth. There are so many different levels of consciousness and existence for spirit that I haven’t met anyone that has yet named all the known dimensions and spaces. Even my magical group, when speaking of the many places, say I’ll know when I’m not in 3D Earth.

“No. None of that,” Gartha says in her best nonchalant tone.

Gartha scaring me half to death seems to be a favorite entertainment of hers. I have no clue why she finds me so entertaining but if she wipes out my IOUs I can get her out of my life. A warning in the back of my mind reminds me of something just as annoying will replace her.

“So, what’s keeping her in the Valley?” I asked.

“She can’t find her way out.”

“How do you know all this?”

“A psychic said so,” Big Gus said.

“A psychic?” I repeated stupidly.

“Yeees,” they drew out in unison.

“Where is this crypt?”

Gartha slid a picture to me.

“In New Orleans? I am not going to the Voodoo capital of the United States. Too many mambas and evil spirits prostituting their brand of havoc to anyone that is willing to shed another’s blood.”

“We know for sure it’s not in New Orleans or even Louisiana,” Big Gus said. “You can use your pendulum and locate where it is. Isn’t that your claim - that you can locate anything?”

“So just what do you want me to do?” I asked sarcastically, “Open her sarcophagus and remove the stake?”

“Yes,” says Big Gus, sounding too cheerful about that.

“Just locate her. Make sure she’s there.” Gartha looks over at Big Gus disapprovingly.

“Okay. You want me to locate a crypt. I’m not opening it to see who’s in there, just so you know.” I didn’t add that I will also notify the nearest vampire agent, just in case there’s a good reason this vampire should remain staked in her sarcophagus. No longer owing Gartha isn’t making me incautious where I cancel out one debt and run up another and with vampires.

“Oh, and take that bag with you,” Gartha said. “You’ll need it. Nicolai retrieved it.”

“Don’t open it until you get there,” Big Gus says in a sing-song voice. “Remember Medusa’s head?”

“That isn’t her head, is it?” I asked, feeling an icky sensation in my fingertips at the thought of touching the bag.

“It could be,” he giggled.

“Loss of head and staked means someone on the Vampire Council is really pissed off with her. It also means she’s a powerful vampire.”

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“Times change,” Gartha says. “It’s been hundreds of years since all that emotional over-killing occurred. There are no more vampire wars. It’s like with the crusades and religious mania purges. We don’t have that type of darkness here.”

“Speak for yourself. That darkness is still here and is being waged on all continents. Why are you digging her up?” I asked, trying to pump a few more bits of information from Gartha. Sometimes she can be pressed to impatience where she just tells me what the danger is.

“*We* aren’t digging her up and why you’re being hired to locate her is our client’s business. You’re just the hired help in all this,” Gartha pointed out, “and I’m the agent. IOUs,” she repeated.

“Who was responsible for the poop on my table?”

“We don’t know about that shit. Victoria Handle, you are being asked to find a crypt. Do you accept?”

Gartha suddenly tired of the game and seemed to want it ended. Why?

“For a fee. You said it will cancel out my IOUs you’re holding against me, and...” I watched their expressions closely, “I get access to the club’s ghouls for information without any strings attached or word twisting for a year.” I hold up my hand so I can continue. This agreement, IF she makes the arrangements, will allow me not to accrue IOUs from my sources. “No tricks. The year will start when I ask one of the ghouls a question.”

“We can’t agree to that,” Gartha says.

“Because?” I asked, fully knowing why, and getting another question answered. Gartha merely manages the club. She works for someone.

“We don’t have authority over the ghouls. They are the property of the vampires that blood them,” Big Gus reminded me.

“Then we don’t have a deal,” I said. I turned and left without touching the bag on a chair near the door. It is so tempting to take the job because it would wipe out my debit to Gartha and because I’m curious, and I would like to know where the vacation comes in, but I don’t want to die or end up owing the vampires anything. Vampires have no scruples that I know of. I haven’t dealt with them directly, so I only know rumors. Also, I had one of my guardians telling me a better deal would be forthcoming.

Chapter 4

“I’m not sure I understand the significance of *you* waking a vampire who has been in her sarcophagus for hundreds of years,” Allie says. “Why can’t they wake their own?”

“Exactly! I wasn’t going to do it but I wanted to see if they would tell me who’s behind the request and why me. Vampire politics is more interesting to hear about than being actively involved.” I shuddered at what I know.

“Why you?” Allie asks again, looking perplexed, but it wasn’t what she asked but what she was focusing on. Allie is working in her mind a whole new pricing code to her program to calculate what to charge a vampire for business. I’m sure my health insurance will go up and then there is learning a whole new set of rules and my limitations in setting down my rules of service. It’s shameful how excited I’m feeling inside. Challenges are what keep me interested in this business.

“I don’t know. But everyone knows when you wake some types of vampires you make sure you have plenty of blood on hand or you’ll be drained,” I said, not knowing where I picked that up.

“There’s more than one type of vampire?” Allie asks.

“It depends on the main source of energy a vampire uses. Sanguines get their energy from blood, psi vampires get their energy from the life force around humans or other living things. The psi energy they choose could be from a person to a thing. I guess it’s a flavor thing.” I don’t really know what I’m talking about. I think doing business with so many beasties I’m picking up their story telling habit.

“I thought all vampires drink blood to survive,” Allie says. “Image that. So, they don’t *have* to drink blood.”

“I had a girlfriend who transitioned to a sanguine and it was because her *creator* was sanguine. Maybe that’s what determines what a vampire starts out as.”

“So, what happens if this vampire they’re asking you to waken is a psi vamp? What are you going to do with all the blood you brought along? What happens if a cop stops you and he sees all the blood? He’ll arrest you as some kind of pervert or terrorist, or a perverted terrorist.”

I stared at Allie wondering if she’s joking. Sometimes she says things that are astute and other times some completely off-the wall stuff that makes no sense.

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“I’m not traveling to any distant lands to raise a vampire, Allie. Besides, I think Gartha was exaggerating. I believe it’s only the location they’re asking me for.” There is something different about Allie’s tone. “Allie, do you have something on your mind?”

“Yes. I would like a few weeks off. I understand I only have one paid week, but I can handle one week of no pay.”

“A vacation?” Is she getting the vacation I’ve been manifesting?

“It won’t be a real vacation. I have a sister that’s not feeling well, and it will give me a chance to get away from my son and his drama for a while.”

“You earned a vacation just for straightening out my books,” I said with enthusiasm. I got a curious look from Allie. My curiosity about locating the crypt took a giant leap of energy. I then moved on to thinking of what to pack. I always keep a bag packed for emergencies so I could probably leave right away. It’s something I learned on the street.

“What am I thinking? I refused the job,” I said, suddenly realizing how I had jumped so quickly at planning my vacation to crypt hunting...with expenses paid. I must be delirious. Where was all this excitement coming from?

The bell on the front door rang and the door swung open at the same time. Allie smiled at the customer automatically and I gulped.

Tristan, a VIP, otherwise known as a Vampire Iniquitous Palliate, stood in the doorway. No skin showed. He wore long sleeves, gloves and he had a scarf covering his neck and lower face. A wide brimmed hat pulled over dark glasses hid his face and eyes. His black leather pants clung to his muscular legs. My eyes stopped at his crotch. I can’t help it, even if he’s not my type.

VIPs are executioners for high-ranking vampire clans or a vampire council. They also deliver messages to vampires to quit or change a behavior the Council of Rules and Infractions deem unacceptable. I know that because the one and only time I saw Tristan was at a party and one of the ghouls gave me a notebook full of information. Too bad I wasn’t taking notes. He was like an open faucet of information I didn’t believe I needed since vampires and me were a chasm. I wasn’t interested in going down or crossing. Tristan’s appearance made an impression on me that was and still is disturbing. I can still feel an attraction, and I’m into women, soft voluptuous ones at that.

I stifled my sigh. It’s been a long time since I’ve looked for such a person.

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The door closed behind him and he removed his gloves, showing pale but strong hands. When my eyes lift to his face his hat, glasses, gloves and scarf are dropped into his hat. My heart beat increased.

“You might want to reconsider taking that find job,” he said to me.

Allie looked at me and then back at Tristan. Her face is as flushed as mine feels.

“I’ll let you two discuss your business. I’ll call you later and let you know when I’ll take my vacation, Victoria.”

The moment Allie closed the door behind her, the blinds closed and the lights went out, putting the room into muted light and all without any physical movement from Tristan. Tristan set his hat on the coffee table. He looked around until he spotted NO. He and NO stared at each other with neither breaking eye contact.

“Stop it you two,” I mentally ordered. “Why are you here, Tristan?” I asked with a lot more force than I thought I had.

Tristan settled in *my* chair. Clients used the couch on the other side of the coffee table that was intentionally to keep distance from me and the clients. Allie accused me of being a therapist in another life because of how the couch is designed. It’s as if it was made for reclining rather than sitting...a Roman couch my neighbor called it.

“You’re being asked by the Vampire High Council of the American Continent to locate the crypt.”

“Why not one of their agents, like you? Why me?”

“Because you have the ability to locate things.”

“What’s going to happen when I waken her?”

“You aren’t going to awaken her,” he said firmly. “You are to only locate the crypt.”

“You’re not compelling me to find the crypt, so I have a choice,” I told him mentally to let him know I’m not that naïve. “Before I get involved in vampire business I want to know the story behind this person in the crypt. I don’t locate people or things only to have them killed. Every find has immediate consequences, and I want to know what they are.”

“She’s just a person of interest,” Tristan said.

My eyebrows lifted. I actually got a strong feeling that this was going to be an interesting hunt. “She’s not a vampire?”

“She’s not one of us.”

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I'm hoping vampires don't convolute facts like beasts.

"Well, that leaves a preternatural," NO said.

Tristan spread his hands wide. "There you have it."

"What is a *preternatural*?" I asked.

"Something that can't be described because it's beyond human imagination," Tristan mocked.

"Not of third dimensional Earth? Well, I don't believe in the proverbial hell, but I do believe in evil and daemons."

"She's none of that."

"What dimension?"

"One that exists alongside of this one but not necessarily in sync with 3D earth," he said

"So, this crypt is a portal to her world?"

"We don't know that and therefore what its importance is."

"What was in the bag Gartha wanted me to take?"

"It was her brand of humor. It wasn't meant for you to take anywhere."

"What was in it?"

"Nothing that would interest you." He said it in such an odd tone I am getting more curious, as if that were possible.

"Why me in particular? I'm not the only one that can locate things," I asked suspiciously.

"She said a Locator of the Odd and Misplaced would be able to pinpoint her location. That is the phrase on your business cards, is it not? Locator of the Odd and Misplaced."

"That's from one of my old cards *before* I took on supernaturals as clients. Why can't she just say where her location is? Why all the mystery. Doesn't she trust you?"

"She's not able to use any landmarks in this dimension. There is a difference in energy patterns."

"How are you getting all these messages if she's not from this dimension?" I asked not bothering to hide my curiosity.

"Ame channeled a message; it was delivered to another who handed it to another. An underling eventually received the message and made a grave error in judgment by not seeking advisement from his master on what to do. When contact was reestablished and misunderstandings corrected, it was decided that a neutral person will be the right person to meet

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with this being, but first, we need to find where this supposed place is that this being can materialize at.”

My first preternatural meeting! I nearly shouted a big yes, I will do it, however, vampires aren’t into emotional displays and I still have to negotiate payment.

“Who are you representing?” I asked.

“The Vincinte Council. Their Supreme Leader, Lady Leda Vincinte in the Americas is head of the Council of Rules and Infractions on the American continent. She doesn’t deal with humans,” he said as if I was going to be rude and drop in on her. I’m not that crazy.

“And all I have to do is locate this place. Who exactly do I send the bill to?”

“No need. Gartha will forgive you all the IOUs she collected on you and the Vincinte will guarantee that she does not dishonor the agreement.”

Not owing Gartha *is* a big deal.

“Contact me when you have the location and I’ll take it from there. Imagine me, and I will know,” he said seductively. Then he stood up with all his coverings on.

“All right. I’ll get to it. I suppose you don’t have any idea what country or...”

He was gone.

“I think this is right up your alley,” NO teased.

“Do you think they know my curiosity is what’s got my interest and not their ordering me to do their bidding?”

“We all know that you want your IOUs paid off.”

I got up and gathered my ritual tools. There’s enough of the mysterious element in this job to ask for extra protection from my guardians and to pull in extra entities willing to help.

Hours later, with candles burning low and the incense giving the room the appearance of a smoke-filled den, I stared at the apparition of a new guardian. It’s so wispy I can’t determine just what type of entity it is; however, my other guides aren’t cautioning me about its motives.

“So just where do you come from?” I asked my new helper.

It’s from a different dimension and it’s a locator of things in other dimensions. It also knows the ways of vampires enough to keep me out of life-threatening danger. I look over at NO to see if he feels anything devious or unsavory about this apparition. NO is purring so loudly I think he’s in love.

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“What do I call you?”

NO laughed when it said Victoria. I was asking myself for help to finding another being in another dimension. Well, it's no different than talking to my Higher Self.

I closed my circle, giving thanks to each direction's guardian and cleaned up my ritual table. Now, it's time to begin the search.

I begin my search by downloading a global earth map from the internet. Then I dowse for location and as each new direction is made, I enlarge that area and keep going until I no longer get any movement from the *bob*. The energy it takes to stay focused for hours is exhausting. I located it somewhere in the Cascade Mountains, near the Oregon - Washington border. No matter how hard I tried, the *bob* doesn't get any more precise than that. I'll need to go to the area and do further dowsing for the exact location.

I sent Tristan a telegraphic message, telling him that if he wants a more precise point I would have to go there. I glanced at the clock. It's early in the morning and daylight is just making its appearance through my curtains.

Tristan, I have found to my discomfort, can read my mind just by me thinking of him. He isn't my type, I assure you. I'm not bisexual, which I found in some communities is a big sin. That's why I don't like belonging to groups. They're too rigid and elitist or eventually become this way due to insecurity in their own identities. So far, my magic group members are the exception.

The first time I saw Tristan he was dressed in bits of leather with a decorated leather codpiece. It was at a costume party Mistress Agnes gave for supernaturals and friends. The costume party was for no other reason than she wanted to attend a costume party, and no one had one planned.

Tristan acknowledged my admiration with a searing look that had me believing we had passionate soul sex right there and then. What a climax. I'm blushing again. It didn't happen in real time, I'm sure of that. When I was able to collect my wits, those around me were in the same conversation before he walked in. For something that seemed to be a night of shared passion only a few seconds in reality passed. It was the first time I experienced a vampire's intrusion in my mind. At the time I was solo in my magic practice picking up this and that from my spirit guardians.

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I attended the party because my then girlfriend, Betty, who hadn't yet become a vampire, was invited and I didn't think it was right for her to go single to a costume party. Betty assured me only select individuals were invited, not at all like a bar scene.

I was curious.

It was a whole new world that I had no idea existed for and it had been right there in front of me all my life. For want of a word to describe something I had no experience to compare I labeled it as weird and those I met as weirdos, and I don't mean it in a derogatory way. Heavens, no. They brought a new level of living color to my mundane world as if my mystical world wasn't exciting enough. Tristan was the only intense and invasive experience I had, thank goodness. I would have been witless if I had any more experiences like that. The weirdoes I met liked me enough to ask for business cards and so began my experience with supernaturals.

I also learned what a ghoul is: a human that supplied blood to vampires. And that Betty was a ghoul and servant to Mistress Agnes. Someone told me she was considered a Pomme de Sang, exclusory and favorite slave to Mistress Agnes. I never got a look at Mistress Agnes. I wasn't part of her inner circle. And, I learned via Tristan, there are really ancient living entities called vampires. They are far from dead, because they do have auras, which are difficult for humans to see due to the energy vibration isn't within the normal human sight spectrum.

Regarding sanguine vampires and their ghouls, I do know that humans weighing 110lbs or more can only give one pint in a 56 day period to stay physically healthy. I estimated either Mistress Agnes has a stable of donors or vampires don't need that much blood. It was information I meant to follow up on, but it wasn't a priority then, just a curiosity, and after my close up experience with Tristan, I stayed away from vampires. I also didn't want to run into Betty in her new role.

It was the next day Night Owl came into my world. He appeared on my doorstep, a handsome marmalade stripped cat with an elegant orange plume for a tail, announcing I needed a familiar in my life. Looking back at how easily I took him at his word, I may have been put under his spell, or just in shock at the new world I learned about the previous night. It could also have been because the previous night I learned that Betty and I were no longer a couple. Since then, NO has been my primary confidant and foot warmer in bed.

"I'm going with you," NO announced.

"Cats don't travel like dogs," I said.

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“Of course, cats travel. How do you think I got here? You think I just dropped out of thin air on your doorstep?”

“You told me a tornado dropped you here,” I said.

“And you told me without Dorothy to collaborate my story it wasn’t believable.”

“You heard Tristan. Vampires don’t like outsiders in their business. We’ll go on a vacation somewhere after I do the last part of the dowsing, since you’re in the mood to travel.”

“Do you trust him?”

“No.”

“Maybe they have a dowser that will pick up where your bob stops and we can just go on a vacation somewhere far, far away.”

I know when NO is mocking me. I had some misgivings on that. Why would they need me then?

A knock on the front door followed by a quick opening and a rather scruffy looking face took two steps into the front room.

“Might you be, Victoria Handle?” he asked.

“Yes.”

He looked around the front room and leaned to the side to peer into the bedroom.

“What do want?” I asked, wanting to get some sleep.

“I’m here to pick up the map with the x marked on it,” he said.

“Who sent you?”

“Master Tristan.”

“What proof do you have that you’re from Tristan?”

“Master,” he informed me firmly. Then he opened his palm, showing an old business card of mine.

It doesn’t prove Tristan sent him, but I could feel an unpleasant energy around him. It wouldn’t hurt to give him the general location just to get rid of him. I handed him the printout. He left without closing the door.

“He isn’t the usual run-of-the-mill type of ghoul,” NO said.

“He’s a ghoul? He’s a rude one not to close the door. End of that case and end of Gartha. I sent a mental picture of the site to Tristan and whoever he represents has the general location

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too. They can fight over it.” I shut the door, locked it, and turned my sign to Closed. Out of the office.

However, I’m too wound up.

“I’ll have a run before I go to bed,” I told NO.

Before I got ready for my run I took a quick look at my calendar on my laptop. What I saw was promising. If I get my case notes finished and sent out by tomorrow, I can take a few weeks off. The idea of a vacation is growing on me, like a strong preoccupation. I’ll give you one guess in what direction I’m thinking of going. I closed the calendar application, turned off the PC and dressed for a run.

During daylight hours I don’t just run. I like to take my time as I circle the park nearby, watching the people and animals as I walk, jog, run, or sit for a few minutes on a bench. I enjoy watching the park ducks chase people that they don’t take a liking to, or children roll down the slope and get so dizzy at the bottom they squeal with abandonment and joy. There are two trails around the park. One is about two miles and the other maybe half a mile. If I run at night, I take the shorter trail because it’s lit up until 9PM and is usually busy with other runners. Being that it’s early in the morning I’ll take the outside trail.

For the hour and half that I took to run the trail, my thoughts kept returning to the job I half finished. It’s an issue of pride in that when I do a job, I complete it to my satisfaction. Finding the general location and not the exact spot was not a complete job.

On my return to the office, I checked for any notes slipped under the door or phone messages. There was one message from Allie that she would not be in today but would do some office work from home. I tossed my clothes into the hamper and jumped in the shower. After the shower I feel like I can sleep for days.

“Have a nice nap, NO,” I said and dropped into bed and sleep.

I was deeply asleep when pounding and the incessant ringing of the doorbell woke me up. I fell out of bed entangled in my bedding and NO hissing that he’s buried in the blankets I kicked off. It’s difficult to get out of my dream. As I become more cognizant and awake, I feel really annoyed with the continued banging. My dream was important, but it fades quickly with my annoyance increasing at being disturbed.

“All right, all right! Stop with the banging.” I glanced at the clock. It’s four in the morning. It could be anything. While I slipped on jeans and a shirt the banging continues. My

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wards protecting my building are holding. I don't feel any weakness in them so whoever it is doesn't practice magic.

I unlocked and opened the door, stepping back, expecting someone to come flying in. I wasn't disappointed. Something breezed by me in a blur and stopped abruptly in the middle of the front room.

Betty.

I purposely forgot how imposing Betty's personality and looks affect me, and momentarily I stood frozen in place. Betty isn't beautiful in the feminine way or slim like a model, but neither am I. Though I run and exercise, I have my padded hips and flabby stomach that reminds me I'm in the crone years. Betty's dress hadn't changed. She still dressed as a Goth only without all the rings and metal in her skin.

I gave myself a mental shake to stay present. Betty continues to look around my front room as if she's seeing it for the first time, which considering when we were together the place always looked lived-in and now it was neat with little wear and tear showing. It was Allie's influence. She peered in the bedroom not venturing into the room. It's protected against anyone but NO and me from entering. The spell is strong enough that Betty didn't even attempt to enter.

Betty stared at the cat pole with a frown on her face. NO is watching her with dark luminous eyes, ears pealed back and his tail bushed out. Betty doesn't seem to see him.

"Long time-no-see," was all I can come up with. I'm surprised at how hard my heart is beating at seeing her. Were we that close? Taking a few deep breaths, I can feel my heart hurt like a knife is twisting in me. I can't let that type of dark energy take over. I say a mental prayer to cast away the heavy feeling, and it leaves quickly.

"Who's your new live in?" Betty demands.

"I'm single these days," I said with more sarcasm than I think I have the right to. After all, we didn't live together. Though Betty called our relationship a committed one, we chose to live separately. A part of me is making cynical remarks on how naïve I was. I shut that mental chatter down quickly.

"You got a cat somewhere?" Betty asked distastefully.

"What do you want, Betty?" I asked.

Eyes darker than I ever remembered turned my way. Does Betty have the power to make me do something I don't want to do or forget things that matter? Is she like Tristan?

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No. She defiantly lacks his power that is like electricity in my senses. My talisman wasn't heating up but it didn't heat up when I was at the club. That's right, I wasn't wearing that one. Shut up, I told myself.

"Tristan is missing."

She says it as if that were my fault. I stand silent for a few moments, quieting my mind and replaying what she just said.

"Isn't he way out of your league?" I just opened up a dialogue about a client which is against my rules.

"Where is Tristan?" Betty demands.

By her body language and slitted eyes, I think she's trying to get me to do something. As she stares at me, I stared back at her.

An orange orb distracts us both. It was NO in another form, bobbing inside the bedroom area. NO isn't some pretty novelty a magician would keep for appearances. NO has serious juju. Before things get out of hand between NO and Betty, I moved the conversation along.

"Betty, just say what you're here for. You have five minutes," I said.

"You don't tell me how long I can stay," Betty said disdainfully, and advances toward me menacingly.

From my limited interactions with vampires, or namely my intense one with Tristan, I thought all vampires have the ability to influence the thoughts of a human, but Betty's display of menace is not doing a darn thing to me. Then I remembered my new helper, something of my Higher Self. I can feel curiosity from its cloudy apparition behind Betty. I don't want to get overconfident in my protection spells and challenge Betty. Vampire tempers are notorious for being destructive.

"It's going to be dawn soon and as far as I know, there aren't any darkrooms on this side of the city, least of all here," I said.

"Where is Tristan? He didn't show at the MidNight Club."

"What business is it to you?" I returned curious, though I realized she may think I'm acting like a badass mortal to her new immortal being. She can thank her attitude for putting me in a non-cooperative mood. What is her connection to Tristan? She's a lowly vampire and Tristan is a VIP. Even I, a mere human, understands some of the hierarchy and elitism of vampirism.

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“My business with him is not your concern.”

“Tristan is my client and I don’t discuss...”

“There she goes. Into your files,” NO informed me. *“She used to be your Molly?”*

One moment Betty was standing before me and the next she’s gone. Good thing NO told me where she went.

“Those are my client’s...” I actually have no worries about Betty reading my files because its password protected with a word Allie created. What I’m worried about is the damage she could do to the laptop in anger...or what she would do to me to get the password.

By the time I got myself facing the direction of the laptop a very angry Betty was standing six feet from me, intimidating as she could be. That was as close as she could get if she poses as a threat to me. Later in the morning I’m going to do a ward-off specifically aimed at her so she won’t be able to cross over my threshold. Maybe I’ll extend it out to the road.

“Where is he?” she demanded again.

My world started to spin as my amulet hummed against my skin, and clairaudiently I heard pings from my protection spells and outside of me things were popping.

“Leave now,” I said in a voice I didn’t recognize as my own, but it came from me.

Betty disappeared in a flash and the pressure I hadn’t realized I was feeling left. My rubbery legs collapsed, and I sank onto the couch. I sat for a while not thinking of anything, just trying to let my wits come together.

“You’ve been saved from a nasty encounter. Did you have a bad breakup?” NO asked.

“It’s confusing. Betty is confusing. She left me for a vampire, her creator.”

“I thought maybe there was also some of that feeling a soldier gets when she fails an assignment. She isn’t finished with you. She has emotional hooks in you.”

“All the people we have intimate relationships leave a hook, NO. What do you know about vampires? All of sudden there are too many in my life.”

“My advice is, don’t piss off a vampire unless you know another stronger that will stand for you,” NO said.

“I’ll do another cleansing. If that doesn’t do it, I’ll ask my fellow...”

“It is best you manage your own emotional difficulties,” NO interrupted. *“People of power should be careful what vulnerabilities of theirs they reveal to others of power.”*

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Chapter 5

Two days and nights passed without any more vampire-related visits. It might be because Mike from my Magician's Forum assured me the three stones; jet, bloodstone and kunzite will protect me from unwanted intrusions in my life from more than just vampires. Unwanted is the key. After visiting my favorite rock shop and purchasing plenty of those stones, I placed them throughout my residence/office and car.

I was able to get a lot done those two days as if I was going on a vacation. I brought permanent clients up to date, that is employers that wanted more than a computer back-ground check on new hires and present employees that were acting suspiciously, and lovers that make it their life purpose to date heart breakers and need me to prove they're running true to form.

At the kitchen sink I was testing out a new incense mixture. A tapping on the front door interrupted my note taking.

"Come in," I called.

Another tap on the door.

"Well, it's not dark so it's not a vampire," I said to NO.

"Tristan moves around in daylight," NO reminded me.

"Maybe it's Tristan back from his journey and he wants me to help find the exact location," I said. I put a cup over the burning powder so it will put itself out and answered the door. Standing on the porch was the same messenger that had come to collect the map for Master Tristan a few days ago.

"What do you want?" I asked, sounding rude to my ears.

"Master has asked for another map," he said, not even stepping into my office.

"Another?" I asked in surprise. Do vampires lose things? "If Master Tristan wants another copy, who will pay for my time? I didn't make a copy, so I'll have to start over."

He turned and left.

"He wanted to know if you had a second copy of the map," NO said. *"Are you going to clear the air of that smell now?"*

I turned on the fan to blow the incense smell around then went to boot up the laptop. I did make a copy of what I downloaded for Tristan, but I want someone more than a messenger to ask so I know I'll get paid. After all, Tristan, a VIP came the first time and guaranteed that Gartha

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wouldn't bother me with jobs I couldn't say no to. It's only been two days, but I trust Tristan with holding to his word. I also want to know who is really making the request. There's also the paid vacation Tristan hinted at. Was he being clairvoyant? Are vampires psychic?

I stared for a long minute at the map I had downloaded, trying to figure out what was wrong with it. "Well, this isn't good at all," I said, noticing the title of the map I had downloaded as the master map. "I printed a futuristic copy of the aftertime world where the continents are greatly altered due to the earth changing axis. How did that happen?"

I'm feeling a bit panicky because I gave Tristan an incorrect location. Quickly I print another copy of the world making sure it's a current map. Then I started over, working my dowsing pendulum. I'm still not able to get the *bob* any closer than a general area in the Cascade Mountain Range between Oregon and Washington. It's a relief though. At least I'm not off what I had marked on the original map.

My growling stomach reminded me we haven't eaten dinner yet.

"Even redoing it, it's in the same area, NO."

NO looks up at me for a moment then resumes his meal. I removed my lukewarm tomato soup from burner and silently sip it. I'm still entertaining the urge to go myself and see if I can locate the exact spot of the crypt or portal.

My front door rattles as I'm preparing to wash my dishes and the energy in the room drastically changes. The hairs on my arms stands up and I have goose bumps everywhere. Whatever the energy is, it's not affected by my ward spells. A thought occurs to me that the energy could be from a different dimension, but I discarded the notion as not likely since there are no portals nearby. I focused on the difference of feeling around me. My vision is slightly off as if I'm wearing someone's spectacles. Sounds around me are like I'm hearing underwater. I touch my talisman, and I feel as if I know every grove in the design.

"Something different," NO finally speaks up.

I glanced at NO and burst out laughing. His hair is sticking out everywhere as if he were a comic drawing of an electrified cat. He clawed the back of the couch, and fortunately I have a thick fuzzy blanket thrown over the back to prevent NO's nails from tearing the couch fabric. He is aggressively kneading it.

I'm at loss on what to do since I don't know what this is.

The door rattles harder.

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I try to speak but nothing comes out. I clear my throat and try again. “Who is it?” My voice warbles.

Energy that is running through my body is causing me to shake. I imagine the energy going down my legs, into the floor and down to the Earth. I can feel the energy drain out of me into the floorboards and the door rattles harder. I fear it will crack.

My land line phone rang, startling me. Somehow, I managed to reach it without falling. I fumbled with the receiver, as it feels weird to my touch, like the receiver is alive.

“Hello?” and I quickly held the receiver away from my ear. The static was painfully loud. I can’t hear what the caller is saying. The front door stopped rattling and bent inward then out and suddenly all the weird stuff stopped. The touch of the phone is now familiar.

“*Victoria. Handle. Private. Investigator.*” The voice coming from the receiver enunciated each word as separate units. I can’t determine the gender of the voice.

“Yes, yes. This is Victoria Handle, Private Investigator,” I repeated distracted.

“*I wish to engage your services,*” the voice said with less stilted pronunciations. I felt amusement from the caller.

“I’m busy at the moment, can I call you back?” I said.

The loud static returned to the phone.

“Hello, hello? Are you there?” I asked.

The static stopped and the voice continued. “*I. am.*”

“What’s the job you wish to engage me for?” I looked around for a pen and paper.

“*Find me,*” the voice said.

I stopped looking for writing implements, realizing this may be the first crank call I’ve ever received. The static started up again and then stopped.

“Who are you?” I asked.

Static again. I strained my hearing, catching “You. Follow. The. Energy.” Then a dial tone.

A knock on the door had me hanging up and hurrying to the door. “Mother Father God help me.” I feared if the shaking started again, it may shake loose the door from its hinges. How would I explain that to the landlord?

I didn’t want to imagine what could be on the other side of the door, but I did know that nothing that can harm me can cross the threshold. I opened the door. The wind blew through the

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door so hard it nearly knocked me over. And there, standing in the middle of a blast of wind was a man standing untouched on my porch.

My first impression of him is that he's missing a top hat, scarf, cane and overcoat. For the cold wind blowing outside, he's underdressed.

"My name is Michael. I believe you have something for me...a map marked with the location of a crypt. Your finder's fee for the second copy." He handed me a wad of bills.

I took the bills and retrieved the printed map I had just completed from the printer. The next thing I know, he's gone.

"You might want to reconsider doing business with vampires," NO said.

"He controlled me! In my own house!" My insides shook with anger. This is exactly what I expected a vampire to be like. Then I thought of Betty and how she wasn't able to do that to me as much as she tried.

What's the difference? I needed to know so it won't happen again.

"He didn't control you at all," NO said with amusement. *"He made an offer that you chose with your own free will to take."*

"I don't find this amusing. I don't recall saying yes to anything."

"It was done on a subconscious level."

"We need to go on a vacation, NO. Away from here because this is getting too weird for me. If I have a conversation, I want to be conscious of it while having it."

The phone rang. I picked up the receiver and heard static. After a few minutes it cleared up and the voice again asked me to find her. I now am sure it's a woman's voice. Any question I asked is met with static. I hung up. No point in listening to static. An hour later the same call and static.

The phone rang all night and into the early morning with me no longer answering. I let the answering machine pick it up which nothing is recorded, not even the static.

When Allie arrived the next morning, I told her about the calls and the strange visitation.

"You don't sleep nights anyway," Allie said. "From beasties to werewolves and now you're moving into vampire clients. Is this a trend or just an occasional job with vampires? What's all this?"

On the kitchenette counter is my pendulum box and discarded copies of the world map that I was dowsing.

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“Work from last night. Global maps,” I said. As I collected the papers to toss into the trashcan the phone rang. “It’s probably the static caller I told you about.”

Allie picked up the phone. Simultaneously as Allie picks up the phone the pendulum bob takes off toward the phone receiver. If I didn’t have a good grip of the moss agate leaf that the chain to the *bob* is attached to the *bob* would have stuck itself to the phone receiver.

“What going on here?” I asked.

NO lying on top of the couch pretending to nap leaped to his feet.

“That is who you have been locating on the maps,” NO said.

I imagined my eyes were popping out of my head as the *bob* on my pendulum continued to tug with force toward the phone receiver.

“Are you channeling the dead?” Allie asked, too calmly. She hung up the phone and the bob stopped pulling and swung back and forth on the chain I still held.

I gathered up the pendulum and felt its heat up in my hand.

“I’m telling you, it’s the woman in the crypt that Tristan asked you to locate,” NO said again.

Allie looked at me suspiciously then glared at NO who was purring so loud it was as if a microphone were pressed against his throat.

Allie held up the wad of bills Michael had given me. “How much?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t count. It could be a hundred on top and the rest ones,” I said.

Allie counted them. “This is a customer that needs to be bumped to priority one. This is what we charge for a finder’s fee for one month of work, with expenses.”

“Vacation money,” I said.

This is a sign for me to close my office for a while. And while I’m away, maybe the vampires will lose interest. I’m getting these vibes that vampires are not good to have a business with unless I become a vampire and that isn’t going to happen. Who wants to live that long in the same body? I look forward to each reincarnation, though I do understand we’re living them all at the same time as fractals of the same spirit or soul. However, I’m looking at the here not some other timeline. I want to experience my next incarnation on another planet in a fifth or higher dimension where there is no need for a physical body. More peace, love and harmony.

“If these calls are from the person lost in the crypt, then you need to pack a bag and go locate this person yourself,” Allie says. “Priority one.”

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I shook my head to remain present. “How can you mix the two? *She* hasn’t paid me.”

Allie held up the bills.

“You weren’t here when that loco energy made this place and me shake.”

“By now you should know that if you don’t pay attention to messages from the gods or spirits, they’ll kick you in the butt until you do,” Allie warned.

“I’m not flying,” I said.

“I hope not,” Allie returned quickly. “With the strange energy you attract, everyone’s life on the plane would be in danger.”

“You’re not kidding. The last time the pilot’s instruments stopped working. It scared the crap out of me enough that I don’t fly anymore.”

“You knew that would happen?” she asked.

“I didn’t know until that one time I flew. If I’m going to fly, I’ll do it in spirit,” I said.

“Astral projection. Whoosh.”

“I think you’d do better to do this in the physical. Rent a van so you can sleep in it,” Allie said. “You’re not one to stop in at hotels and sleeping in your car isn’t recommended.”

“How did you know that?”

“How long should I say you’ll be gone?” Allie asked.

It felt like Allie was pushing me out the door, but then again, that’s what I really needed.

“There’s no need for you to come into the office. Why don’t you take that vacation you keep putting off? I’ll put on my voice mail that I’ll be on vacation for a few weeks.”

“While you’re packing, what do you intend doing about your cat?” Allie asked.

“NO will come with me.”

“Don’t tell the people you’re renting the vehicle from that you have a cat.”

“Why?”

“Potential damage to the interior.”

“*A lot she doesn’t know about me,*” NO huffed.

“*She’s witnessed a few of your temper tantrums,*” I reminded him.

“*Shredding catnip toys is what cats do. She should be happy I don’t bring in dead things,*” NO said.

Allie immediately took it upon herself to record a telephone message that I’m on vacation. I searched on the Internet for a nearby recreational vehicle rental place. Allie collected

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her purse and waved goodbye from the door. I feel good that I gave her the nudge she needed to leave her son to suffer his consequences.

It takes four phone calls before I decided to settle on what's available. The class B vans were rented out from all the places I called. The next size is class C. That's a lot of room for one person and a cat but the more I think about a mini house on wheels the more fun it sounds.

"We have thirty minutes to get out of here, NO. By then it will be in the ethers of my intention to leave town."

I had already smudged the entire office so that was one task I didn't need to do. It doesn't take me long to gather what I needed because I have emergency departure bags ready. I prepare for surprises as best I can. Food for NO, three days change of clothes, magic bag with ritual objects, and NOs litter box are carried to the car in two trips.

As I packed the supplies in the back seat, NO hops into the car, using my back as a springboard. He is really happy about this trip.

"I wish you wouldn't do that NO. You leave claw marks on my back."

I can feel NO's amusement. Standing before my apartment, I do a sensing of the building to see if there are any weaknesses in the defenses. I patted my pocket where I had slipped a crystal in. My pocket is empty.

"I forgot something," I said to NO.

"Thirty minutes is up," NO said. "You bound the apartment up in a spell. It will take more time to undo it and redo it."

"I need the crystal."

"I have it."

What is he doing with my crystal? I turned to look at NO. Turning away from the apartment saved my eyesight. A bright light of energy hit the apartment and like a flash of lightning it ran over my side of the apartment. It was a powerful protection spell breaker. I could feel it.

Self-preservation kicked in and I scrambled into my car and backed out at full speed. We're lucky there isn't any traffic. NO stood on the passenger seat legs set in a wide stance with nails clutching the seat as I swung into the street and reversed direction abruptly, accelerating from a dead stop as if the fireball was after us. Whoever or whatever sent that blast was someone with more power than I had or hoped to have.

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We arrived five minutes before the rental place closed. It was off the freeway near a shopping mall with car lots on both sides. As I'm parking my car I'm taking deep calming breaths. Since we left my apartment, I've been chanting mantras so I don't leave an emotional trail that someone can follow. NO is silent but I trust he would say something if our lives were in immediate danger.

"You just made it before closing time," Bob Kingman, a middle-aged father of three said pleasantly. I know he needs my sale to make his week's quota and since I put dibs on one of his RVs I know he wouldn't close until a reasonable amount of time passed. I shake my head to get rid of his information. My finder mojo is actively picking up all sorts of miscellaneous information. I touched my talisman in quiet thanksgiving to my guardian sprits that I didn't have ghosts joining me on the freeway.

Bob introduced me to the Tioga. The RV is a class C. Interior Height: 82" Interior width: 96" It has a cab-over length of 76 inches; a permanent bed length of 74 inches. The water heater is 6 gallons; grey water is 37 gallons; gasoline tank is 55 gallons, propane 14 gallons. Inside I have to step down to get to the driver and passenger's pit. The back bedroom extends out and so does the dining area. It has more room than NO and I could possibly need. I'm shown the hoses and explained how to hook everything up, what grey water is, and how to dump the waste when I leave campgrounds.

While he showed me how to work the hook ups on the outside NO checked out the RV's interior. Through our connection I knew NO found a few places he liked. When Bob thought I was ready I signed the papers, paid in cash and just so he didn't get in trouble with the owner, I left him a credit card number that was spell-bound so no one could use it for any reason, like looking up information on me. While he was about closing up the office, I emptied my car of supplies then moved my car to a part of the lot for people who left their vehicles behind. A couple of dogs guarded the entire lot. Bob hadn't released them yet from their dog run, but they had finished their night meal and were watching me. I connected to them and found them to be pleasant. They were abandoned dogs Bob rescued and talked the manager, his brother-in-law, into using them as guard dogs to keep vandals out of the yard. Bob was the first and last to leave the lot, spending time with the dogs, picking up after them and playing with them. He spent more time with the dogs than his wife, but it was his wife that bought the toys I could see in their run.

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Marge was allergic to dogs and so were their children. Bob loved dogs and it was touching how she supported his love as long as they weren't in their home.

I asked Toby and Kevin, names Bob's children picked, to keep an eye on my car and because I took the time to speak with them, they were more than willing to do so. My protection spell over the car would probably be enough, but just in case. My protection spell had a twist to it. For anyone who touched my car without my permission will have a compelling urge to urinate on other people's car tires. I use behavioral methods to imprint on those meaning to damage or steal, so they have a chance to change. I see it as a good incentive and it's free of charge. If they relied on their own resources, they would either end up in jail or get shot before they consider taking up another profession. If there are any female car thieves, I think it will be a fast change of profession.

I turned off my cell and removed the battery. On the floor next to my seat, I laid my map and the box with my pendulum.

"Time to hit the road, NO. Strap in." In the rearview mirror I can see NO leap up to the bed in the cab-over. The tanks are full so my first stop will be at a mall to pick up some supplies for the RV, like sheets, pillow, food and cooking gear. The cash I'm using is from my emergency stash. The money from Michael Allie took to deposit in the bank while she withdrew some cash for her vacation. I always exchanged cash from my clients at the bank and smudged the money I withdrew. There are too many people with their lingering bad energy on the bills to deal with. Allie believes the same and I'm sure it's because of the clients I have. Since she does my banking, I'm assuming she withdrew enough money to have a comfortable vacation of her own.

After two hours on the road, I took a turn-off to a mall alongside of the freeway. I parked with a lot of space around me. It makes it easier to protect the RV with a wider protection bubble.

"I'll be right back," I told NO. His tail twitched.

"Well, what's keeping you? Do you need my approval?" NO asked. *"Don't forget toys and fresh catnip."*

"I put your litter box in the shower, just in case you hadn't noticed."

On exiting the RV I scanned the parking area, then walked quickly to a store that has an entrance to the mall. I bought pots and pans for cooking, sheets, pillow and a blanket for the bed. My shopping cart and I moved fast up and down the aisles. In the camping section I found most

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of what I need. Outside of the store I spotted a farmer's market with fresh vegetables. I stocked up on vegetables and fruits, adding them to my cart.

I felt good about this trip, until I remembered the light flashes above my apartment. It reminded me that I need to smudge the RV but not where someone can smell the sage, sweet grass, and cedar and think I'm having a pot party.

I quickly stored everything, tossing the sheets, blankets, and pillows on the bed in the back next to my sleeping bag I had brought from my car. Back on the road, I hummed songs, so my mind is busy with something that doesn't give my location away.

Hours later I found a place to pull over to smudge the entire RV, inside and outside and under the hood. I sprinkled marjoram and wild oregano around the interior and placed stones around the RV where they wouldn't come loose with travel. It's always good to start a journey with prayers and good intention.

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Chapter 6

"You need to look for a place to pull over and take a nap," NO said.

"What? What did you say?" My eyes popped open at the voice in my head. "You're right. I was spaced out there."

"You were too spacey," NO said disapprovingly. NO laid curled up on the dashboard keeping watch on me.

"It's the stop and go traffic," I complained.

I forced my eyes open and begin chanting out loud to reenergize the atmosphere around me. I also vigorously tapped acupuncture point GV 26, located between my upper lip and nose. A rest stop sign caught my attention. I leaned forward as if that would make the reading clearer and NO turned his head to see what I was staring at. He jumped to the passenger seat as I turned off the highway and followed the signs to the rest stop. It looked like a caravan of RVs had stopped for the day. There were also a dozen truckers sleeping off the busy traffic of the day.

I parked two spaces from an older RV that had on its back a customized locker and four bikes on a rack. On the passenger side one third of the exterior was covered with stickers from different state parks around the US and Canada, some partially peeled off with age. The tires were the only thing new.

I glanced at the grassed area near the rest rooms. It was a miniature park with BBQs, park benches and bright lights over the restroom and a snack building. Adults and kids were laughing, eating and some playing on the grass with dogs.

Too tired to make the bed, I laid out my sleeping bag on the back bed and quickly fell asleep. In my dream I spoke to a woman about a parallel universe and how we are all one and living in fractals of Source. I feel connected to her. It dawns on me that she is me. Everything makes perfect sense. That's as far as I got in the dream.

"Get up!" NO shouted in my head.

I was up instantly, blinking to adjust to what I was seeing in my dreamscape and what I was now seeing, which is nothing. It's dark.

"NO, you're worse than an alarm clock," I grumped.

"The others are getting ready to leave. It would be good to stay with them for a while. Their energy can mask yours."

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I heard children's voices giggling outside and barking dogs. I looked out the window. Near the public facilities under the lights are children and adults moving to and from the RVs.

"I'm going to use the restroom and see where they're headed."

I felt my way in the dark to the door near the kitchenette and stepped out of the RV not fully awake. Standing for a few moments to get a feel for the environment the cold registers, raising goose bumps everywhere. Rather than go back in for a coat I decided to tough it out and hurried to the restroom, generating my own body heat. I glanced at the snack machine, and it's empty on selections I would have chosen.

Inside the woman's restroom there are four of us waiting in line. The women were chatting about their anticipated visit to a shop called Middle Earth at Mt. Shasta.

I'm surprised by a huge yawn that stretches my jaw till it popped. I get an amused look from the girl waiting her turn. I can feel she's intuitive.

"Where are you going?" the girl asked.

"Towards Washington State. And you?"

"Mt. Shasta. We visited Sedona and spent time at each vortex. Some I didn't feel all that connected with, but I liked Bell Mountain. We've been sending energy to the vortexes because people are charging themselves at them and not giving back."

"Taking and not giving," I said. "Not nice at all. Most people like Bell."

She beamed a huge smile at me and went to use one of the newly vacated stalls.

"She's a rainbow child," one of the women informed me.

I must have given a blank look.

"A star seed," the woman next to her said.

"We call our group the Vortex Travelers."

"Most of us are schoolteachers so every summer when we're off, we get in our RVs and hit the road to visit vortexes around the US and Canada and re-energize them."

"Mt. Shasta is powerful," I offered.

"After the summer solstice of 2012, we believe it is *the* most powerful. Do you want to join our caravan? I can sense you're psychic yourself."

"I'm not going to Mt. Shasta, but I'll tag along for a while if you don't mind," I said.

"Not at all. The energy of like minds focused on love and peace, raises the collective consciousness."

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I nodded and hastily head to a newly vacated stall. I would have stayed longer to chat but standing around in a restroom is like watching someone yawn. I had to go. I listened to the last of them while I did my business. Mt. Shasta is in the general direction I'm going. It won't hurt to tag along unless my guides and pendulum give me another route. Now I know why NO said they would mask my energy.

Back in the RV I laid out the map on the kitchen table and used the pendulum to make sure I'm on the right course for me to get to where my guardians are guiding me. The bob veers away from Mt. Shasta to the east. I glanced at the time. It's 3AM. My guides have been giving me a weird course. I'm guessing it's to avoid anyone getting a fix on me.

I followed the caravan for thirty minutes and when they turned off the highway to fill up their tanks at a truck stop, I stopped and filled up too then waved a goodbye to the girl I met previously. She was giggling and chatting with another girl. She cradled a unicorn with a rainbow mane, and her companion had a doll with rainbow hair. A woman that was an older version of the girl had hugged her while the giggling girl squirmed out of her embrace. I smiled at them, sharing in their happiness.

"I'm feeling tired, NO, like I didn't get a good rest. I need to find a place to pull over that can't be seen from the air."

"Vampires don't fly during the day," NO said.

"Their associates do. They also drive cross-country truck routes. There was a trucker that was following the Vortex Travelers caravan. I couldn't get a fix on him to see if it was the caravan or me he was interested in. After a short nap I'm going to take I5. We'll reach Grants Pass by the evening unless something else comes up."

I turned down a country road and found a place to pull over. Recently road work had been done leaving a new paved road and the side of the road was smoothed out, cleared of any plants. The fence was more than ten yards from the road, so I felt secure.

"You do know that it isn't a coincidence that you've met up with that group," NO says.

"For whatever the reason of the meeting my pendulum is pointing in another direction."

"Yet you're tired. Usually that's an indication you're going in the wrong direction."

"I think it's because I'm not a cat and catnaps aren't working for me. My pendulum is my guide, NO. Is there a reason you want to visit Mt. Shasta?"

"I've never been there. What do you think is there?"

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I chuckled. “ETs and other beings that live within the mountain. I’m okay with knowing they exist, and I can deal with the mental conversations, I just don’t want to see an ET.”

NO’s laughter inside my head was weird and when his laughter turned into purrs, I fell asleep.

I don’t know how long I slept when pounding on the door had me jumping up where I hit my head on the paneling to add to my disorientation. NO said nothing. I spotted him peering at me from the cab-over.

“Thanks for warning me, NO.” I sound as grumpy as I felt.

I looked out the door at what I feel is a rancher. I opened the door, not feeling a threat.

“Listen here, this isn’t parking lot,” he said.

As soon as I opened the door his energy changed. Perhaps because I’m a woman he thinks he can vent, since that’s what he’s building up to. His aura was chaotic with dark colors. I see emotional hooks around his chakras. Either he’s going through a divorce, or he’s got some issues he’s not dealing with. It’s not worth pointing out that one parked RV doesn’t make it a parking lot. I send him calming thoughts, closed the door without exchanging any verbal conversation and made ready to leave.

NO jumped onto the passenger seat and glared at the man through the passenger window.

“For god’s sake, don’t curse him, NO. I don’t want it traced back to us. Nor do I want any karma coming back to bite me,” I scolded.

“He was rude,” NO said.

“He’s a grouchy guy,” I agreed.

“Makes a grouchy driver with not enough sleep,” NO said. *“How safe a driver are you?”*

“If you had a driver’s license, I would let you drive.”

“I think not. I don’t follow the same roads.”

The image he sent me showed energy grids across the ground that overshadowed the roadway making it difficult to see manmade roads.

Back on the freeway I picked up speed, just enough over the speed limit that it wouldn’t alarm the highway patrol. At one PM before me is the tail end of a familiar RV.

“It looks like the Vortex Travelers took a detour,” I said. I glanced at a highway sign to affirm I’m going the right way. When the caravan pulled over at a rest stop, I followed, curious why they’re heading east of their destination.

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“Hi, again.” I waved.

A woman that had spoken with me earlier waved back and came over to join me. “They closed the road we were on. They had a tornado that caused some damage. Imagine that! In California!”

“Usually they aren’t that destructive,” I said. “I’ve seen them go across the open fields along I5.”

“Well according to the CBers, they closed down the road because it picked up a 4-wheeler and spun it around, so it scattered what it was carrying on both sides of the road.”

“What about the driver?” Even as I asked, I knew the driver was telling his tale to all who would listen in the hospital. I don’t know if he was alive or in spirit.

“No reports on him, but since there were no fatalities mentioned on the radio, I would guess he’s alright,” she said.

“So what road are you going to take to get back to Mt. Shasta?” I asked.

“Our leader decided to go around and come up the back way from the direction of Oregon. We’re going to rest up and wait for the traffic to die down before we move on. The kids need to work off energy so some of us have child entertainment duties,” she laughed.

“I’m stopping for a nap myself. Knock on my door when you’re pulling out. I’ll tag along for a while.”

“I’m Nancy Frayne by the way.”

“Victoria Handle, Vic for short,” I said.

“What’s your cat’s name,” the little girl asked appearing as if from nowhere.

“Night Owl.”

“This is Eleanor,” Nancy introduces. “Her mother is Antonia Merchant.”

“Ellie,” Ellie said firmly. “Can I pet your cat?”

I glanced at NO who is watching from the window. “*NO do you want company?*”

“*She’s a witch. She knows I’m your familiar.*”

“*Nancy said she’s a rainbow child.*”

“*Nancy thinks all psychic children are rainbow children. In Ellie’s previous life she was a witch, which she remembers.*”

“I’m sure NO won’t mind your company,” I said.

“NO? Oh. Short for Night Owl.” Ellie giggled. “Does he mind that you call him NO?”

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While Ellie was talking, she stepped into the RV and looked down at the passenger seat where NO was sitting. Whatever passed between the two was silent. We all stepped into the RV and Ellie stepped down into the front of the RV to share the seat with NO. NO climbed into her lap and curled up.

“So, this is what a newer RV looks like,” Nancy says. She turned to see Ellie’s mother coming over, looking concerned. “I’ll let you and Antonia get acquainted. I have children to watch.”

The two women switched places in the RV.

“Mommy, this is NO, short for Night Owl. He’s her familiar. Can I have a familiar? Can a horse be a familiar?”

I stared at her startled.

“Well, maybe not that big,” Ellie said after thinking about it. Then she giggled. “Even a miniature horse might be too much. I wouldn’t be able to take him with me on a plane.”

Antonia’s face is tanned and freckled. Her carrot-colored hair is tucked under a knitted rainbow colored cap with a few hairs escaping and those she automatically pushed back. For a moment the image of a Celtic priestess came to mind. Mentally I brought myself to the present.

“When we get settled, we’ll look into it,” Antonia said. “Hi, my names Antonia. I’m Ellie’s mother.”

“I’m Vic.”

“You’re a witch then? Ellie told me she met a psychic at one of the rest stops. She thinks we’ll be traveling together.”

“Mother used to belong to a coven. She makes powerful amulets that keep negative forces from hurting us,” Ellie says.

“I have my own amulets,” I said. I showed them one of my bracelets.

Ellie looked interested, so I leaned over to let her look closer.

“Apite, angelite, isolite, and moonstone, I said as she touched each. She paused at the moonstone.

“I like this one. It feels nice.” She turned her attention to NO who shifted in her arms.

“So, you’re a witch?” I asked Antonia.

“It’s in our blood. However, psychic children today are more than we are. Many of them believe they’re here to help Earth into a higher consciousness.”

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“Star seeds,” Ellie said.

“NO likes to go places. Why don’t you take him out more often?” Ellie asked.

“I take him when he asks nicely.”

“He said you’re looking for someone,” Ellie said.

I looked at NO. *“Stop telling her our business,”* I said to him.

Ellie giggled.

“That’s what I do for a living. I’m a private investigator. I look for people and sometimes things.”

“A real PI?” Ellie asked excitedly. “What kinds of things do you look for?”

Antonia looked interested too.

“It depends on my client. Sometimes it’s just following someone around.”

Ellie took a deep breath to ask more questions when Antonia stopped her. “Vic has to get some sleep, Ellie. Maybe at the next stop you can ask more questions.”

“As long as it doesn’t have anything to do with any of my cases, I’ll answer,” I smiled.

Ellie looked mischievous. “If you don’t answer them, NO will tell me. We’re friends.”

“NO will lose his PI license if he spills any client secrets,” I said.

When the two were far enough away to not overhear I turned to glare at NO and was about to say something; however, he was already curled into a ball asleep.

I was tired and went to sleep.

Many hours later NO woke me.

“No need to sleep like it’s your day off.”

I give a wide yawn, feeling rested. “How is everyone?”

“Your Vortex caravan left without you,” NO said.

“Why? I thought Nancy was going to wake me. Why didn’t you wake me?” I rolled out of my sleeping bag, my feet hitting the cold floor.

“I didn’t wake you because you were too tired to drive.”

“When did they leave?”

“As soon as you dropped into a deep sleep. There are some in that caravan that don’t want a PI around.”

“Not a problem. I feel rested. I guess it means I don’t have to be interrogated by Ellie, your new friend,” I teased.

“She’s a strong intuitive.”

“For whatever or whoever I made nervous, that’s not our problem.”

After a quick shower which emptied the water tank, and a change of clothes, I felt a lot better. From my ritual bag I pulled out my smudge bowl and again smudged the inside of the RV. Before I stepped out of the RV to smudge the exterior, I imagined myself as an old hippy woman so that should anyone see me, I won’t raise too many eyebrows. With a cloth wrapped around my forehead, my abalone shell and a feather, I walked around the RV and whispered protection prayers. I closed my thoughts to those around so that I could focus on conjuring up a strong protection spell for anyone that is a passenger at my invitation to be on the RV, and concealment from those that wished to do me harm. Finished I went back into the RV and prepared to put the sage bundle out when a tapping on the door had me laying it still burning in the shell inside the sink.

I peered out and spoke through the screen without opening the door.

“Yes?”

“Hi, ma’am. I don’t mean to butt in or nothing, but I couldn’t help noticing you blessed your RV.” He stopped and then took a deep breath before nervously continuing. “I’m wondering if you can bless my rig.”

“You can do it yourself.”

“I would just feel a lot better if someone else does it.”

“You’re a beastie,” I said. He saw past my concealment spell and his aura was shouting his *supernatural* state.

He looked startled and then gave an embarrassed smile. “Now you can see why someone else would be better to bless it than me.”

“Your prayers are as valid as mine and will carry more power since it’s your rig. But I’ll help you. Where’s your rig?” I asked not opening the door since he’s standing too close to the door.

He pointed to an old rig that wasn’t pulling anything. A woman heading toward it suddenly changed her direction and headed to us. I could sense her curiosity.

“My sister,” he said with mixed feelings.

“Whose rig is it?”

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“It was fathers. It’s all he left us. He was teaching me the ropes of hauling when he died. We have a job waiting for us in Tupelo but I’m not so sure the rig’s going to make it. Maybe with some of your magic...”

“Corey...” the woman’s voice held a note of warning.

“Why don’t I tell you how to do it and you bless it yourself? You see, there’s a lot of your father still in that truck. You being his relatives he may be coaxed to help you out until you can buy a better rig.”

“What’s going on?” the woman demanded.

“She’s a...”

“A witch,” I finished for him. I’m not really one but it would back her off.

“No shit?” she asked sarcastically.

“I can’t protect you from yourself,” I said.

“Corey, get the fuck back in the truck and let’s go.” She turned and stomped back to the truck. “It’s a wonder how you even got this far,” she muttered angrily.

I looked at Corey. “You can’t help her unless she helps herself. You have to believe in yourself.” I waited to see what he’s going to do with my advice.

“I didn’t want her to come but the truck was left to both of us, and she says she doesn’t trust me.”

For a brief moment, I got a glimpse of what they thought of each other. It was amazing they could ride together in the truck.

“I don’t know what beastie’s believe in, but if anyone asks for help in a...”

“Corey!” an angry voice shouted.

“If you ask from the heart, help will come, though not always the way you would like it to,” I told him quickly.

He sighed.

“Corey, I don’t know how you two are going to make it to your destination, but...talk to her about your memories of your dad. No two people have the same recollection of the same events so it should be entertaining.”

Another angry yell and honking of the horn got him to start back to the truck.

“Thanks for talking to me,” he said.

When the engine came on, I could hear it wasn’t a healthy sound.

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I put out the smudging bundle and open the windows in the RV. I sat for a while in quiet meditation, settling myself and then I pulled out my pendulum and dowsed over the road map. The *bob* moved in a new direction, toward Mt. Shasta. I don't usually question my guides why they change directions from one moment to the next because life is fluid. I also trust all this traveling around will be finished in two weeks. For a moment I wondered what I'm going to do once I find the crypt or portal then think how satisfying it will be to finish the finding job. I don't need to do anything but find the exact location.

I fed NO, fixed tea and a sandwich for myself and listened to the radio. I wanted to make sure I'm not going to run into the brother and sister again so I'm giving them plenty of travel time. After I waited long enough for them to make it to their first turn off, I hit the road.

I kept my thoughts busy with humming and singing songs.

At two in the morning, I opened the window to breathe deep the crisp mountain air. I have the heater going full blast, so my legs are warm. I passed several RV sites and rest stops but my target is Grants Pass. Another overnight car park came up. For some reason, I slowed down and took the off-ramp. A short nap would be good. I don't understand why I feel so tired. Maybe it was all the zigzagging I was doing. I'm nowhere near the Oregon Washington border.

In the rearview mirror I can see the tip of NO's tail hanging down from his nesting place. As I slowed down further to take the side road, I heard a thump and then an orange ball appears in the seat next to me.

"Ellie is here. She's asking for our help," NO says.

"They're in Oregon?" I squint at the GPS. We're not quite in Oregon.

I slowed as I entered the camp site, stopping at the office that has a light over instructions for late hour arrivals. There's a slot with tickets listing available spots and a map of locations. I said a prayer for picking the best spot and selected a ticket. I wrote the RV's license number on the ticket and dropped it in the slot. Tomorrow I'll pay.

It's too dark to go without lights so I dimmed my lights, so I don't disturb the community that's already settled. No lights shine behind closed curtains. I followed the road and my pendulum swung to the right when I came to my spot. To be sure it's the right spot I shined my light on the post. I backed up, watching the neon markers until I was level with the plugins.

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Slipping on my head lamp, I began to hook up my water, one hose to the cold and one to the heat, uncurled the flush toilet hose and locked it to the dump pipe, then plugged in the electrical. A warm shower before going to bed gives me a thrill. I'll even take the time to make the bed with the sheets I bought. Once back in the RV I extended the dining area and bedroom.

"NO, this is a lot of room."

NO was sitting in the cab over, looking out the window.

"Anyone watching us?" I asked as I closed all the drapes. I don't want someone to see me undress for my first shower in the RV.

"Everyone is tired and sleeping. Even their night watchers. They don't know you're here yet."

"What does my being here have to do with their business?" However, I was too tired to question NO further and just wanted to shower in warm water and go to sleep. I had faith that NO and Ellie would find each other.

Though I didn't put sheets on the bed in the back, I did take time to hand wash some clothes while I was in the shower. I strung them in the shower and gratefully crawled into my sleeping bag.

Chapter 7

I woke up because there were giggles from a child's voice that didn't fit in my dreamscape. I rolled out of my sleeping bag and used the toilet then washed my face. I joined Ellie and NO in the dining area. Ellie had a rainbow horse sitting between her and NO. She was laughing and from NO I got a happy vibe.

"You two are making too much noise," I said.

This made Ellie giggle all the more. I dumped coffee grounds into the filter and plugged the coffee pot in, then studied the two. It was interesting to see Ellie's aura change colors as her mental conversation with NO went on. While the coffee got ready, I went to brush my teeth. When I returned Ellie was gone and NO was curled up in the cab over.

"Why did she leave? I thought she needed our help?"

NO's head lifted. He got up and stretched then dropped to the floor. *"Her mother was looking for her. Ellie said one of the girls is missing, so her mother is nervous when she loses sight of her. The girl went missing last night."*

"With all those psychics around, why can't they find her?"

"Maybe she doesn't want to be found."

"Something hinky going on?"

"Ellie thinks so. Ellie wants to leave the caravan."

"Did she say why?"

"Something is not right and when she tries to focus on what's wrong, she loses focus. She's also upset because her mother is worried about something and won't tell her...mentally."

A knock on the door had me getting up then peering out the door. It was one of the men from the caravan. He wasn't putting out nice vibes.

"Perhaps you should arm yourself with something more than a spell," NO said.

I opened the cupboard near the door and put the pepper spray on the counter near the door and a Taser in my hand. I opened the door and before I could react, he charged in and pushed me back into the RV knocking me painfully into the kitchen table. My reflexes took over and using the table for support I kneed him in the groin as hard as I could, which wasn't with much power since I was off balance, and shoved him back out the door knocking another guy that was climbing up. Gravity was in my favor.

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"There's more to come," NO warned.

A breeze was blowing toward me so that ruled out using pepper spray. Instead, I held the Taser in front of me. I also held out my cell phone and hit auto dial then pointed the lens at the men, recording their faces.

"I don't know what your problem is, but if you ever try that shit again, it won't be a Taser, pepper spray or a kick in the groin that I'll use."

"You get the hell out of our caravan. We don't want you following us," one of the men said.

"Is it because I'm a private investigator and you have a little girl missing? Is it one of you or all of you involved in making little girls go missing? I suggest you find her alive and unharmed or it won't be me you'll be worrying about."

"You shut your mouth or we'll do it for you," another said.

"You're talking like you're all guilty." I wiggled my cell phone. "Notice it's connected to another phone. It's to an answering machine of a friend of mine who works for the FBI. It's to his home phone so when he gets home, he'll have this recorded conversation to listen to. GPS coordinates of where this call is made can be traced. I suggest you find the missing child before the FBI comes investigating. Harassing me will be a waste of your time."

"Stop following us or you're going to have an accident," one of the men said.

"Your threat has been recorded," I mocked. I watched the men leave but I don't think they believed I called the FBI.

I disconnected from my answering machine. I closed and locked the door. Something hit the side of the RV enough to rock it. I pulled out my pendulum and laid out the map.

"Guardians, angels and saints, show me where I can go to stay safe from this bunch and be of service to the ones who need me." Over the map I held the pendulum. The bob moved in a wide arc then took to moving more to the left than right.

I have no doubt the caravan will be leaving soon so I moved my damp clothes and took another shower under hot water then fixed breakfast of an omelet with cheese and veggies. After I cleaned the dishes, I took a peek out the window and it looked like the caravan had left. I got out and walked around the RV to inspect it, looking under the frame as well. One of the tires was flattening out. There was also something leaking from below the RV.

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I called triple A and gave him the size of the RV. While waiting for a tow truck I went to pay for my space. Returning to the RV I disconnected all the hoses and folded them back into their storage then retracted the dining and bedroom area. Two hours later Ellie and her mother, Antonia, came knocking on my door.

“Hi, come on in. You two look like you can use rest and water,” I said. Both were carrying overnight bags and looked sweaty and exhausted.

“We ran away,” Ellie said triumphantly.

“Some of the men were getting cultish weird,” Antonia said. “Do you mind if we grab a ride with you to a bus station?”

“No, I don’t mind. Sit down and get comfortable.” I reached into the refrigerator and pulled out a cold bottle of water and an apple for each of them.

“They put a hole in your tire, didn’t they,” Ellie said.

“They did. I’m waiting for a tow truck. I was given about a two hour wait due to their two drivers are pretty busy.”

“There’s an accident on the road. A big pile up that has both sides of the road blocked. That’s how we were able to leave. They had to slow down to a crawl and stop in some places,” Antonia said.

“We had our bags packed and were waiting for something to happen. I prayed for it so we could leave,” Ellie said breathlessly. Her eyes were as big as saucers. I could pick up on her fear mixed with excitement.

“But you didn’t ask for an accident,” Antonia quickly added. “Remember the Karmic rule of three.”

“Three times ill or three times good,” Ellie said in bored voice. “It’s not like I can cause something like that.”

“Where do you plan on taking a bus to? Maybe I can just drop you off where you need to go,” I said. I am curious where they’re going with only overnight bags.

While Antonia thought of an answer, I could hear a truck shifting gears outside. I looked out the window. The tow truck arrived.

“A rescue at last,” I said.

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The three of us squeezed into the front seat with the tow truck driver. I sat next to the driver and Antonia, holding Ellie sat next to the door. NO was happily ensconced in the RV without having to be hidden in a bag.

Bill Dominique, still in his twenties, entertained us with stories for thirty minutes about the people he met in his line of work. He dropped us off at a gas station that still did vehicle repairs. It was an hour from Grants Pass.

The station didn't have the tire size the RV needed so the manager/owner ordered it from another gas station thirty minutes away. That didn't arrive until closing time, which meant the tire wouldn't be put on until the next day. Mr. Jackson, the owner of the gas station, dropped us off at the only hotel in town.

Once we settled in a room with double beds, I ordered two large pizzas, three drippy salads, and water. We feasted until we couldn't eat anymore. NO was content to chew on pepperoni, sausage and ham that we shared with him.

Chapter 8

Early in the morning I felt a strong nudge on my shoulder. It wasn't light yet. The silhouette of NO sitting near my pillow suddenly morphed into an energy orb. I quickly sat up. NO moved around the room rapidly, generating an urgent feeling to do something. I noticed a dark apparition approaching my bed.

"*Be away,*" I shouted mentally and NO quickly returned to his cat shape and the energy left. Were we under some sort of attack? I rolled out of bed and unzipped my bag of ritual items. I pulled out sage and sweet grass bundles, then felt for a lighter.

"What's happening," a child's fearful voice asked in the dark. "What was that?"

"I don't know," I said.

"It's now outside. I don't think it's friendly," Antonia said.

I got the bundle of protection herbs lit and Antonia took one. I began a protection chant moving around the doorway, the window and in the bathroom with Antonia following and whispering her prayers. That, taken care of, the four of us sat on the edge of our beds waiting for the energy we all were feeling move from our room's front door. When it did, I crawled back under my covers and surprisingly enough, fell asleep. I felt secure with NO sitting on the edge of the bed, his tail twitching.

Antonia and Ellie also went back to bed, and I hoped back to sleep too.

It was daylight when I woke. Antonia and Ellie were still asleep. NO had moved to the bureau sometime in the morning. He hopped to the floor when I got up.

Shall we take a look around? NO asked.

I slipped on my shoes and pulled out a watch cap and gloves from my bag. My coat wasn't very thick for the cold morning, but it was enough if this was going to be a quick look around. My emergency pack left a lot to be desired for having an assortment of clothes for mixed weather conditions.

We found a residue of something that snapped when I reached out to see what it was.

"*It's not from this dimension,*" I thought to NO. Not finding anything else, not even footprints, we returned to the motel room. Antonia and Ellie were still asleep.

I gathered my soap, change of underwear, and unfortunately no change of clothes, since two changes were still drying in the RV, and headed to the shower. What can only be called hand

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towels were all that was supplied for drying off. I added towels to my list of things to buy along with more clothes. After my shower I dried off, dressed and brushed my teeth, expecting any minute for my two sleepyheads to wake.

A light tapping on the bathroom door came as I turned off the sink water.

“I’m decent. Come in.”

The door opened and Antonia poked her head in. “I see you have also maxed out your clean clothes.”

“I was thinking it’s time to visit the local laundromat if my clothes in the RV aren’t dry.”

“I can go for that. Maybe after breakfast.”

“There’s a fast-food stand in front of the laundromat that’s a few blocks from the gas station. I can check on the RV, grab my laundry and we can meet at the laundromat. I’ll give you some money and you can grab us something to eat while we’re watching our clothes get cleaned. Is anyone likely to come looking for you two?”

“Vincent.”

Antonia and I turned to Ellie who walked into the bathroom.

“Vincent has been trying to take over the Vortex caravan since he joined. He’s a smooth talker but a viper in disguise,” Antonia said.

“How did you two join up with the Vortex group?”

“Claire invited us to join the caravan in Cassadaga, Florida.”

“Cassadaga is where all sorts of psychics live,” Ellie interjected. “They don’t let fakes carry on their business there, but the energy is real wobbly because there are some nonbelievers in the town next door who are trying to pray them away.” Ellie’s eyes were round with something only she saw.

“She can read minds so of course she’s going to be shocked at what some people wish on others when they’re supposed to be in a church of the Master Jesus,” Victoria thought.

I was startled at Victoria’s thought because *I* don’t have a clear picture of Christianity. Due to all the hate spewed for centuries by churches that profess to be followers of this gentle and peace filled...

I needed to focus on what’s before me. Here and now, I say firmly to myself.

“That’s where the main body of the Vortex Caravan started,” Antonia was saying. “They spend two days there adding energy and protection to the spirit of the town. Many of the people

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of Crawford, the town Ellie is speaking of, visit Cassadaga secretly to get readings and such, and that's really why the energy feels wobbly to her. Cassadaga is over a vortex and has plenty of protection," she said to her daughter. "We stayed with Claire and her son Roger in their RV. Their RV usually has five people on this yearly trip, but her guests bought a van conversion."

"They aren't having as much fun," Ellie said.

Antonia smiled at Ellie. "Yes. They miss traveling with Claire and Roger. As we traveled, we picked up people. The Vortex members are scattered across the US and Canada and meet up along their route. Vincent joined the caravan in Sedona. No one invited him he just followed along as if he was part of the group and started to take over."

"Vincent doesn't like Roger. Roger can touch things and people and tell you all sorts of things about them," Ellie said.

"Vincent doesn't like hanging out with the children because they are intuitive, but he exerts some kind of power over some of the women and men. Lately he's been getting bossy and rubbing people he can't exert power over the wrong way. It's his way and no other way," Antonia said. "Like a cult."

"Until you showed up," Ellie said grinning.

"Why?"

"It was like poof, and the veil Vincent had over some of the people was dropped." Ellie snapped her fingers.

"It was before you arrived," Antonia said. "About three days before you met us three other men joined the caravan in a rented RV. Their energy is terrible. That was the wakeup call to even the people Vincent was cultivating to follow him. The original caravan leaders spread the word around that the caravan was to break up and meet somewhere without Vincent and his friends. Things started to happen on the road like flat tires, broken pumps, etc. that would necessitate vehicles to stay behind to get things fixed."

"So, the missing girl is part of this scattering?" I asked.

"That's what Claire told us. Cecilia is intuitive and her father was concerned about the way one of the men was looking at her. All the more reason we needed to leave," Antonia said. "Claire was concerned about us and told us to find you. Ellie felt the same way."

"Vincent and his friends are bad witches," Ellie said. "Roger and I put a hex on them so they can't find us."

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“I hope you remembered to remove traces of yourself on that hex otherwise Victor can follow it to you. Anyone need soap?” I asked. I need to process all this.

Ellie put her hands on her hips, “I know how to do protection spells, you know.”

I looked over at Antonia. She was wearing a frown.

“We don’t have any soap,” Ellie said. “Can I please borrow yours?”

“We’re out of a lot of the conveniences of civilized life. Deodorant is another,” Antonia said.

“We can stop and shop for whatever we need,” I said.

I left Antonia and Ellie in the bathroom and went to check up on NO. He was crouched on the dresser with his eyes closed.

“It shouldn’t take long to mount the tire,” I said to NO.

“That won’t be your problem. It’s how to hide mother and daughter when some unfriendly men come looking.” NO sat up and stretched.

“Why would someone come looking for them?” I asked.

“Two reasons. Ellie and Antonia are running from someone not from the caravan and Vincent wants to know who. And two, Vincent has plans about using some of the malleable people in the caravan for robbing banks.”

“Where are you getting that information?” I asked NO.

“Where else but human minds,” NO said.

“Where else indeed,” I said aloud. *“Why would Vincent come looking for them?”*

“He senses there is something he can sell. He has some psychic abilities. He’s not a nice person.”

“I’m hungry,” Ellie said. She came over to NO and scooped him up from the dresser. NO purred loudly.

“While I’m at the gas station picking up the RV you and your mom can pick us up something to eat,” I said.

“How are we going to hide from Vincent?” Ellie asked.

“I thought you put a hex on him.”

“It doesn’t mean we should be right out there in plain sight,” she said.

“I can weave a cocoon spell over each of us.” I went to my ritual bag and pulled out my rolled-up rug, candles, incense and other things so I can feel for what I would need.

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“Would you mind if I joined you?” Antonia asked.

“Not at all. The more energy, the stronger our protection,” I said.

Antonia looked at Ellie.

“Is NO going to help?” Ellie asks.

“He’s usually my guardian,” I said.

“Can I join?” she asks.

“You certainly can.”

I bless the four directions with a standard prayer which Antonia and Ellie repeat. From my pile of stones Ellie picked an amethyst, Antonia sodalite and I chose anglite. In the center of the magic circle, I placed a moonstone.

“This prayer circle is to call our angels and guardians to help us stay safe and to harm none in our journey through this lesson,” I said aloud. I said another ritual prayer with Antonia and Ellie joining in. NO sat between Ellie and me. I made my request, then Antonia and then Ellie, after which we sat in silent meditation.

NO head bunted me when he thought the meditation was long enough.

I opened the prayer circle after giving a thanksgiving prayer to the Beloved and all guardians present.

Antonia and Ellie left to go to the laundromat with NO along with them to keep them safe. While they attended to that business, I put away my things. I then called the gas station to see if the RV repair was on track. The tire and damage to the underside of the RV was fixed and the RV is ready for pickup. I grabbed up my bags and anything Ellie and Antonia may have left and hurried to hand in the key to the hotel desk. From there I jogged to the gas station.

Something is going to happen and the fluttering in the pit of my empty stomach is not from hunger. While I waited to pay my bill, I couldn’t help glancing out the gas station’s dirty windows.

“Something wrong?” the woman at the desk finally asks.

“Something, but I can’t put my finger on it,” I said.

“Maybe whoever put a hole in your tire and undercarriage?” the attendant that replaced my tire said. He handed the woman a yellow slip that guarantees the new tire. “I put a rubber plug in the hole under your RV but it’s not going to be any problem if it falls out. It’s a water tank.” He handed me something. “This is what caused all that damage.”

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“If I catch him, I’ll Taser him where it hurts then call the police.” Smiling I added, “but not before I clean out his wallet for the trouble he cost me.” I palmed the smashed bullet. “Y’all have a nice day,” I mimicked in my best Southern Belle sweet as pie, accent. The two laughed and wished me good hunting.

In the RV I dropped the spent bullet in the beverage holder to later try psychometry to see if I can pull up any information on who touched the bullet. As I pulled out of the gas station, I checked the road for trouble and there it was. One of the men from caravan was on an off-road motorcycle riding slowly through town, looking this way and that.

“NO, trouble on a motorcycle. Gather those two and meet me behind the laundromat.”

I headed to the back of the laundromat. Ellie with NO running beside her came out of the laundromat’s back door as I drove up.

“Get in. Quick. If the protection spell holds, he won’t see the RV right away. Where’s your mother?”

“He won’t see her. She’s in disguise.” Ellie was breathing heavily more from fear than running.

“Where is she?”

“She is in the laundromat with the clothes,” NO said. “She doesn’t want to leave their belongings behind, so she is going to finish them up.”

I could hear a motorcycle slowly coming our way. “Ellie, think of yourself as a...”

“Fly on the wall,” Ellie said promptly.

The motorcycle passed by the RV without slowing down.

After thirty minutes I got worried and went to see what was happening in the laundromat. The only person there was an old woman muttering over a newspaper. I did a double-take because the aura around the woman wasn’t what I was expecting.

“Antonia?” I whispered.

“Give me another ten minutes. I’ll bet you two are hungry.” She handed me two breakfast burritos wrapped in tinfoil.

“Ten minutes,” I repeated and left with my stomach growling.

While we waited, we ate our breakfast burritos at the table. Ellie shared some of hers with NO.

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“While I was paying for the repair work, I bought some deodorant, comic character toothbrushes, tooth paste, and some chocolate bars, with nuts and without.”

“Let me see,” Ellie said excitedly. Ellie was interested in the character toothbrushes, picking the bear. She left Wile E Coyote for her mother.

Ten minutes later an old woman dragging two plastic bags exited the back door of the laundromat and climbed into the RV.

I was more than ready to go.

“You’re pretty good at changing your appearance,” I said, as I pulled out of the parking lot.

“It’s come in good use. I used to do acting in small theaters. Hiding this RV must have been hard,” Antonia said.

“It’s a spell I’ve become really good at in my line of work. Have you tried weaving a cocoon over yourself to not be seen?”

“Is it like the cloak spell?” I nodded. “We’ve been relying on it.”

“We’re going to have to stop again soon. I didn’t bring warm clothes. I don’t know what I was thinking when I packed.” It was embarrassing that I had gloves and hat but not a warm shirt or coat.

“There’s a second-hand store on Hay Road. I saw a card posted on the bulletin board in the laundromat. Depending on how much they charge, I have a few dollars that could buy Ellie and me a few more clothes that we haven’t been seen in.”

“What’s the address?” I punched in what Antonia gave me in my GPS. “Remember, if you think about being followed, it can be picked up and my concealment spell will be for naught.”

“We got you covered,” Ellie said.

The store was opposite a home and if my two co-pilots hadn’t been looking we would have passed it. NO stayed in the RV. The store had three cats he wasn’t interested in meeting. When I stepped into the room a bell above the door tinkled like someone was shaking a bell to summon service.

“This is nice,” Ellie says, stepping past me. “It’s like a fairy house.”

I looked where she was looking. The children’s section was set up like a forest with fairies everywhere, painted on the walls, hanging from the ceiling and cardboard cutouts.

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“Pick one outfit,” Antonia told Ellie.

“Hello, hello. Come on in and look around,” a woman said from behind a desk in the corner. On the desk were two of the three cats NO and I sensed. She was knitting while the cats watched the ball of yarn move. They had amazing control to not pounce on the moving ball.

“Good morning,” I said, which Antonia and Ellie echoed.

“All the clothes are clean and repaired. Smudged too by my auntie. No buttons missing on anything,” she said without interrupting her knitting. “Restroom is the fitting room.”

Antonia went to the girlie girl section while I was more interested in a warm coat, long sleeved shirt, and another pair of jeans. The underwear section in a secondhand store with naughty nighties wasn't where I would go even if I was interested, and that section separated the guy's side from the gal's. As I selected what I wanted to try on, she was right that there were no lingering energies of previous owners.

I was in the dressing room, or the restroom, trying on jeans when I heard the entrance bell. Whatever entered made me cold. I quickly put my pants back on and left the restroom with the clothes I selected sitting on a basket. Stepping out into the room I could smell the unmistakable odor of black magic. The front door slammed closed. The woman behind the desk's mouth and eyes were opened wide. Her aura showed she was alive but in shock. I looked around and heard a shot fired. I ran to the front door and saw a motorcycle and jeep take off down the road. Antonia was lying in the dirt. Quickly I went to Antonia. She was alive with a large lump forming on her forehead. I ran back into the shop to call 911. The woman behind the desk was beginning to recover.

“Call 911!” I shouted and ran back out to see Antonia. As I passed the RV I noticed the RV front wheel was flat.

It wasn't very long before police arrived. Three cars. I was impressed that a small town could afford three cars.

Heather Hall ran the secondhand store. She was articulate and gave a good description of the three men. They didn't see her sitting quietly in her corner, so she was not interfered with, except the spell which stunned her for a few moments. The kidnapers were focused on Antonia and Ellie. The spell stunned them all, giving the kidnapers time to press a cloth over their face and carry them out. The police found a rag soaked with chloroform near Antonia. Antonia was

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distraught at Ellie's abduction. I told them about the motorcycle and the jeep. The jeep had an out-of-town license but the mud on it didn't leave the ID readable.

The garage sent a tow truck to haul my RV back to its shop. The police took the bullet casing that put a hole in my tire. The hole was plugged up to be used as an emergency tire while another new one was mounted. At this rate I was going to be replacing all four of the worn tires. The police wanted us to stick around for a day until they checked Antonia's story and did a background check on me. Rather than spend more money on a hotel when the RV was just fine, we were directed to a place to park until the police released us. It was meant for day camping so there were no hookups, not even for water. It did have an outhouse.

Before heading to our waiting spot, I stopped at the secondhand store to pay Heather for the clothes I left in her restroom. I needed warm clothes. I also paid for the clothes Antonia and Ellie dropped. My gaydar told me Heather was a sister. We must have been on the same wavelength because she became a fountain of information. She retired from law enforcement, but it didn't mean her brain stopped working. She told me about places people could hide nearby until dark when law enforcement had fewer patrols out. That got me to thinking. I returned to the RV where NO was babysitting Antonia who was pacing in the RV.

I had ideas on what to do but Antonia had to calm down, or it wouldn't work. I drove to our place where we were told to wait and parked. I used the RV's head, changed clothes and drank some water and finally Antonia sat on the bench seat across from me.

I leaned forward. "Are you ready to do something?" I asked her.

Her reddened eyes lifted to mine. "What?" she asked hoarsely.

I took out my pendulum and held it over a map. I stated my intent out loud and asked for assistance. The bob moved but not far from where we were.

"Is that where they are?" Antonia asked.

"That's where Ellie is. Antonia, tell me why they left you?"

For a few moments she was silent. I could feel her struggle. "I don't know." She let out a sob and quickly controlled it. "My last employer was in some kind of illegal business but not in the store I worked at. An FBI agent approached me. He wanted me to get some evidence for him. Ellie told me something terrible was going to happen and we needed to leave town, but the agent was twisting my arm, claiming he could take Ellie away from me as an unfit mother because I

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was part of a coven. I got him the information and now both the FBI and my ex-employer are looking for us.”

“What did you do with the information?”

“What did Ellie do with it is the question. She was so angry with the FBI agent she told him off and said what he wanted was where he couldn’t get it. I don’t think the agent was expecting that from an eleven-year-old. Then my employer shows up and the agent and him start arguing. That’s when Ellie and I got a chance to run. We got as far as that psychic town, Cassadaza in Florida. We were lucky Claire rescued us.”

“If the FBI is after you there will be a broadcast everywhere for you.”

“That’s what I thought too. Ellie insists that the agent that threatened me was bad and the group we were with, the Vortex group, said the same thing. They were hiding us. Then Vincent started getting nosey about us and his friends showed up.”

“NO, do you have any advice?”

NO suddenly went from cat to his alternate ego, a ball of energy.

“There’s our answer. It’s still daylight but that means we can see them better.” I went to the cupboard and removed the pepper spray and Taser.

“Pick your weapon,” I said.

“Pepper spray,” she said.

“Remember, if there’s a breeze, that’s the way it’s going to go.”

“I know how to use one.”

We must have been an interesting sight, two women with an energy ball the size of a baseball sprinting across a field and then into a sparse forest. I had my pendulum with me and occasionally we would stop and let it show us the way.

A noise behind us had me turning with nothing but my Taser to defend myself. A hefty woman dressed in fatigues with bullet proof vest was following us. She held up her hands.

“I come in peace,” she whispered. “Heather told me your daughter has the fey about her,” she said to Antonia. “My chief and Cole are on the west side checking out the vacant cabins. I thought I would follow y’all. I think I’m on the winning team.” She pointed to my hand with the pendulum.

“Ellie isn’t that far from here,” I said. “My names Vic.”

“The PI,” she said with a grin.

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“Antonia,” Antonia said.

“Ellie’s mother. I’m Sgt. Amy Hall. Let’s go, but, not through the poison ivy.”

Amy led the way around the patches of poison ivy. She turned to me every now and then and I pulled out my pendulum, and it kept pointing in the original direction we were headed except for the poison ivy detours. Amy never mentioned seeing NOs energy orb and I wasn’t going to say anything.

Amy stopped and waved us both to crouch down. She looked around us and then pulled out her cell phone. She whispered in it and took a few pictures. We were on the backside of the building where the main road didn’t pass. A jeep was parked in the back. No motorcycle.

Amy leaned close to us. “Only a jeep but someone’s in the cabin.”

We all ducked when a man came walking around the cabin smoking a cigarette and looking around him. He wasn’t holding a weapon but who knew what he had under his coat.

“That’s the FBI agent,” Antonia whispered.

“You have the FBI after you?” Amy asked.

“I don’t think he’s a real one,” Antonia said.

“Just what kind of information did he ask you to get?” I asked. A list of names was what popped into my head.

“A page from an address book, all those beginning with B. There were only three.”

The man finished his cigarette and disappeared.

“We can get in closer and see where Ellie is,” I said.

NOs energy ball took off with Antonia following close. They both moved before I could say anything. I thought for sure Amy who went after her was going to drag her down; however, she must have changed her mind and moved from tree to tree, so far between, covering for Antonia and NO.

I chose to move to the left, careful not to step in anything I would regret. What had me worried was that someone had used black magic to stun Antonia and Ellie before they smothered them with chloroform. Whoever used it wasn’t there now, and we had to do something before he returned. I’m guessing that would be the guy on the motorcycle.

Amy gestured for us to fan out as we approached the cabin from three sides. I decided to check out the jeep. As I’m thinking of damaging the tires in the distance, I hear motorcycles

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approaching. I look for NOs orb. He hovered over the jeep. I hoped he could do something to the jeep though I have my own death wish on it.

I hid near the jeep and wondered how I could sabotage it without them knowing it until it's too late. If I put a hole in the gas line, it would mean danger of setting a fire and they would smell the gas. Punctured tires would be good, but I don't have anything on me to punch through that much rubber. If I let the air out, they will see it right away. I reach into my pocket and pulled out my Swiss army knife. Under the jeep I began to work on the radiator plug.

Finished with that, NO and I went to find Antonia. She was frantically working on a window. I could see Ellie on the other side looking over her shoulder at the door then back at her mother. I joined Antonia and we opened the window a crack, then slid the knife blade in enough for Ellie to cut the rope on her wrists. Ellie was then able to remove the dowel on her side that prevented the window from opening beyond a crack.

Just as Ellie was crawling out the window the bedroom door swung open and two men entered. NO enters the room and his energy ball hit one of the men who dropped to the ground. The other man grabbed Ellie's foot. A well-aimed kick from Ellie had the man letting her foot go, minus her shoe. However, we could hear men shouting and running around the front and then came Amy's voice announcing who she was and telling them to stop where they were or she would shoot.

I didn't feel it was fair that Amy faces them alone, so I went to help her out with my Taser. Shots were fired and I fired my Taser. Antonia was furious and sprayed whoever she could reach, holding a cloth to her face. Reinforcements arrived and five men were captured.

It was a great ending and exhausting, but I didn't get that feeling of closure. I ignored that, so happy to be able to leave all that business behind. After our information was verified, though Antonia no longer lived at the residence she supplied – I did interfere there, so it got our release so we could continue on our travel.

Chapter 9

I pulled out my map and held my pendulum over it.

“Are you looking for treasure?” Ellie asked.

“I’m looking for where I’m going next,” I said.

“Are we going too?” Ellie asked.

I look over at Antonia, not knowing what to say. I was thinking first of where I needed to go and then I would work in where they wanted to be dropped off.

“If you don’t mind,” Antonia said.

“I don’t know what I’m heading to,” I said.

“It can’t be any worse than what I’ve been through,” Ellie said dramatically.

“We don’t have anywhere to go at the moment,” Antonia said.

“Not until Aunt Evie gets back from her cruise,” Ellie said.

I felt relieved they had somewhere to go but uncomfortable with bringing them along. I’m getting attached to them.

“We don’t know if Aunt Evie will let us stay,” Antonia warned.

“She has a really big house, like a castle,” Ellie said. “I’ll be like a princess in my very own big room,” she said dreamily.

“It is a big house. She’s from my mother’s side of the family. I’m not sure who she’s directly related to. As far as I know, she doesn’t know about us.”

“She’ll like us,” Ellie said with certainty.

“Why not?” I asked Antonia.

Ellie rolled her eyes.

“My parents didn’t want to be little soldiers in the clan’s coven,” Antonia said.

“We don’t either,” Ellie said.

“Yet you’re asking for help from her, your kin. It means you’ll owe them,” I said to Ellie.

“Those men that were arrested won’t stay in custody. They’ll come looking for us again but with better methods to contain us,” Antonia said. “They’ll have a new agenda besides getting hold of the list of names Ellie disappeared.”

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“Life sure can suck sometimes with the choices we’re given,” I said. “It sounds like being surrounded by witchy people is your safe haven. Coven of friends or your family aren’t bad choices.”

“If only it was just a matter of flipping a coin,” Antonia said.

“Do you have music?” Ellie asked.

“I haven’t brought any so there’s only the radio,” I said.

Ellie made a face. “It’s boring stuff.”

Antonia and I were quiet in our own thoughts as I followed my route. We traveled for two hours and according to my pendulum we needed to make a left onto a dirt road. We still had hours to go before we get to the Oregon Washington border so I’m not too sure why I’m still driving in circles. It feels like my guides are trying to throw someone off our trail. I took an off ramp that advertised a campground nearby.

The campground entrance was off a public-maintained road. Before turning on the dirt road, I stared at the condition of it wondering if the RV could take it.

“Are you sure this RV can drive over those ruts?” Antonia asks echoing my own uncertainty.

“It’s a camping van so it should be okay.”

It’s getting dark and shadows over the road from the forest on both sides of the road made it an eerie drive, but my guides assured me that my destination is at the end of this road. I drove at a crawl so the head lamps could pick up the deep dips in the road so I can avoid them if possible.

“It did say campgrounds, so someone has had to be able to drive up the road to use it,” I said just to reassure myself that I won’t break something like an axel. It sounded like everything not tied down in the cabinets was trying to break loose.

“Finally,” I said echoed by Ellie and Antonia. A small shack with a sign on it informs us that it’s \$25 a night and to put the money in an envelope and find a place to park. We were the only ones in the park I felt.

I used the pendulum to find the right spot energy wise. I backed in with no problem. Within sight is a building that has a restroom, shower and laundry Icon on it.

“Laundry and shower. Just the things I need,” I said as I climbed out of the driver’s pit to the kitchenette area.

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“Why don’t you go clean up while I hook up,” Antonia says. “I know how to do it.”

I grabbed clean clothes, thinking how nice it will be to stand under a hot shower without worrying about water pressure and running out of hot water. For a camp site so far off a well-maintained road, this place has all the luxuries of a RV friendly KOA campsite.

Ellie and NO trotted behind me. I stuffed my things in the washer and fed two dollars’ worth of coins to the machine. NO and Ellie sat on the benches near the washer. Ellie was telling NO a story of a fairy she had met. Her story was entertaining.

My shower was quick. After my shower I left NO and Ellie watching the washing machine while I went to look around the park, daring only to go as far as the lights from around the building shined. I felt we’re being watched. Now I’m not so sure I should have brought mother and daughter here, in fact, I can’t believe I made that decision.

Finder, don’t come looking in the dark. Wait for the light.

I was numb struck for only a few seconds. I hurried back to the utility room. Ellie was holding NO tightly and staring at Tristan who was just staring at the two with curiosity.

“Tristan,” I said in surprise.

The vampire turned to stare at me in equal surprise.

“Do I know you human,” he said with distaste.

I reevaluated the vampire who looks a lot like Tristan but... He doesn’t feel the same.

“Well, I thought I knew you. VIP to the High Vampire Council in the Americas?” I asked.

Tristan laughed. “I would never pretend to such a station even to a human.”

“You look just like him. You are a vampire?”

“Yes,” he says in a clipped manner. He obviously doesn’t want to be speaking to me, a human. “What brings you to our lands?” he demands haughtily.

“I was summoned here.”

“You?” he asked unbelieving. Something distracted him because he looked outside the door and then was gone.

“A vampire?” Ellie whispers.

“We’ll be safe in the RV. They can’t enter nor can any *supernatural* unless we invite them in,” I said. “You and NO go back to the RV and tell your mother that.”

“What about you?” Ellie asked, her voice trembling.

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“I’m going to finish my laundry,” I said. “I’m protected. I’m used to handling *supernaturals*. NO will make sure you and your mother are alright.” She still didn’t move. “I’ll be alright. Go before we get any more visitors. Your mother needs to know not to let anyone in.”

Ellie hurried out of the utility room with NO bouncing in her arms. I was thinking NO would probably have preferred to run on his own legs.

There weren’t any further visits while I waited for my clothes to finish the dry cycle. I folded and put my clothes in my bag while listening and feeling what is around me. There are *supernaturals* gathering but only near enough for me to get the raised hairs on my arms and the nape of my neck.

I needed to be fearless otherwise my fear would attract predators like sharks to blood. I OM’d a mantra on my way back to the RV. I tapped on the door to the RV. “It’s me, open up Antonia.” I don’t know how long I stood out there, but the door finally unlocked and Ellie peered out at me.

I stepped in and dropped my clothes bag on the driver’s seat. I locked the door, saying a protection spell over the door to reinforce what I already have invoked. I can feel energy from my right hand that I pointed at the door running down my arm and energizing the spell that I already had invoked.

“Where’s Antonia?”

“Asleep,” Ellie whispered.

“NO?”

“It is better she is asleep through this. Ellie is better equipped to handle supernaturals,” NO said.

I didn’t think so, but NO liked Ellie and I knew he would keep her safe.

“NO put her to sleep. I was going to tell her about the vampire when a wolf came and sat outside. Mother got really scared.”

“Werewolves, NO?”

“Yes.”

“As long as we leave the night to them and not open the door no matter what we hear outside, we’ll be alright. I see you have the curtains pulled. That’s good. We should sleep too. It’ll help pass the time.”

“I can’t sleep with them out there,” Ellie said.

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“Do you want to learn some spells?”

“Okay. Does NO know these too?”

“What NO knows is a constant surprise to me,” I said. “I’m going to teach you a basic protection spell. Full moon is a good time for this. Candles to use...”

After tiring Ellie out with talk about spells and ward offs, and her telling me some that she knew and I didn’t, we both went to bed close to midnight. I was too tired to wonder if it was wind that buffeted the RV or something else.

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Chapter 10

NO and I slept in the cab-over bed and Ellie joined her mother in the back bed, right next to the shower and toilet. An inconvenience I thought, but when I had to use the toilet, I didn't wake either of them.

"NO, did you work a sleeping spell on them?"

"It's better for them."

I slept about an hour more, dreaming of something that I could understand but I knew I wouldn't get it when I woke up. It was incredible. I don't know how long NO was meowing in my ear but a bite on my earlobe is what woke me, but not enough to energize me to get up.

"You have a visitor," NO said.

My eyes popped open. I peeked over the rim of the bed and was startled to see Betty preparing coffee. The aroma rose to fill the small space. That alone should have been like an alarm clock and woken me up right away. Why didn't it?

I climbed down the stairs and stared at her. She didn't feel right. We stared at each other not saying anything. It was as if we were both not quite satisfied with what we were seeing.

"Tristan was right," she finally said. "You're not our Victoria."

"You're not a vampire," I said.

"I wouldn't be fixing coffee if that were so. You are human, yes?"

"Yes."

"Then we'll have coffee together. We haven't done that in quite a while."

She poured coffee for us and handed me my cup. I looked at it and was surprised to see it was coffee light, just the way I drank it.

Betty looked up at NO. "Vampires usually don't have cats as familiars. But you aren't like...or my Victoria isn't like the others."

"Your Victoria? I'm a vampire? Who converted me?"

"You mean transitioned you? You never said. It's rather difficult to not be the only one in her life."

"In my dimension, Betty was converted by Mistress Agnes."

"Are you two still together?" she asked.

"No! She's a vampire."

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“Ahh. You have discriminating tastes,” Betty mocked.

“I’ve got a business to run. It keeps me too busy to be in any committed relationship,” I said defensively. “I noticed Tristan isn’t a VIP like he is in my timeline,” I said.

“He mentioned that. You went and gave him ideas, you know. He was a rising star until he failed a task. He’s been demoted until he proves himself trustworthy and with long living vampires, that will be longer than my lifetime.”

“What do you have against him?”

“He was one of the guards to a portal Victoria was going to use to reach you. He overstepped his assignment which has caused problems between the two timelines.”

“Did Victoria summon me?” I asked.

“Yes, I did.”

That voice sent shivers up my spine. It wasn’t of fear or excitement, but something else I couldn’t put a name to.

Betty smiled at a woman that was devastatingly beautiful and had the same powerful energy around her as I felt from Tristan when I first met him at a party. My mouth dropped open as I stared at a kick-ass version of me dressed in leathers. I personally don’t like leather for a variety of reasons. For one it’s from a dead animal that probably died a gruesome death which means I will be picking up on its agony; and two, it makes me sweat; and three - it stinks.

NO jumped from the top bunk to the table.

“Hello, Michael, I see you’ve taken care that she wasn’t harmed until she was needed,” Victoria said, rubbing NO’s purring head.

“NO is yours?” I asked feeling betrayed.

NO hopped to the ground and turned into Michael, or a version of the Michael that last came for a map.

“Michael?” I asked.

NO/Michael smiled. “It was rather interesting to see my other self.”

“Why all this trickery? Why am I here and just where are we?”

“We are betwixt and between dimensions. It’s a space where our energies can meet using recognizable forms.”

“So?”

“Your timeline has a problem.”

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“And *your* vampires don’t want to fix it,” Betty said.

Michael did an equivalent to a vampire rolling his eyes: he turned his head and looked to the side. When I look in the mirror to see Michael’s expression there was no reflection to see, in fact, none of us are reflected in the mirror. I quickly turned away from the mirror. Is this betwixt and between?

“There are some vampire council members on your side that will do something and there are some who want to use the information to steer the vampires in the wrong direction,” Victoria said.

“I don’t deal with vampires –,” I started.

“Until recently,” Victoria said.

I went over in my mind a list of vampires I could call on and found there wasn’t any name on the list...except Tristan.

“Tristan!” Victoria said, reading my mind.

That was strange, me reading my own mind.

“Believe it or not, he’s a very responsible vampire in that dimension. A VIP - unlike my other,” Michael said.

I could feel Victoria staring at my neck. Reflexively, I put a hand to cover my throat.

“What do you and Tristan have going?” Victoria asked.

“Nothing!” I said defensively, however the image of him at Mistress Agnes’s costume ball came back to me.

“Hmm,” Victoria and NO/Michael said, sounding disapprovingly.

“You didn’t share that with me,” NO/Michael said.

“It was before your time and nothing really happened,” I said embarrassed. “He’s not my type. So just what is this meeting for and what happened to Tristan and Michael from my timeline?” I asked.

“They are wandering around mountains and valleys,” she grinned. “They wouldn’t be able to find this dimension because they lack the ability. However, time is running out,” Victoria said.

“Just like in the flicks,” Betty said.

“I need you to get a message to Council Member Leda Vincente.”

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“How did I...I mean you, end up a vampire and Betty not?” I ask, not hearing what she was saying.

Betty snorted and then laughed. “No way do I want to live forever. I’ll take my chances with reincarnation, starting over without the burdens of the previous life, and a chance on moving into a Pleiadian world. More peaceful and loving.” She looked over at Victoria, and I thought I saw sadness there. I couldn’t read her like I usually could others but that could be the place we were at.

“Do you have visions?” Victoria asked me.

I looked at Victoria surprised. “I’m not a visionary, I mean not consistent enough to call myself clairvoyant. Sometimes I can predict things, but I wouldn’t rely on it to save anyone’s life.”

“I’ve been having visions most of my life. In one I saw the race of vampires at a crossroad in their consciousness...a spiritual opening up would be their next step in species evolution or the other road - devolution, staying closed down collectively. No one that I spoke to heard of vampires with spiritual beliefs, yet, they had many practioners of magic. How far is dealing in magic to spirituality? Doesn’t the Magician Card attest to the uniting heaven and earth by spiritual means?”

I opened my mouth to tell her I didn’t use the Tarot for my work, but Victoria continued.

“I asked my guides what I was to do with this vision. At the time I wasn’t a vampire.”

“We were a happy committed couple,” Betty said.

“Living in separate apartments clear across the city doesn’t make a committed relationship,” Victoria said. She looked back at me, “I took it to my mentor, a magician, who happened to be a vampire.”

Victoria grinned at my opened mouth expression, which made me close my mouth with a snap. What happened in my life that was parallel to Victoria’s that she chose to train with a vampire? I could think of no time when I was aware of my many mentors as being vampires.

“I wanted to learn with the best and learning magic from someone that’s practiced it for centuries was ideal. Anyway, for months we discussed it and I dreamed more and had even more questions. To make a long story short, I became a vampire so I could reach other vampires to give them a choice. I taught any who came to listen to me speak about spirituality. When that moment in time came, we collectively took a different path and here we are.”

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“Just where is that?” I ask.

“We’re in the 4th and 5th dimensions preparing for the next leap of consciousness, where there is no need for a physical body. No one would have believed a vampire could evolve to the 5th dimension. Those that didn’t want to change eventually perished. My visions have continued showing me that in another dimension where I wasn’t a vampire, nor meant to be, the same choice needed to be given to those vampires. I had thought the visions were telling me to give you the task of taking a message to someone in the vampire council that is willing to listen.”

“To evolve or disappear,” I said.

“Yes.”

“Tristan told me that the Vincente clan doesn’t speak with humans.”

“Tristan has misinformed you. VIP or no, in both dimensions Tristan belongs to a group mindset of vampire elitism. That’s why we’re going to share your human form.”

I can feel my head bobbing stupidly in agreement as I try to process all this quickly. Then I got it and gulped. “We? Share what?”

“It’s done more often than you know,” Victoria reassured me. “There are spirits that your dimension calls pets that have passed over that sometimes don’t want to wait to come back in a new physical body but rather share the body of their replacement in their human companion’s life. Their emotional ties to their previous human companions don’t limit them to ghostly visits.”

“Walk-Ins?” I said feeling a very cold fear creeping over me.

“Walk-ins don’t necessarily mean the spirit born into the body leaves. Some humans have two higher selves each with her or his own purpose.”

The picture of a two headed person came to mind.

“Just how...who...I don’t want someone controlling my life!”

“It’s just you and I and I’m you. We are the same soul only experiencing life differently. Soul fractals. If it was morally wrong, I would not do it,” Victoria said empathically.

“We aren’t doing it! I don’t want to do it.”

“It’ll be the same as hearing your guides speak to you. Your guides are you only closer to the Source on the other side of the veil.”

My mind stopped hearing. I thought seeing nonhuman forms was scary, instead sharing my body with this thing scared me. I couldn’t imagine it. Would I be like a schizophrenic? Would I look like those crazy people walking the streets talking to themselves? I would have to

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wear a blue-tooth connection in my ear all the time so people would think I'm on my cell. That might work.

What am I thinking?

This shouldn't be all that difficult to accept. After all street people talking to spirits only they could see were the very people that taught me how to hone many of my psychic skills.

Victoria laughed as my thoughts became more frightening. "Breathe," she said.

"I don't think it's all that funny," I said.

"You already hear voices in your head," Victoria said.

"Is that supposed to be encouraging?" I demanded.

"Multiple personalities, schizophrenics..."

"Alright already! I just don't want someone else in my head making me do things."

Victoria got so close to my face I could feel her life source. A vampire that feels alive? I jumped back.

"Just what do you feed on?" I ask.

"Do you fear me bleeding you - myself?" she mocked. "Or is it your fear I will need to bite someone while we share your body?"

"I'm not you, or you me."

"When you visited the Edge of Darkness for the first time...that was me sharing with you my experience of what that place was like."

"What? That's what I'm talking about. You controlled me!"

"No. You were still yourself. You accepted the job without my influence and so you wouldn't be overwhelmed, I showed you some of what it was like. You were in complete control."

"How did you get in my head?"

"We are fractals of the same soul," Victoria said patiently.

I touched my forehead thinking how I was sounding even to myself, crazy.

"Why aren't my stones keeping you away," I asked.

"Do the stones bother you?"

"No! I'm not a vampire."

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“That part of you that is in me isn’t affected. Also, I mean you no harm which is what your protection spells and stones are meant to work on. We can go around this subject for a lifetime, but we don’t have that much time.”

“I say no,” I said.

“I say yes. Since we are one and the same soul...”

“Vampires don’t have souls,” I said without conviction. How pathetic I sound.

Victoria laughed uproariously. “Well, then. You can keep our soul nice and safe, and I’ll do all the heavy work when it comes to handling vampires. You obviously don’t know anything about vampires and that’s where I’m going to help.”

“I’m not going to be sucking anyone’s blood,” I said. “I’m eating the same as I always do.”

“It’s your body.”

I can feel my hands shaking from fear.

Victoria turned to Betty and NO/Michael. “You must return to our dimension, Betty. Leaving the portal open too long leads to energy leaks and someone may notice it.”

“So...” just as I was asking how she was going to appear she walked right into me like a ghost. It was the oddest feeling, like putting on a jacket but inside of myself not outside. I stood for, I don’t know how long, waiting for something to happen. When I noticed NO was back to a cat and it was just the three of us. I was aware of the difference in me, but I couldn’t put a finger on what was different.

I felt amused and knew that it was Victoria my other self. My other self? Was that how I was going to be calling this coming together?

“What am I going to do about Antonia and Ellie?” I ask to no one in particular, but I was staring at NO.

“Take them to their aunt’s place,” NO said. “It is our destination too.”

“Have you met them in your timeline?” I asked him. I got a distinct feeling both NO and Victoria knew them. I also felt I wasn’t going to hear anything more about it unless it was necessary. I know that what happens in one reality doesn’t necessarily mean it will happen in another but when this is over, I want to know. I want to know about Antonia. My thoughts quickly jumped to wondering if it was ethical for Victoria to cross dimensions to change the future.

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"I can hear you, by the way. Why don't you unhook the RV and let's hit the road?"

Victoria said.

"If you can hear me, then tell me if this is right to be changing the future? People should make their own choices and learn the consequences."

"Exactly. But in order to make a choice everyone has the right to know what the options are. That is what this is about. There are people in places of power for both humans and nonhumans in your dimension that don't want to let others know of the options. They want to steer the future to where they will remain at the top; however, it will not work out as they think. They aren't my concern. They are the ones denying free choice."

"Why are you doing this?" I asked skeptically.

"For the same reason you are...to give people options. What you call supernaturals should have the same chance to make a choice of going this way or that. And of course, curiosity."

NO was purring as he watched me.

"So, I drop off Antonia and Ellie who are being followed, and then somehow locate this Queen of Vampires."

"She is like a queen and may not take that as an insult, however, those around her would take it as an insult to give her a human title and use your humanness as a weapon. Treat her as a queen but don't think of her as one. Remember, your human thoughts will be easily read and I may not be able to block them completely from being read...I'll guarantee that what Tristan did to you, won't happen again, as long as I'm here with you."

I was astonished how relieved I felt at that. It made me realize that that was more of why I didn't do business with vampires.

"Can you astral project?" That caught Victoria off guard.

"No. Can you?"

"Can vampires?"

"Not that I'm aware of. Perhaps we've never tried because many of us can move our consciousness through dimensions, portals and from one place to another in minutes."

That was something to think about.

I unhooked everything and neatly stored hoses in their spaces noticing that I moved faster than I normally would and my movements were more precise. I pushed the button to retract the

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dining area and after touching the spirit of mother and daughter, let them remain asleep as I retracted the bedroom. I was securing the coffee pot when I heard a noise from the bedroom. I knew who and what I heard. I turned to confirm what I felt.

“Good morning. Sleep well?” I asked Antonia. I felt an emotional shift inside of me.

She gave a wide yawn and nodded. “Excuse me. I don’t do mornings well. I was going to take a shower. Too late?”

I cleared my throat at the desire that heated my insides.

“There are showers with hot water in the facilities.”

“There are showers in the facility,” I said. “Roomier and enough hot water for two showers.”

“Yes, that is a luxury I can take without feeling guilty. Let me wake Ellie and gather our toiletries and clean clothes.” She turned back to the bedroom.

I sat on bench and played with my coffee. Who was it that was finding Antonia attractive? Victoria thought that was funny.

“Where’s NO?” Ellie asked as she was gently pushed forward by her mother. It appeared that Ellie, like her mother, didn’t do mornings well. I didn’t remember mornings affecting them like this previously.

“Perhaps they had a reason to be hyper vigilant on your first morning together.”

Was Victoria insinuating something, then I remembered the early morning visit. My memory of the visit of the dark energy had Victoria’s attention. While she absorbed my memories of that event, I was distracted with NO who jumped down from the cab-over.

“You were supposed to wake me up so we could see the sunrise,” Ellie scolded him but continued out the door with her mother. NO followed them out.

While Antonia and Ellie were busy cleaning up, I cleaned the inside of the RV. I wanted to keep busy physically while *my* thoughts were focused on a mantra. The idea of someone poking in my mind – my memories - was uncomfortable. I considered pulling out my ritual objects and begin my day like I usually do, with prayer, focus, and setting boundaries but with Victoria....

“Don’t let my presence stop you.”

“We need to set boundaries,” I said.

“If I’m you and you are me, just who are you setting....”

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There was that feeling again. I heard Antonia and Ellie talking.

“Look what I found!” Ellie ran past her mother excitedly. She held out a turquoise ring in her hand.

I looked at it suspiciously.

“*She should let it go.*” Antonia echoed my feelings about the ring. I hadn’t noticed any ring when I had showered and used the facilities the night before. As an intuitive, shouldn’t she know picking up abandoned things was unwise?

“Somebody left it on the sink. Finder’s keepers,” Ellie said in a sing-song voice.

That voice didn’t sound like the Ellie I knew.

“*It isn’t her. It’s an entity that lingers in the betwixt and between spaces.*”

I used a prayer for the owner of the ring to claim it and have done with Ellie and her mother. Ellie flung the ring away and it vanished.

“It was horrible,” Ellie cried.

Antonia grabbed Ellie and hugged her. The color around them looked better.

“Let’s get out of here,” Antonia said.

“I agree.” I sat in the driver’s pit while Ellie sat on the bench, hugging NO to her.

“Careful, he may barf on you if you hold him too tight,” Antonia said.

“That was so scary,” Ellie whispered.

“Lesson learned,” Antonia said and kissed Ellie on the forehead.

We all breathed a sigh of relief when we hit a paved roadway, then highway.

Antonia read the map for me. She was my copilot as we headed to central Oregon. Her aunt’s place was in the middle of farm and cattle country. It was a four-hour ride from where we were.

Chapter 11

“The further we drive away from that place, the more impossible it seems,” I said. “*Are you there?*”

“*What better place to be but here?*” Victoria asked.

So, she was still there - inside of me. I shrugged my shoulders uncomfortably, because I couldn’t feel her. Suddenly, NO, who was curled up on the dashboard lifted his head then jumped onto the empty passenger seat.

“Hello. Are we there yet?” Ellie came to sit on the edge of the raise separating the pit from the body of the RV. “Hello, NO.” She stroked NO who stood and leaned against her. “Where are we?” she asked, leaning to look out the windshield.

On either side of the road were farms and ranches with wide open spaces dotted with cows, sheep, llamas, horses and bales of hay waiting to be picked up. I was driving down a two-lane road which my spirit guides that finally came through said would branch off to the right. After looking at the map and using my pendulum I found our present road branched off up ahead. Instead of following the two-lane road our destination was on a dirt road heading toward a hill where I could occasionally see a large house part of the way up.

“According to the GPS, we’re right here.” I pointed at the GPS.

“That really helps,” Ellie said drily. “Can I have something to eat?”

“There’s food in the refrigerator to make a sandwich with. How’s your mother?”

“She’s okay. A nap always helps when her energy gets low.” Ellie got up and went to the kitchenette with NO following her. Ellie returned with a bag of chips and dip. Her legs dangled into the pit with NO jumping over her onto the passenger seat.

“How long until we get to Aunt Evie’s?” Ellie asked.

In the mirror I could see her scoop out dip and carefully transfer it to her mouth. My own mouth watered for a chip dipped with plenty of guacamole, but I needed to concentrate on driving.

“Maybe another twenty minutes,” I said.

In the rear-view mirror I could see her pause her chewing and tilt her head to the side. “She’s not there yet,” she reported. “Maybe we can drive around her house and see what it looks like.”

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“Hi. How long have I been asleep?” Antonia asked. “Ellie, no snacking before...” she leaned down to get an idea of the time, “lunch, is it?”

“I was waiting for you to fix me a sandwich. It’s too high for me to reach.” She had a smile in her voice. I remembered the dip was on the top shelf and the cranberry walnut chicken salad mix was on the bottom shelf with the bread.

“Where are we now?” Antonia asked.

Ellie pointed at the GPS, “We’re right there.”

“I see,” Antonia said dryly. Their similar response made me smile.

“There’s sprouted wheat bread and chicken salad with cranberries and walnuts. Are either of you allergic to the contents?” I asked.

“No. Did you want a sandwich, Vic?” Antonia asked.

“No. It’s too messy while driving. I’ll have a bottle of water, though.” I held up my empty bottle. Ellie took it and handed it to her mother. She then got up and went to watch her mother fix sandwiches. NO jumped up into the cab-over to watch them. I wonder what he finds so fascinating about Ellie.

When Ellie sat at the table with her sandwich, NO jumped down and sat on the bench next to her. Antonia brought a bottle of water and her sandwich and sat in the passenger seat. She looked up at my dangling pendulum. It was leaning to the left and yet the RV was level. I smiled at the expression on Antonia’s face.

“You’ve been using that for directions?” Antonia asked.

“It’s one of my tools and the GPS tells me just where I am. Did you nap well?”

“I miss my coven,” Antonia said. “I dreamed they were chanting for my protection.”

“I have a cell if you want to call them,” I said.

“It’s safer to connect through dreamtime.”

“What are you going to do if your aunt isn’t there?” I asked.

“I told her in a dream we were coming to see her,” Ellie said.

“What was her answer?” Antonia and I asked. I glanced at Antonia smiling.

“She wants to get to know us first,” Ellie said.

“No doubt,” Antonia said thoughtfully.

“Well by the GPS we’ll be there in ten minutes,” I said.

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“I don’t think so,” Ellie said and I too could see the reason why. We were nearing a dead end.

“It looks like the road we want is over there,” Antonia said.

I brought the RV to a stop. We were surrounded by fields and apparently this road once was a connector to the road that was a football field distance to the right.

I turned the RV around and retraced our route. We kept ending up at a dead end no matter what side road I took.

“Your aunt obviously doesn’t want us arriving yet,” I said.

“I take it you found what you needed at our last stop so there’s no going back to mark time,” Antonia said.

“Yes. I now have a new destination, once you two are safe.”

“Is it far from here?” Ellie asked.

“I don’t know. I’m looking for a --- Lida Vincente.” I didn’t want to say a vampire, and she certainly wasn’t a person.

Ellie made a surprised sound and Antonia coughed.

“What?” I asked.

“It’s someone we know *of*,” Antonia said carefully.

“Aunt Evie is friends with her,” Ellie said.

“As a witch from a long family line of witches, Evie St. James has connections with all sorts of people including with vampires and supernaturals. Do you know Lida Vincente is a vampire?” Antonia asked.

“Yes.”

“And that she’s not just any vampire?” Antonia said. “The Vincinte’s are an old and powerfully influential clan on two continents.”

“I know Lida is the head of the Vampire Council of the Americas. I’m just not sure what that means, but I’m just a messenger.”

Antonia looked at me curiously. I wondered what my aura looked like that gave her that furrow in her brow. Could she see that there are two of me?

“You’re wondering what business I have to someone so important in vampire land, and me a human?”

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Antonia laughed. “Well, as far as I know Aunt Evie is human too, so Lida isn’t repulsed by humans as most vampires that high tend to be.”

“They can’t be that repulsed. How else are they going to get their blood donations?” I asked.

“From animals,” Ellie said.

“Where do you learn all this stuff, Ellie?” I asked, watching her in the rearview mirror as she played with NO.

“Ellie can see past disguises of most species. She’s way beyond me,” Antonia said affectionately.

“So, what do you two plan on doing at your aunts?” I asked to be nosey since that is my business.

“Study,” Ellie said.

“I do energy healing. I’m a Reki Master and there may be a witch or two that I can work with,” Antonia said. “But the real reason is if Aunt Evie consents, I would like Ellie to study with her.”

“As talented as Ellie is I’m sure she would accept the challenge.”

“A challenge?” Antonia asked.

“I suspect Ellie has the ability to outshine her aunt. That is a challenge to keep your Aunt Evie learning.”

“Aunt Evie’s apprentices have all made a name for themselves and I haven’t heard anyone say she holds bad feelings for their successes,” Antonia said.

“How do you know so much about an aunt you’ve never met?” I asked.

“Aunt Jane,” Antonia and Ellie said together.

“Aunt Jane is from my mother’s more immediate side of the family, and she’s related to my father via 3rd and 2nd removed cousins. She didn’t tell me who she was at first. She wanted to know what we were about. At the time Ellie was three. Since then, she’s been popping in and out of our lives helping train me and offering to teach my coven some things, such as preparing potions from scratch. Ellie picks up things fast and has surpassed me in many things by the time she was seven. Jane wanted us to be prepared so when we were ready to petition the family for membership, we would know what would be asked of us. After my parents were so adamant

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about not being part of a family, it had me worried about just what it was that they didn't want to be a part of."

"Obligations," I said without thinking. "So, your mother's family does know about you two. I hope it works well for you both. Since we're not going to get anyway near her place today, what say we look for an overnight camping place and wait to be summoned?"

"Can we have pizza?" Ellie asked.

"Alright, we'll look for pizza and hook ups with shower facilities," I said.

"Do you want me to drive for a while?" Antonia asked.

"I'll be okay. We passed a sign that said camp facility back this way."

We drove by a handmade sign that announced a Renaissance Fair was in progress tacked under a campsite sign. We passed a few more and then the camp facility with another handmade sign for the fair below it with an arrow pointing to the right at the off ramp.

Ellie was excited at the possibility of attending a fair. Antonia explained to her what a Renaissance Fair was about. Wearing costumes added to her excitement and the RV was vibrating happy energy.

Signs along the side road directed us to camp sites away from regular parking. As I headed to the camp site with facilities, I conjured an available space. I could feel Antonia and Ellie doing the same, but they didn't have Victoria's power which I could feel radiating from the top of my head. I glanced in the mirror to see if my hair was standing up. It wasn't but my face was flushed.

"Go that way," an excited Ellie said. She pointed down a dirt packed row lined on both sides with clothing, antique weapons resting in racks, modern lawn chairs and BBQs of all shapes and sizes. The RVs were of varying sizes, from big buses to vans. Signs said staff so I kept going. At the end and to the right was a spot without a sign indicating it was taken. I maneuvered the RV into place, and once parked Antonia and Ellie were out the door excited. Ellie helped her mother get the hoses attached while I got the RV leveled.

"We're clear," Antonia said.

I pressed the buttons to expand the bedroom and dining area.

Though the side mirror I watched a man dressed as a Renaissance Merchant with a prominent belly stop to speak to Antonia. Both Antonia and Ellie pointed at the RV. It must be me he's looking for. I stepped outside.

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“A tax collector,” Victoria says with amusement.

He works for the IRS I picked up.

“Milady informed me you are entrusted with the money pouch,” he said jovially.

“Aye, that I do, matey.” And I grinned.

He grimaced at my bad try and shook his head. “You’re lucky this spot is open. The person that reserved it had a family emergency and cancelled. It’s a nice crowd around here. I see you have a cat. Keep it indoors. We have a lot of dogs that would eat it. Okay then. It’s fifty dollars a night for the park and twenty-five for our fair. How long are you staying?”

“Do I have to give you a time now?”

“No. You can rent it by the day. It’s not like we’ll have a difficult time to fill the spot. It’s first come first serve and you rolled in right on time.” He held up a sign that said Available. See Parking Attendant.

When our business was concluded I joined Antonia and Ellie. Our stomachs growled at the same time.

“Let’s go see if they have something to eat,” I said as delicious smells from the fairgrounds came over us in a cloud. The sudden fluttering of a colorful bird and the impact on my shoulder had me grabbing for something to hold onto. I felt Antonia grab my arm to steady me.

Ellie was holding her hands to her mouth and jumping up and down.

I looked at the scarlet macaw that moved around on my shoulder for a better purchase.

“NO?”

“Who else did you expect?” he asked.

“Oh goodness,” Antonia gasped.

Ellie kept jumping up and down with glee.

“You could have morphed to a smaller bird so Ellie could carry you. You’re hurting my shoulder.”

Antonia glared at NO in his new form. “You’re a vampire.”

I waited for NO to say something, but it came out in a squawk, fluttering of his wings, which wacked me in the face, then he resettled.

“Let’s go get something to eat. NO please.” I held out my arm so he could climb down to my arm instead of my shoulder. That didn’t help. His talons hurt my arm too.

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Ellie disappeared into the RV and came back with my new thick coat. It wasn't cold so I was going to be sweating. That gave me something to consider. Do I want to sweat on a nice warm day or get my arm or shoulder gouged out?

"Just don't feed him anything," I warned both women. "I don't want bird poop lines down my back." That got giggles from Ellie.

NO preened himself and looked down at Ellie. I wondered why NO wanted to come along with us. I would have preferred him staying in the RV just in case the RV needed extra protection.

"You didn't know he was a vampire?" Antonia asked.

"I thought he was a beastie. It's not like he tells me things about himself. I like him as a cat."

"I like you too, kid," NO said in his best imitation of Humphrey Bogart.

"What about me?" Ellie said skipping beside me.

"You're my BFF," NO said in another voice.

"Can I carry him?" Ellie asked.

"Does he bite?" Antonia asked.

"Only, when necessary," NO answered for himself.

NO fluttered to Ellie's shoulder. She cringed when he landed on her shoulder, but she gave him a gentle pat on his red head. Ellie and NO led the way to the entrance of the fair.

I squinted at NOs form. Did it seem smaller?

"He's making himself smaller," Antonia said with wonder. "Well, if he takes a nip of her, he's going to be a bundle of feathers not even fit for a hat."

NO squawked and added what I thought were cackles of laughter. We all laughed.

I showed the pass I purchased at the entrance, and we all hungrily followed the smoke of cooking edibles. There were a lot of comments about NO and Ellie beamed a radiant color in her aura as she tried to draw herself up with pride. If anyone came too close to Ellie, NO shouted, various phrases from "Off with your hands!" and "Give us some space now, make way for my princess." I was wondering when he would pick up the phrases the callers announcing their lords and ladies' procession. Some of it was a bit bawdy.

Antonia leaned forward and spoke to NO. "Don't try to be so smart. You may find someone throwing a bag over your head."

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That I was hoping would make him not to use bawdy language.

“I’ll protect, NO,” Ellie said.

We found a nice slope under the shade of a huge tree where I left Ellie and Antonia with NO. Ellie was relieved that NO roosted in a branch above them.

I went to get some fruit and shish kabobs with vegetables and meat. While I was heading back, I heard an uproar along with loud squawking, then the brilliant scarlet and blue that flew high above the crowds swooped down to me. NO landed on my shoulder with everyone around me impressed. The few people that wanted to get close NO shouted, “Back off you scallywag.” He then nuzzled my ear. He was the hit of the marketplace.

Balancing NO on my shoulders, holding packages of shish kabobs and fruit and keeping NO from eating the fruit was no small feat. I wasn’t walking in a straight line due in part to my balancing act and in part because of the crowds. I could see Ellie rushing toward me. My heart skipped a beat until I saw Antonia not far behind her. Ellie flung her arms around me and just held me so tight I couldn’t move. A concerned Antonia relieved me of the food. I put one arm around Ellie while keeping my other shoulder up so NO would have to dig in for a better purchase.

“Are you two okay?”

A man dressed in the theme of the fair appeared, clanging his way to us. His face was sweaty, and his aura confirmed he was angry.

“They got away! But mind you, I’ve put the word out and anyone with scratches on his face we’ll put them behind bars. I see your bird found a safe shoulder.” He nodded to Antonia and moved quickly away when someone shouted at him.

“What happened?” I asked.

“Two men tried to grab us. NO clawed one of them. They weren’t dressed like the fair people,” Antonia said softly. “Let’s find some shade and eat.”

I followed Antonia, or actually, I was following the food with Ellie wrapped around me. I was the closest she could get to NO. Antonia set everything down on a bench under stretched gunny sacks to give shade to those sitting on the benches. Ellie grabbed a fruit cup and handed NO a grape. She ignored her own food, feeding NO until he ate no more.

I could see the same man who I am assuming is a sheriff dressed in Renaissance garb. He was walking around people and holding a plain pole with a horizontal bar wrapped in leather that

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birds roosted on. NO seemed to know exactly what it was and who it was for because he flew to it. The man wore a big smile as he stopped at our table with NO proudly standing on the T bar.

“My mother wants you to have this. She saw the little one struggling to carry him and thought this would be nicer.”

I dug in my pocket and pulled out sixty dollars the price I knew his mother was selling this T-bar for. “I saw her stall and admired her work,” I lied. “It’s very kind of you and your mother to have thought of us.”

Someone still had to hold the stick with NO on it. The two nice things about it were, it gave my shoulder a break and when we stopped to look at something I could set the end of the pole in the ground. The pole was too thick for Ellie’s hands unless she held it with both hands and that would make walking difficult for her. Ellie was so happy with the gift, she finally ate her shish kabob and chatted about how the two men thought they were being smart, but Ellie knew they were there. What she wasn’t expecting was NO to attack one and take off. She was hoping for something more spectacular, but she could understand why NO didn’t use magic to get rid of them.

I leaned forward and said in a low voice, “Ellie, let’s talk about this when there are less people to hear.”

“They can’t hear,” she said confidently, “There’s a cocoon around us.”

I was startled because I would know if there was something around us.

“It’s not something that will prevent those that you have good reason to worry about harming you,” Victoria said.

“Who put the cocoon around us?” I asked.

Ellie paused in her eating and thought about it. She shook her head. “I don’t know.”

“Maybe it’s Aunt Evie,” Antonia said hopefully.

“You don’t think she’ll welcome you?” I asked, catching wistfulness in Antonia’s voice.

“It would be nice to not have to be the only one worrying about us. If there weren’t kidnappers lurking around or some FBI nut looking for us, I would say I can take care of us just fine.”

I nodded, not wishing for any more conversation in public. We spent the rest of the late afternoon wandering around the fair. On our walk back to our RV we were part of a small crowd heading in the same direction. I listened as Ellie chatted excitedly to the children dressed in

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costume and Antonia laughed with a group of costumed fair participants. By the energy around Ellie and her two new friends, they were excited about one of the boys who carried his pet lizard in his pocket. As we entered the RV area BBQs were smoking in the area with spicy smells heavy in the smoke. The children ran to change out of their costumes and adults peeled off to their RVs. Antonia and Ellie rejoined me and NO.

“We’ve been invited to a BBQ,” Antonia said. “Angelica and her husband are vegan, and he’s been heating up the coals getting ready for tonight’s gathering, she said.”

“Bianca wants us to bring NO,” Ellie added.

“You’re not tired?” I asked Ellie as a tease.

“No. Did you know that Bianca’s parents have a crystal shop? They dig up their own crystals!” Ellie’s eyes were open so wide I could see the whites in the dusk.

“What’s so wonderful about that?” I teased.

“Are you kidding?” Ellie asked flabbergasted. “You can be the first to touch your own crystal! It’s like birthing a baby!”

NO squawked and flapped his wings, nearly taking off with the perch he had his talons wrapped around to keep his balance as we walked. Ellie giggled as I tried to balance the bird and perch without tripping over the pole.

As we joined the party goers there was plenty of food set out on the park benches that had been moved close together. Ellie reminded me of a bag of sweets I had stashed and forgotten about in one of the cupboards. We didn’t come to the party empty handed after all. It was the first thing that ran out. There was plenty of conversation and laughter to share. It was a joyous gathering with no under currents of darkness. As it got later, people put out their fires and headed to bed. I was leaning back in a chaise lounge and admiring the sky filled with so many stars and dozed off. I was startled when a shadow covered the sky for a moment. It happened so fast I thought maybe I just blinked. I sat up and looked around.

“*What was that?*” I didn’t hear any response from Victoria and NO was in the RV, so I put it down to me falling asleep. Antonia was sitting in the chair next to mine speaking in low tones with Angelica. She and Don who owned a gemstone and new age store were also artists that created sculptures of gods and goddess. Antonia and Angelica had sleeping children in their laps hidden under blankets. Everything seemed peaceful.

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Looking back up at the stars I blinked a few times startled. I thought I saw a dark shape pass over us. I could feel Victoria stirring just as I noticed the energy of the night change.

"That's the second time I saw a dark shadow in the sky," I told Victoria.

Vampires. You are being watched, Victoria said.

Victoria's presence became more intense and as she became stronger my senses became sharper. The world around me was alive and vibrating with more intensity than I was used to even on a good day. Antonia touched my shoulder, bringing me back to where we were.

"Are you alright?" Antonia asked concerned.

"I'm okay. I was just in a strange dream," I said.

"It's getting late. Time to put Ellie to bed," Antonia said.

We said goodnights to Don and Angelica. Ellie was like a sleepwalker guided to the RV by her mother. NO wasn't in the RV but Antonia and Ellie didn't notice. Each used the toilet and went directly to bed.

Michael is out doing a perimeter search. When he returns, we will decide what to do about your watchers, Victoria said.

"I thought I hid myself from them."

I felt something shift and interesting information came to mind about supernaturals. Everything is about energy no matter what dimension an entity is from. I left the RV to see what NO was investigating.

Don't be too eager to test this new you out. You'll tempt the Fates, Victoria said.

That made me pause. I had thought the need to see what NO was investigating came from Victoria. I leaned against the RV and took a few moments to see if my senses were heightened or if it was just my normal self being more aware.

Michael appeared as an apparition and bowed respectfully to me/Victoria.

"Mistress," he said then turned slightly to give us a view of what was behind him. "There is a gathering. I don't know if they are good messengers to request an audience with Lady Leda Vincente."

I turned to what sounded like someone stumbling around.

"Oh, hey," a man said. I could smell beer on his breath, and I could see clearly that his costume was on awkwardly. "Can you tell me where the vendors are parked? I'm all mixed up."

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“Right up that row,” I said and just as quickly blocked his arm that came up, and Michael hit him on the head. The man collapsed on the ground.

We were quiet as we sensed what was going on around us. I leaned down and felt for a pulse. There was a faint one. I picked him up as if it were a bag of coffee and carried him to the front of the vendors’ row and rolled him, so he was out of the way of foot traffic. I continued to walk around to see if there were any other night people then returned to my RV. I could feel that Victoria was wide awake and wanting to see what this dimension was like, but I was tired and didn’t want to run myself down.

Once we were back in the RV Michael reverted to his cat form and joined me in the cab over. I went to sleep but just before I lost consciousness, I could feel Victoria sliding out of the cab over.

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Chapter 12

The next morning, I was awakened by something dropping in the galley. I peered over the railing and Antonia was cooking and at the same time talking on a cell phone. I laid back and heard both conversations. I'm amazed how easy it is to overhear both voices.

"I don't know when," Antonia said in a very low voice.

"Well find out," a male voice said.

"And just how am I supposed to do that when he's not talking to me?"

"Why the hell didn't you just go there and face him?"

"I already told you why. This conversation isn't going anywhere. Bye."

"Why would she have that conversation when she knows I will overhear it?" I asked Victoria.

"It's not happening right now," Victoria said.

"What?"

"You're hearing a conversation she had elsewhere. She's replaying it in her head."

"Am I going to be hearing people's thoughts?" I demand.

"You must have something that's hers that you're touching."

I rolled over to the ladder and climbed down. In the corner of the bed padding I spotted a bracelet that I had seen Antonia wearing when we first met. I noticed that Ellie liked it, showing it off to NO. I picked it up and laid it on the table.

"Good morning," Antonia said. She looked at the bracelet. "I thought Ellie lost it. I would give it to her but it's too big for her."

"Good morning. She must have been showing it to NO up there. The onions smell good," I said as I passed her to use the toilet. When I returned Antonia was halving an omelet and splitting it on two plates. She opened the door and called for Ellie.

"I made you and Ellie an omelet. I only eat toast for breakfast."

Ellie came into the RV looking like she had been playing pretty hard. NO in his bird form flew into the RV.

"Take a shower first," Antonia said.

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“They found Mr. Piaster unconscious,” Ellie reported. She leaned forward in a conspirator way and added, “He’s smelled like a brewery. His wife thinks the devil is responsible for the way he was found because he had a strange mark on his body.”

“What kind of a mark?” I asked.

“The devils mark,” she whispered dramatically. She spotted the bracelet and laid claim to it, pressing it against her chest with a wide smile.

NO flew to the overhead bed and morphed back to a cat.

“Just what kind of mark is that?” her mother asked.

Ellie shrugged her shoulders and continued to the bedroom, sliding the bracelet up her arm, past her elbow.

“I told you never take someone’s word for things like that. See for yourself,” Antonia called after her.

“It was on his ...well, you know what,” Ellie said. Grinning she closed the shower door.

“Are you going to go and find out just what the devil’s mark is about?” I asked.

“I would rather not. I just want to end this odyssey and find a permanent home,” Antonia said.

“What happens if your aunt doesn’t take you in?”

“You mean take Ellie as a student? Then I’ll have to find another teacher. Ellie needs a mentor who is smarter than her and who can protect her from outside threats while she learns.”

“What about you?” I asked.

“Me?” Antonia laughed. She shook her head ruefully.

I studied her for a few moments wondering. I could see power radiating from her center, not her heart chakra but an inner power and I knew it was because of Victoria that I could see this. It dawned on me why Antonia’s aura had a black ring around its outside. She was protecting herself. Why was she hiding her own talents?

“You may not be a threat, but you have more power than most witches I’ve met. My magic group would love to have you as a member.”

Antonia returned to my stare, silent at first. “Is this a come on?”

I burst out laughing. “I get you don’t want to discuss your business, but you can just say that instead of accusing me of coming on to you.” I finished my omelet, washed my dishes, dried them and put them away.

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Ellie came out with her hair wrapped in a towel and wearing clean clothes. “Are we going to go back to the fair?”

“Not me,” I said. I had no interest. I was more interested in seeing what was around the parking lot to see if I could spot what Victoria said were watchers. I looked at the cab over where NO was stretching his cat body and then resettled and curled up for sleep.

“What’s at the fair that you want to see?” Antonia asked.

“We can go to Bianca’s parents’ crystal booth and see what they have.”

“We could,” Antonia said.

When they left, I tidied up the RV. When I finished I left to look around the parking lot and beyond. NO, as a ball of energy, came along. The area around the parking lot was primarily flat with dirt pounded down for vehicles of all kinds, some with hookups and some without. The area the fair was using was a large park with a lake, trees, and green slopes - great for overnight camping. However, I was interested in just beyond that where a line of trees separated the parking lots from the road. There was an unusual activity on the treetops. Black birds.

When I got to the trees, I was disappointed. No birds. I don’t know what I expected but there was nothing to make sense. Looking up the road, I shaded my eyes. Something like a dark cloud was off to the right. I waited to see what the cloud was about, but it dissipated before my eyes.

Strange.

“*It’s an omen,*” Victoria said.

I heard dark clouds were omens, but that was for dream interpretation. If we were in a building, I would say it was something evil but this was in the middle of a field. I waited to hear from my guardians and then realized I hadn’t heard from anyone since Victoria came aboard. I also haven’t dreamed.

“I haven’t dreamed for ages. I recall having guardians or angels. I now have servants from other realms that come to my bidding,” Victoria said amused.

“That’s what happens when you train with a vampire as your mentor,” I thought back.

“When I was human, my mentor taught me that guardians and whatever else I called upon as counselors are parts of myself, just closer to the Source on that side of the veil my

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physical self can't access. We are all part of the quantum chemical cloud with fractals of us on many planets, timelines and places unknown, working on lessons."

"Who's keeping track of all this?" I said in jest. "I'm thinking how confusing it would be if many of me ended up in front of the pearly white gates at the same time."

"If you believe you'll be in front of Pearly White Gates, that's where you'll be, until you're ready for reality, then a whole new reality opens up. Don't you listen to people who channel people who've died?"

"Not really. So, about this different choice you want vampires on my timeline to know about, what happens to vampires that aren't so nice?"

"Vampires on a higher vibration must not interfere with other's free will. Power can corrupt if the wielder doesn't self-examine constantly."

"What if someone says no?" I asked, surprising myself that I wasn't angry. "I seem to remember I didn't agree to this."

"How do you know I'm not your higher self?"

I laughed at that then stopped when a flock of black birds roosting in the trees above me flew away.

"It's going to be hot today," we both observed.

"It's been a long time since I've walked under the sun without covering my skin,"

Victoria said.

"What's with that? How come most vampires can't be under the sun?"

"The ultraviolet rays. Many of the beings that were here during the early times of earth, had no problem with the sun because the ultraviolet rays didn't penetrate the atmospheric cover over earth. A cataclysm occurred which removed the cover and many species couldn't tolerate the ultraviolet rays and went underground or moved through the many portals off the planet. When our DNA is changed via a virus that a vampire carries, our skin becomes sensitive to the ultraviolet rays."

"That is enlightening about vampires. What about beasties and some of the other supernaturals?"

"Many of them cross from different worlds via portals and either live in underground cities or stick to nighttime living."

Both of us turned our attention to a flock of birds returning to the tree.

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"They are curious about you," Victoria mocked. "They've returned with new instructions."

"About us, you mean," I said.

"They are from Antonia's clan. They can hear you but unless they have directions from their mistress, they will not answer you."

"Messengers," I said as I watched them move around on the branches above me. I quickly moved from under the tree, remembering I had once asked a flock of pigeons to follow a stalker and poop on his head. That was one of the few times I let the stalker see that he was being stalked. Stalkers aren't always men. Women stalkers get more upset with my behavior modification methods than the men, but the women were more willing to get help, which made it worth it. I hope this doesn't mean I am getting the three fingers back.

Victoria was amused.

"Of course I find it funny," she said.

"How do you know what is going on with the birds?" I asked. "You've been through this before?"

"Yes. The only thing I can help you with is with the vampires. Until then, do what comes natural...help someone find their way."

"Find their way... What's going on?" I turn to the fast-approaching dust cloud made by many fast moving vehicles.

Ambulances were arriving and there were more than one. Police vehicles too. NO disappeared in a flash. I started to jog back to the parking lot.

"We need to leave. The people that don't want us to reach Lady Leda and their aunt's people are attacking each other and leaving bodies everywhere," Victoria said. "They have no respect for the innocent. NO is collecting Ellie and her mother."

At the RV I began to unhook the hoses and store everything. I retracted the rooms and started the engine. Rather than back out, I drove further into the parking area. I spotted Ellie and Antonia. It was difficult to miss a woman carrying a bright colored bird on her shoulder. They were heading back to the parking lot but had to move further away due to the emergency vehicles.

"They will catch up with us," I said. I have confidence in their locating me since they had been finding me when they needed me. I lost sight of them as I headed to the exit out the back

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side. Suddenly a bright bird fluttered by my windshield. I stopped. The door was opened, and I turned to see Ellie being pushed in by Antonia and NO flew in over their heads. Ellie dropped on the floor and cried.

“We need to get out of here,” Antonia said. “Those men from the caravan are here and they tried to grab us. They have guns. We were able to distract them and summon help enough for us to escape. We heard shots fired and just kept running. We didn’t know if we could get away.” Antonia hugged Ellie.

I was already rolling to the exit and out onto another road going I don’t know where exactly, but it was away from all the drama. I passed a few towns before I took the off ramp and entered a small town. Antonia had put Ellie to bed and NO in his cat form was staying near her.

“They apparently got out of jail sooner than I thought they could,” I said feeling disappointed in law enforcement.

“I told you one of them works for the FBI. He could have told them anything. What are we doing here?” Antonia asked.

“It’s still near your aunt’s place and we can get a good meal as well as park the RV and get a break,” I said.

“How do you know... Oh. I can feel something is off here,” Antonia said. She looked out the window as we passed small businesses and homes intermixed.

“This is a betwixt and between place. Fairies, dwarfs, and all sorts of other creatures you’ve heard in Fairy tales are here.” That was Victoria speaking. With her senses fully engaged I could feel all sorts of strange energy as if we had passed into another dimension.

Antonia laughed nervously and glanced at me and then out the windshield, not knowing if I or I should say, Victoria was speaking the truth.

I pulled into the parking lot for a diner.

“Do you want to wake Ellie?”

“Not particularly. NO will watch her, right?”

“Yes. They’re best friends,” Victoria said. I was wondering why she was stepping in when she said she would only do so when we ran into vampires.

I stepped out of the RV and waited for Antonia to follow. She had gone to check on Ellie first. I took a few steps toward the diner when a vampire stepped onto the porch. He was dressed

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as vampires do when in daylight. All his skin was covered with clothing and glasses darker than most.

I stepped onto the porch and whatever aura or power Victoria radiated, this guy stepped back hastily. I stopped and waited for Antonia to join me. She glanced at the vampire that had moved back into the darkened interior. I could see very well in the room and walked to a table near the window so I could see the RV.

Two menus were placed before us. After we ordered I leaned forward to speak to Antonia. "Whatever conversation we have, it will be overheard."

For the duration of the dinner, we spoke little. I paid for the meal and we left.

Once back in the RV I could feel Antonia glaring at me.

"I stopped there because we need to let your aunt know where you are. Also, whoever is following you, they'll take care of us. This town is behind your aunt's property." I have no idea how I knew that.

"Where are we going to stay until I get word?"

"Right here. Whoever is following you won't be able to enter here unless they're part of your aunt's group."

"How do you know so much," Antonia demanded.

"The same way Ellie knows things."

A knock on the door had me getting up and opening the door.

"Your aunt has arrived home. In two hours, she'll be ready to receive you." The young woman handed Antonia a card. "That will open the gate." She then left.

"Things are moving fast now," I said. "Something is agitating the air around us."

"I'll bet it's those men following us," Antonia said. She stretched her legs out, for the first time in a while looking relieved. She suddenly stood up. "I'm going to nap."

Normally, I would meditate or speak with my guides, which I decided I would do just to see what would happen.

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Chapter 13

I wasn't invited to the family meeting. The energy around the messenger was enough to make me know asking to come along wouldn't be welcomed. I was getting anxious to get Victoria's business finished with. I don't know why the anxiety and I'm sure it wasn't coming from Victoria. Was it the mixture of our energies?

"Let's take a walk," Victoria said.

"It's too dark outside," I said.

"No problem. It's unlike our world and I want to see if it's because of our meld or the vibrational differences between worlds," Victoria said.

"Our?" I repeat.

"Ours," NO said.

The moment Victoria became dominant I felt overwhelmed with sensory overload. This isn't a normal night stroll, my sane side thought. I know it's pitch dark, yet my feet have no problem moving rapidly over the uneven surface. I glanced at NO about five feet to the left of me. He's an apparition whose outline is ghostly with no real physical substance yet in the night I can see the outline. Victoria processed everything so quickly I decided to withdraw and just go along for the ride, as was becoming my habit.

"You need to stop being so melodramatic and just enjoy the experience," Victoria said impatiently.

I wonder if elves and fairies she had spoken to Antonia about earlier are around and if the stories of humans stumbling into fairy gatherings are as dangerous as children's tales go.

"Do be quieter," Victoria admonishes me.

"Don't listen to my thoughts," I said.

"Who are you?" A deep voice from out of the darkness demands.

Suddenly I'm surrounded by darker shapes than any of the physical forms of trees or fences that Victoria was passing.

I say *I* because it is my body that is being confronted. However, before my question is finished and *I* react with fear because their energy is scary, it is effectively handled by Victoria.

They all are wearing hoods over their heads but it's obvious they are vampires and not high enough in the hierarchy to warrant respect from Victoria. They are new and out for a jaunt. I know that because Victoria knows that.

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“Who is your leader and by what right have you to challenge me?” she says haughtily.
“Identify your lineage and place.”

And suddenly I am moving quickly with Michael in perfect synchronization protecting my back. As sudden as it started it ended. We are now alone.

“Silly fledglings,” Victoria said.

“Not much of a challenge,” Michael agreed.

The rush from the encounter has me, us, invigorated and hungry. Hungry for what has me concerned.

“Oh, stop worrying,” Victoria says. “I’ll preserve your vanilla status and refrain from any assimilar urges.”

In my mind I can see that assimilar meant she didn’t drink the blood of another vampire. For a brief moment I also understood the power that would give her since in the DNA of that vampire was all knowledge he or she had gained from many lives.

Victoria was amused. *“To make it worth my effort of blooding another vampire, she or he would have to be of a certain pedigree, meaning, within their DNA they would have to be a virtual library of knowledge. Not all vampires have the ability to incorporate the entire DNA of knowledge from a being they blooded. You do need to educate yourself on vampires.”*

I disagreed.

“Now that they know we’re here, do we wait or follow them?” Michael asked.

“By their skills I would say their creatrix or sire isn’t worth our visit. We’ll continue our stroll and see what else we stir up.”

Thank goodness we didn’t meet up with any more night creatures, yet I felt Victoria was satisfied with her and Michael’s inspection of the area. By the time we returned back to the RV I knew how to recognize night creatures. Once in the RV I was given charge of my body. When Victoria withdrew, I felt exhausted. My legs shook and I could only roll into the bed in the back.

“Am I always going to feel like this after you use my body?”

“Well, we did cover a lot of ground in a short time. Why don’t you get some rest and we’ll keep watch,” Victoria said.

I’m too tired to argue. Even my brain feels tired with all the new input it has taken in.

I dream of witches and moonlight dancing. I’m sure it’s because of the residual energy left by Antonia and Ellie on the bed and pillow.

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Chapter 14

I didn't know what time it was, but the sun is bright behind the curtains. I not only feel refreshed but eager to finish my vacation and head home. A shower then something to eat are the first two things on my To-Do list, then I'll need to strategize on how I can meet Lida Vincinte. I have no doubt I will meet up with her. My spirit guides have always come through, and I have Victoria's will power behind the job - who won't go home without meeting her, so that's my desire too.

While showering I reviewed what I had in the cupboards and realized they were bare. I'll have to go shopping. While I tied my hiking boots I could smell fresh coffee and the unmistakable smell of a diner open for business. How clever of me to have parked in a diner's parking lot.

A solid knock on the door to the camper has me checking my amulets but I feel no threat. I peer out the door and can see nothing and at the same time another solid knock.

An apparition? Where is NO? I give a quick glance around then open the door. All I see peering above NOs orange fluff are squinting eyes with bushy brows and blow away hair with no discernable color.

"Is this your cat?" the small person in a mature voice inquires.

"Yes."

"He eats a lot. You owe me for two meals."

"How is your coffee?" I asked.

"Good enough for refills," he answered.

"Then I'll owe you for three meals and coffee."

He nods and still holding NO he turns and heads to the diner which isn't that far from the RV.

"You need to get NO back from him," Victoria said.

It didn't take many strides from me to overtake the little person and quicker than I thought I could move, I plucked NO from his arms. NO was like a warm lifeless blanket that I draped over my arms. I rested his head on my forearm.

Did NO have a spell on him? I didn't even feel a purr from him.

"Nice kitty." The little person looked up at me.

"He can be," I responded. "Just what were you doing with my cat?"

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“Just talking. Not many cats want to talk with me. I think I bore them. My names Colin,” he said and offered a hand.

“Don’t shake hands with him,” Victoria says.

“I’m Vic,” I say and nod my head instead of shifting NOs weight to free a hand to shake. He smiles like it’s no big deal.

We walked through a parking lot where all sorts of vehicles varying in sizes, makes, models and years and all of them are shiny and spotless as if fresh from a car show. Quite an eclectic group of customers.

As I climbed the wooden steps to the deck that surrounds the front of the diner I noticed two things right away. One, there is no satisfying clumping sound of my boots on wooden stairs and two, the diner is a well-maintained private Pullman railcar. I peered through an unusually clean window and could see an opulent interior that reminds me of the baroque era which is odd for a diner. I wondered how the owner kept the place so clean from the grill grease that I can smell filling the air. My stomach growls in anticipation of eating.

Colin gestures to me to enter the diner before him. As we stepped across the threshold I catch in my peripheral vision a woman behind a cash register.

“I told you I could get her to come. No sweat,” Colin says to her.

“All you needed to do is ask,” I replied. I sat at the counter and placed NO on the seat next to me, the only two available places to sit. NO raised his head and blinked his golden eyes at me. It’s his first sign of life. I felt relieved.

I took a deep breath at the smell of fresh coffee and close my eyes to savor the moment. When I opened my eyes a large mug of steaming coffee is before me. I placed both of my hands around it and say a protection prayer then take a sip. It’s heavenly.

“So,” I said. “Why do you want me here?”

“Let her have breakfast first,” an old man behind the grill says grouchily and slides a plate filled with a steaming omelet topped with sliced avocados and potatoes on a counter that extends into the Pullman car through a window. The kitchen is separate from the railcar which may be the reason why the interior is not covered in cooking grease.

“Is the food good?” I ask NO.

“It’s better than the cat food you feed me,” he responded, then yawned, revealing his fangs that glint in the light.

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I don't feed NO just any cat food. It's Feline Caviar, an expensive but holistic meal without all the chemicals and body parts that aren't healthy to consume. NO eats better grade food than I eat. I thought he liked his meals which I'm sure he supplements with what he catches on his night prowls. I shook my head to rid my head of images of a vampire cat on the hunt and read the menu that is slid on the counter toward me. The pictures are nice. I pointed at a picture that shows everything in it – meat, potatoes, onions, eggs, cheese and vegetables.

While that is in the making, I glanced around at the customers filling every available seat in booths and around the counter with no one taking any notice of me and NO. I would think NO would attract a lot of attention since animals are not allowed in eating establishments unless in the service capacity. I glanced at NO. His plumed tail is dangling over the seat, twitching no more than it usually is when he's napping with one ear pointed toward me.

"While I'm waiting, do you want to give me an idea of why you want me here?" I asked.

"We need an agent," the woman at the cash register said.

I looked at her closer, relaxing my eyes. She's not human or bestie but she does have a glimmer around her. I haven't been around fairies, but I'll make a guess this is what she is and it's not because she has a *naturally* slim body, a Barbie doll copy, with hair barely covering the tips of her ears. Nor because I ruled out a gnome. Nope. It's because her skin is translucent, her eyes are a luminescent color not found in earth animals, and she had changed size twice since I looked at her. Though fairies are normally small they can change size.

Okay. I'll admit it didn't take so long to identify what she is because I heard Victoria whisper, "Don't trust that fairy and gnome."

Both earth gnomes and fairies are guardians of the planet Earth. Some books say they work for heavenly angels to help Mother Gaia. Just what kind of job do they want me for? Of course, my imagination had to be curbed so I don't go off thinking of 'things' they may have lost and need back. If I wasn't careful, I would be visiting parts unknown and no telling how much human time would pass before I returned.

Victoria is curious too.

Fairy tales should be taken seriously. So, I asked, "Just where am I?"

"In Corey's Diner. So, are you available for hire?"

"Tell me what the job is," I said.

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“We need someone to speak with Lady Lida about her clan contaminating our land with their presence,” the gnome, Colin said.

“They are interfering with our caretaking of the lands,” the fairy said.

“Lady Lida Vincinte, the Supreme Leader of the Vincinte Council of the Americas? You want me to tell a vampire to move?” I asked, thinking at the same time, not likely.

“My family can’t return to the land we have been tending for thousands of years,” the fairy said.

“That’s longer than she’s been in existence,” Colin said.

“We need to continue with our nature work,” the fairy said.

“When did this happen?” I asked just to make conversation while I tried to figure out how a vampire can prevent earth spirits from returning home and more importantly, wondered if a human is the right agent for this type of meeting. Then I thought of how vulnerable the messenger is in matters of supernaturals and earth spirits, something I have misgivings on.

“The passage of human time is not something we deal with,” Colin says.

The fairy smiled and the image of the diner wavered then solidified. My order was placed before me and my coffee mug looked as if I hadn’t taken a sip.

“Just how real is this?” I asked, then pushed the plate away and regretfully didn’t take a sip of the coffee. My consolation, though not by much, is that if the doorway to fairyland is closed, then I don’t have to worry about time in my dimension passing quickly while I’m in their dimension.

“All it takes is a sip,” someone whispered. I looked around but no one is nearby.

Under the guise of being their agent I could get an audience with Lady Leda Vincinte.

“So how do I get an audience with Lady Leda?”

“Ask.”

“That simple?”

“She is obligated to hear our request for an audience due to her clan moved in without asking our permission,” Colin said.

“Her clan has broken a rule,” the fairy said. “The last time that was done...” she sighed, “well, it’s before humans started storytelling to pass down their version of events, seldom truthful and seldom flattering to their neighbors, I might add. This habit to justify abuse has gotten out of hand.”

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“Stick to our problem,” Colin rumbled.

The fairy shot Colin a frown. “The fragile relationship between the earth spirit kingdoms and vampires can be damaged with dangerous consequences...to all entities,” she said.

“Make the deal,” Victoria said. *“It’s our way in.”*

“Let’s talk fee,” I said.

“We don’t deal in human currency. We don’t use it,” Colin explained.

I was about to ask what they use because if it’s a pot of gold the US government agents would confiscate it should they find out I had that much gold. Victoria nudged me not to take something of substance from their world to mine. That set me to thinking of the stories of how greedy humans were bound to the fairylands when they tried to remove something from that reality. However, it wasn’t all of that that had me hesitating. To make a deal I would be opening another door to possibilities. My PI client world was not just with humans and supernaturals but now with the earth spirits, fairies and gnomes and whoever they associated with...and then there were the vampires.

“Sure, I’ll take the deal. What do we do, pinkie swear?” Victoria mocked.

“You leave a lock of your hair,” the fairy said.

“I’m not leaving anything of mine with you,” I said feeling outraged at Victoria. “What do you think I am, witless?”

“It is how you will have access to our lands without you becoming bound to its enchantments. Your lock of hair will be kept in a safe place,” the fairy said, touching her chest, as if she had a heart.

Do fairies have a heart? They aren’t of the same physical composition but of a vibration that gives them the appearance of solid mass...so do they have a heart? No. No more than they would bleed if cut.

“I accept and agree to the terms,” Victoria said and she reached up and pulled some of my hair out. The scary part is I didn’t feel the loss of my hair.

The fairy counted the five strands and rolled them between her fingers and everything around me disappeared. I found myself standing under a tree with NO sitting beside me swishing his tail agitatedly and causing dust to rise. The parking lot with all the lovely cars is gone.

“Victoria, you didn’t sell my soul, did you?”

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“Our soul and of course not. They were my hair strands, and it will be interesting to see if I can cross into fairyland being a vampire and all.”

“Oh my,” I mock, “A vampire in fairyland.”

Victoria laughed.

“So, what’s next?” I asked Victoria.

“We wait while you take a nap. I can feel your energy is slow.”

“I need real food. I’m going to find a real grocery store and restaurant,” I said, with more energy than I have. To restore some of my energy I tap vigorously on the acupressure point GV 26 as I take long strides back to the RV. Victoria seemed to be in a hurry to get me to finish up my chores and to take a nap.

Dreamtime, I thought.

On my Garmin I press the ICON to locate the nearest shopping center. After it searched for a satellite signal it listed dozens of nearby shops 21 miles from where I was. It comforted me to know I wasn’t lost in Neverland.

At one store I bought staples and bottles of water. At the restaurant next door, I had a big greasy breakfast with foul tasting coffee that I only sniffed at. By the time I returned to the RV I was tired. I was going to take a nap in the parking lot, but Victoria insisted I return to the spot we had met with the fairy and gnome. I pulled out my bob and used that to find a place to park. I’m sure Victoria influenced it because I pulled up near the same tree the diner had been near.

I fell into bed without unpacking my food and dreamed almost immediately. It was a lucid dream, or I’m sure it was I just didn’t feel like exercising my will to change things. I was visiting Antonia in her aunt’s garden.

Chapter 15

I was making the bed in the back of the RV when the strong smell of gardenias filled the small space.

“NO?” I called, feeling unnaturally anxious.

I heard a thump and then NO jumped on top of the bed. We both looked at each other, realizing there was no telepathy between us.

I reached for my protection amulet on the nightstand that I had removed but didn’t know why and it moved out of my reach. I began chanting out loud and my throat became constricted.

Victoria’s energy surged forward, and I was too busy trying to breathe to notice just what she did. When I regained consciousness, I could feel I was moving. From Victoria’s senses I deduced we were in a box with no windows and no light. The seat I was sitting on was comfortable. The gardenia smell was so strong it was suffocating. Victoria wasn’t concerned. Victoria may not need to breathe but my body did. I took shallow breaths so as not to choke. She was staring at a shadow directly across from us. I remained still not knowing what was going on.

When the vehicle came to a stop Victoria was immediately out of the box and moving through an underground tunnel. This was going to be an interesting visit, that I hoped we both survive.

The tunnel smelled strongly of dirt and rocks. Imbedded in the walls were stones that I could feel and identify. Victoria glanced at the wall for my benefit and there were drawings of people from many different time periods preparing themselves for...

“This is a tunnel meant for rituals...initiations,” I thought to her. I felt Victoria’s amusement. Of course she knew.

I didn’t hear anyone following us, but vampires are not noisy travelers. At one point in her walk, I felt the energy change as if one path of energy crossed another. Five minutes later, the tunnel stopped at a hatch opening. It looked like an underground bunker in the process of being altered into a spiritual meeting place. The metal walls of the bunker were painted the colors of the rainbow, but in pale colors, nearly masking the tiny lights that were like the sparks from a holiday sparkler. Looking around I sought out where such an energy point was being blasted from. In an alcove covered with satin cloth was an object I could feel energy from. It felt

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odd. I thought maybe it was being redirected or blended with another vibration but not very well. Perhaps that's why the sparkle. Why would someone want their altar in a metal shelter? It seemed wrong but this may just be a stopping point on the initiate's journey. It was a work in progress.

My attention was drawn to two seated figures, one vampire and one human. Only one candle was lit giving still shadows on the wall. I found it interesting that the shadows made it look like there were a dozen people in the shelter. Since this was Victoria's show, I trusted she was fine. She was closer to getting her wish, though I didn't think the vampire was Leda. There wasn't any conversation going on that I could hear yet by the feelings from Victoria for me to be still I believe she was in a heavy discussion.

Since I wasn't needed, I studied our surroundings more closely. Statues, stands and musical instruments were lined against one side of the wall where a stage was near completion. Behind the stage was another tunnel but it wasn't deep. I returned my attention to the covered grotto piece. Whatever was in there was a power piece that was trying to become more active. It had searched out energy to use and tapped into the fairy ley line that the tunnel crossed. I was surprised no one had noticed the power object was active. I had been taught that power objects should not be left to their own devices. Since ley lines didn't bend at sharp angles, I knew it was definitely a ley line the fairies used that this object was leeching its energy from. What power object could bend natural energy of Earth through metal that was meant to withstand a bomb's energy?

As I thought of the fairies, I got a clear image of the fairy at the counter. My imagining of the fairy allowed her energy through. I became her channel. I wasn't aware of anything else. Part of me thought this is what a multiple personality felt like. Where was the real me?

I saw the fairy go over to the statue in the corner and give it a solid rap with a sick. Thousands of glittery lights burst and whatever was under the cloth collapsed and only the cloth was left on the base and slid to the ground.

I became aware of Victoria after that and she was standing before a human, a vampire, and I don't know what the dark shadows were. NO was not present.

"Earth has already moved into the 5th dimension," the human said. "So, your message is late and unnecessary."

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The vampire was as still as a statue. It was one particular dark shadow that I would call creepy that kept my attention.

“What dark shadow?” Victoria asked me.

“Standing between the human and vampire,” I said aloud, not realizing I had.

They all turned to look over their shoulders, surprised.

The dark shadow suddenly came straight for Victoria and though she moved quickly to deflect its blow, we were knocked to the side. The other two were surprised as I and were slow to respond. Odd for a vampire I thought. Victoria righted herself and drew something into the air. The other two stayed where they were looking puzzled. I could feel Victoria’s energy and my energy being depleted.

“Help!” I called out.

“With what?” the human asked.

I then became too engrossed in lending all that I had to help Victoria get some balance or was it me that felt so disorientated. Abruptly all came to a stop. The fairy and gnome appeared dressed in clothes I remember the fairytale books depicted them as. The vampire and human appeared to be dressed in their finery and I felt flummoxed. The underground area was no longer an unfinished meeting room in a metal barrier but a place of power with no statues in nooks but small creatures of different shapes and sizes that I have never seen before, and they were alive.

Victoria reminded me to be silent and just observe. I have no idea what I observed but Victoria was pleased at what transpired.

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Chapter 16

I woke up under bed covers nicely tucked in. For all I know, I could have dreamed being on a vacation except...I was in an RV. There was light behind the curtains but not bright enough to wake me. It was my growling stomach that woke me. It was as if I missed more than one meal. I knew from experience that after not eating for three days, my stomach would stop growling. I didn't learn that because food wasn't available to me but because a group I joined believed in fasting one week out of the month. It was ironic that I moved from living on the streets where food is scarce to a spiritual group home where food was abundant and starving oneself was considered sacred.

Where was NO? Usually, he wakes me up.

"NO?"

Complete silence.

Victoria is gone too. Was that all a dream?

Sliding out of the bed I stood for a moment, breathing deep and sensing anything foreign.

Nothing.

I did notice the difference in my senses. Everything wasn't as intense. I got up and inspected the RV to insure my protection amulets were still strong. I checked the cupboards and the food stuff I had purchased...was it yesterday...was in the cupboard. Did I put them away? I started to make coffee and realized I had no water in my tanks. I did have small bottles of water and used that instead. While the coffee maker sputtered coffee into the pot, I looked out the RV windows and found I was parked in a forest. I thought I parked under a lone tree.

"NO!" I called again. "*NO!*" I mentally called.

Wherever I was I wanted to leave. Once I had my travel mug filled with a hot cup of coffee, I started the RV. The gas gauge warned me my stomach wasn't the only one that needed fuel. While the engine warmed up, I pressed the button on my GPS to look for the nearest gas station, hoping a restaurant was next door. I got impatient waiting for the GPS to finish acquiring a satellite connection and pulled out my pendulum. I drove in the direction my bob was leaning.

Ten minutes later and with an alarming lower gas gauge I found a road and my GPS finally gave me several directions to take. I continued to follow the leanings of my bob.

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The gas station I drove into was staffed by a white-haired person dressed in coveralls. Gender undetermined. In the garage I could see a motorcycle was stripped down. The chrome was shinny enough to let me know it was well loved. While the attendant checked the vitals of the RV I went into the station where I was told a fresh pot of coffee was just put on and I was welcomed to have a free pour if I used my own cup.

In the clean office I spotted the pot and heard tiny mewings. I sniffed the coffee to assure myself my empty stomach could tolerate it, and it smelled too good to pass up. I also spotted two fat breakfast burritos on the desk with one half finished. My mouth watered.

After refilling my coffee cup, I went to investigate the mews. In a pet carrier were three kittens. Near the carrier was a play area that had a few handmade cat toys and a sleeping calico cat with fat teats. At my presence she merely blinked at me and went back to sleep, curling into a tighter ball.

“She wandered in a few months ago, dropped her litter and is fattening up,” the women’s voice said. “My partner couldn’t part with her, but we can’t keep her kittens. We already have too many pets people lose around here.”

“How old are they?” I asked.

“Eight weeks. The calicos are females and that silver one, he’s male.”

I leaned down to see the male. He was sleeping in the back while his sisters were curled near the door.

“What are their names?”

She laughed. “Oh, no. If I name them, I keep them. Are you interested?”

I thought of Allie’s reaction to three...yes, if I was to take one, I would take them all. I knew with kittens it’s best to get them in pairs so they can terrorize each other instead of focusing on me and I certainly couldn’t leave one behind.

Maybe Allie would see it from a positive side and know she could train them to mind her.

“I’m looking for cat.” I heard myself sigh and the woman gave me a big grin. “I can’t separate them from each other and one kitten would be lonely...” I admitted then shook my head.

“Best to have a companion so you don’t wear yourself down,” she said knowingly.

So, when I left the garage I had a breakfast burrito, my coffee cup refilled, and three new additions to my family in a dog carrier big enough for three kittens. I felt it was a good stop.

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When I finished patting myself on the back that I had survived another strange adventure I started to think of how I was going to manage three kittens with my being out so often. That brought me back to thinking of business. At lunch I stopped at a roadside diner that had a small store next to it and bought cat food and lunch. While I gassed up I made my round of calls. I started by dialing my office. It was time to get back to earning a living.

"Victoria Handle, Private Investigator's Office. May I help you?" a child's voice asked primly.

"Who is this?"

"Who is this?" demanded a young voice that suddenly turned suspicious.

"I asked first," I answered surprised.

I heard some phone exchanging and a breathless voice, more mature but still not Allie's voice.

"This is Victoria Handle's answering service. If you give me a name and number I will have her give you call when she's back," a terse voice said.

"This is Victoria Handle and where's Allie, my assistant?"

"Oh, Ms. Handle," she said sounding taken back. *"This is her daughter-in-law, Angelique. We...we don't know where Mother Allie is. She left us a note but it didn't say where she is or how long she would be gone, not even a phone number!"* She ended her complaint on an indignant note. *"She hasn't even paid the utility bills."*

That was said with some anger. Allie wouldn't just cut them off without a warning, so I was guessing they didn't take her seriously.

"Are you in my office - my home?" I was beginning to get worried about my protection spells, then I remembered I had left while a spell breaker was cast over my apartment with a big boom. I'm not worrying about my neighbor because I cast a separate spell over his apartment so that none of my strange business would harm him.

"Yes. Well, when we couldn't reach her, we came here and ... Well, if you want to know, we filed a missing person's report and told the police we think you have something to do with her disappearance."

I waited for the so-there, that her tone implied. The idea that they were in my home, going through my things, had steamed me. I took deep breaths to calm myself before continuing in what I thought was a calm voice.

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“She’s on vacation. I’m on vacation. Get out of my house or I’ll call the police on you for breaking and entering and trespassing.” I disconnected from my phone. It took a few minutes for me to get calm and remind myself that I was back in the real world and instead of supernaturals, I would have to deal with humans and dysfunctional family dramas.

I dialed Allie’s sister’s number. I just got an answering machine with a message to leave a name, number and brief message. I left the message: Hello, Allie. I hope you and your sister are doing better. I’m on my way home. I called the office, and your daughter-in-law answered the phone informing me she reported to the police that I kidnapped you. Please clear that up before I return. Blessings, Allie. See you soon.

That should give Allie a belly laugh...or I hoped it would. I purposely left off the news of NO not returning with me, but three new kittens were. I glanced at the carrier that I had strapped in on the passenger seat. A pair of eyes stared back at me. Pharaoh, the silver male blinked a few times then settled down for a nap. His sisters, Clairaudience or Clara and Callie for Calico were purring and content with fat bellies, draped over each other. I couldn’t find kitten food, but I figured adult food for a few days wouldn’t hurt them. I would find out for sure when they used the litter box.

I called a few of my friends to let them know I was on my way home from my vacation and only got their voice mails too.

I drove all night because I was too wound up. I used the energy to visualize positive things, so I don’t let my imagination run amok with gloom and doom images. It was early the next morning that I drove into a just opening RV rental place. It was the same guy, Bob Kingman that met with me. He looked nervous. I waved to the dogs that were in their kennels that paused in their eating to acknowledge me.

Oh, oh. They were a little stressed. I looked back at Bob. “What’s wrong with your dogs?”

“Nothing.” He looked around then and we moved into the office so I could conclude my business. I had given him cash for the use of the Rental and more than what was needed as a down payment to the final cost.

“Can I have your credit card?”

“Why do you need a credit card? I paid you in cash. Bob, what’s got you and your dogs upset?”

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“The police came by,” he huffed. “They said they were investigating the disappearance of your secretary.”

“I don’t have a secretary. I have an office assistant and she’s on vacation. Why should I pay for an assistant when I’m on vacation?”

“Well...I don’t know. I just didn’t want to tell them you paid up front in cash. We don’t have cash customers these days. Billing likes audit trails.”

“You didn’t pocket the cash, did you?”

“No! I’ll give you the cash back. I just need to charge your credit card.”

I pulled out my credit card. He ran it through the card reader. In fact, he ran it through many times, and it wouldn’t take so he finally took my cash. Then comes the stinker. My car is gone. The police took it. I called Juliet, the only human in my magic group of practioners.

Juliet said she would be right there.

I was beginning to get worried. I unpacked the RV with Bob’s help, and he cooed over the kittens. I left the food stuff I bought for human consumption with Bob and lugged my personal belongings with what I had purchased for camping with the large carrier with three kittens mewling to a corner where Juliet would pick me up at. I looked like a homeless person without a basket to carry my belongings in. I put a protection spell over me that would prevent anyone from getting a clear sight of me. Just as Juliet pulled up, three police cars with lights blinking sped past surrounding the RV place.

Juliet grabbed the carrier, and I stashed my bag and belongings in the back seat. We took off.

“What is going on?” I demanded.

“We were wondering too so we stopped at your place. No protection spells. Your neighbors were being questioned by the police, and your landlord was there and getting grilled too. The police went through your place. Either they made the mess or someone else did and left some bad energy behind. We reinforced the protection spells around your neighbors and landlord since we knew that’s what you would want. Some of us have been questioned by the police. They got our names off your computer.”

“Its password protected,” I objected.

“Well, they figured it out. They got to your bookkeeper and were asking her about your finances and clients. What the hell happened to all the protection spells over your place?”

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“As I was leaving for vacation my place was zapped with a spell buster. Just about knocked me silly. I called my office a few days ago and Allie’s daughter-in-law was there. She said she called the police on me that I had kidnapped her mother-in-law.”

“From what we could read on the situation, they’re not interested in Allie’s family problems. They’re interested in your clientele.”

“I code them.”

“It’s a very good code.”

“Just what kind of police are they?”

“Supernaturals. A complaint was issued to the Board of Controllers about you.”

“Who are they?”

“They are a group that makes sure relations between supernatural visitors, residents and humans are smooth. You’ve never heard of them because you haven’t done anything to warrant their interest.

“Until now. Just what is it that has set them after me?”

“Our exact question.”

“And what did you find?”

Juliet gave me a pained expression.

“Come on. I know the group looked into it. Give me a hint,” I said in my best coaxing voice.

“We didn’t see a thing.”

“Are they looking for a payoff? Is it a protection racket? Because they can’t see what I’m doing, they have it in for me. That’s why they’re looking at my records. I keep good records. The kind that doesn’t speak ill of my clients nor say anything that will incriminate them in any wrongdoing...though, I don’t mess with anything illegal,” I said rambling along and not able to stop it. I clasp my amulet and sighed at the dissolving of the pressure to chatter.

“Whew!” said Juliet. “For a while there I thought I was going to have to give you a tap on your third eye. So...”

I took a deep cleansing breath. “I’m going home and see what’s what. I know I haven’t done anything wrong. My conscience is clear.”

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“I’m going with you.” She held up her hand to stop me from saying thank you, but... “Our group’s integrity is at stake here. We all vouched for you, and we all put a touch to your protection spells over your apartment. An attack on you is an attack on us.”

“Oh,” I said. I almost said the famous 3 musketeers chant of one for all and all for one, but I didn’t, however by the grin on Juliet’s face she was mentally thinking about it too. Her life must be boring at the moment.

The mewling turned my attention to my threesome. “We’re almost home, kids. Wait until you see the toys in the toy box.” And I remember how NO was not interested. The only thing he enjoyed playing with were the catnip stuffed toys. He was a regular addict to the stuff. In my heart, I didn’t miss NO and it could be because I now know he was there to spy on me. Or was it because he was a vampire?

“Are you planning on training them for protecting you?” Juliet said.

“I was thinking of taking them to Anglea and seeing what she says,” I said without thinking on it.

“The animal communicator? That’s a good thing. Even though some animals will speak with you, your attachment would interfere with what you hear.”

“Right,” I said distracted. There on the street corner where the bus stops was my neighbor, Marvin, sipping his coffee and reading a magazine. His briefcase was tucked at his side, secured by the strap around his shoulder. He looked up just as we were passing. Automatically we both smiled. I could see he wasn’t stressed at all.

“We saw to it that he wasn’t harassed or given problems by your problems,” Juliet assured me. “We know you’re mentoring him.”

“I am not!”

She looked over at me. “Yes, you are.”

“In your dreams,” I returned.

“No. In your dreams. Why are you denying it? We all have students or favorites that we hover over and keep safe or give nudges to.”

I didn’t answer because she was right, but I wouldn’t call it mentoring. Nudging is the right word. But I’m not going to waste energy quibbling over a word change.

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My attention was instead on my apartment. It looked really weird. A cocoon of energy was split in half. The protection spell over Marvin's half of the apartment was solid and my side was an empty shell.

My vehicle was parked under the carport next to a shiny red mustang convertible. Juliet parked behind a white SUV Escalade.

"Looks like you have company," Juliet said.

I grabbed the pet carrier because the kittens were making a racket. I told them we were coming home, and they would have a room full of toys. Sigh. At least while I was getting them settled, I could get a sense of what these visitors were about.

Juliet was kind enough to bring in the litter box.

"The voyager has returned," Allie said and then did a double take at the carrier when tiny meows issued from its contents and not the expected meow from a mature cat.

"I rescued some kittens," I said to her. I made no mention of NO and Allie didn't ask. I nearly fell over when she took the carrier and followed Juliet into my bedroom.

"I'll let you all introduce yourselves," Allie said as she went into my room and closed the French doors behind them.

I turned to the four, no five people. One was a short person. Not another gnome, I thought.

The gnome grinned.

"We're here because of some interesting sequence of events that have brought us here," a tall red head said.

"And?" I gestured to the couch. I was interested in how they would seat themselves. The gnome jumped, no make that leaped into my chair. Two sat down and the tall one brought the stool that Allie usually sat on into the front room and pointed to the hassock for me to sit on. We formed a circle.

"We have found your talent for finding portals to other dimensions has misdirected some outlaws from another dimension..."

"Or maybe not from another dimension..." broke in the gnome.

"But the energy is from another dimension..." One of the seated persons said. She appeared to be the more intuitive in the group. I could see that in her aura. I was beginning to see all their auras now.

“So, this isn’t about Allie missing?”

“No. Allie contacted us when she found your apartment was without any defenses and what looked like *Earth Lights* were moving around on your porch and in your front room. We advised her to remain with her sister a while longer while we investigated.”

“*Earth lights*? There’s no fairy activity around here or I would know it.”

“You’ve had dealings with fairies?” he asked too intently. If he were a vampire I would suspect, he was trying to control me.

“Fairy time isn’t human time, from what I hear. My accountant and business manager would dissuade me from taking on a case for a fairy. Don’t fairies have their own agents?” I said.

“Like vampires,” the gnome said.

“So, what did you find out about the spell breaker?” I asked.

“If you were in the same timeline as the power source,” the tall one resumed, “there would have been a huge hole in the ground that would have covered blocks of these homes. In the timeline it originated from, it appeared as a twister and took out huge sections of land. The only thing left was a house and that is where your house is in this timeline.”

“Wow!” I felt alarmed. Something was familiar about that. Was it a dream? “That’s a lot of people that live around here. How many lives were lost?”

“It’s not in our timeline so we haven’t done a crossing-over count,” the woman said.

While I studied them, all I could see were their auras and they were growing stronger so that I didn’t see their physical bodies any more.

“Now that you’re back, you can erect new protection spells and resume your business,” one of them said. I could feel relief come over me and one part of me making plans on connecting with past clients to see if all was well and...

A demand.

A command.

A compellation.

I stood up and blinked a few times to clear my sight.

“Just what is it that you want? State it and be open,” I ordered as if I were Victoria.

The auras disappeared and before me I could now see a short person, a goddess shaped women with curves and boobs. Her body reminded me of the Venus of Willendorf, and as that thought came up so too did my desire to give her homage. I shook my head to clear it of

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overlapping images and thoughts. I was crossing timelines. Looking at my hands to refocus I could see them changing from young to old, from large to dainty and gnarled to arthritic.

I sat down on the cassock as if I was pushed.

“Well, that is what we have here. A breach in a dimension that crosses timelines.”

“And that is what we’re here for, to help find the reason and see about fixing it.”

“We didn’t get this reaction when we came to investigate. It seems you’re the lynch pin.”

“Lynch pin?” I asked stupidly. I held my head as if to keep my thoughts from going in all directions.

“Just what does that mean?” demanded Allie. She stood in the doorway to my bedroom holding Ramses, the silver kitten. I was fascinated by his big orange eyes that stared at me.

“Ramses,” I mumbled. My mouth felt like I had been doing drugs. It was dry, swollen and my tongue could barely move.

A glass of hot water was pressed into my hand. I didn’t hear most of the conversation, but Allie seemed to be negotiating something which when my head cleared I’m sure she would tell me. Lips near my ear tickled me back to the present. I turned to look at Juliet.

“The spell has been removed from you,” she said. “So, let’s get down to business.”

“What spell?” I asked, looking around the front room. Allie was sitting on the couch with Ramses sleeping curled up in her lap. Juliet had Cleo and Calie on her lap.

“Someone put a spell on you to prevent you from being pressured into something beyond your skills,” Juliet said.

“However,” Allie said. “We broached a deal.”

“What? When did all this happen?” I asked alarmed.

“While you were asleep. You have strong mojo. But now we have to gather all our skills to find out what this is all about.”

“Please don’t let this be vampire business,” I said.

“No vampires,” Allie said.

“What about Gartha?” I asked hesitantly.

“Your IOUs have been paid in full. I updated your files while I was at my sisters and I was picking up your calls so you’re up to date,” Allie assured me.

“What about your daughter-in-law?”

“She and my son have moved on.” Allie’s voice was harsh.

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“What happened?” I demanded in response to her change in demeanor. They had better not have hurt her, I was thinking.

“My son reported my car stolen and listed you as the possible thief. They found my extra set of keys and came here to see what they could find probably to steal. Marvin, your sweet neighbor, called the police and set the record straight, that we both were on vacation and wouldn’t be back for two weeks. Marvin left me a message before you called telling me some strange people claiming to be related to me were ransacking your apartment. I was on the phone with the police when you left your message. Then I called Juliet, some friends and your landlord. The good outcome is all that drama gave my sister the will to live. She does love family drama. She needs to get back into theatre work.”

“So, what did happen?”

That was the magic question. Both women leaned forward excited.

“A synchronicity of events that needs investigating,” Juliet said.

“And Victoria Handle, PI of the Odd and Misplaced, has been hired to look into it,” Allie finished.

“The group is behind you with this. You’ll need help and eyes and ears where you don’t have access,” Juliet said.

“Actually, by the sounds of it, this isn’t in the vampire or beastie realms,” Allie said.

“That’s a relief,” I said meaning it, then thought about the earth spirits I had recently met.



To be continued in Victoria Handle, PI *Searching for Pan and the Wild Herdsman*