

Velvet Heaven

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For Rollye, Joey would not exist without you.

Chapter 1:

## *Hello Stranger*

Joey slipped the headphones on, adjusted the volume levels, and swung the microphone into position. She sighed, and then smiled. Close to 40 years of doing talk radio and she still felt a rush as she cued her opening theme song. She caught a reflection of herself on one of the computer monitors next to her. Other than a few wrinkles and the slight graying of her blond hair, she looked very similar to the young woman who had started out in the business so many years ago. The same shoulder length blond hair, same dark eyes, although once brown, were now a deep, vibrant plum color due to her recent change in diet. Being a vampire had its advantages in her line of work, not to mention it made her appear at least 20 years younger than she actually was. *Ironic*, she mused, *all those years everyone joked about me being one of the undead.*

She hadn't been one of the undead for very long. In fact, it was only a few short months ago when all hell had broken loose in the parking lot of the annual Conspiracy Con, which for some ungodly reason had been in Dayton, OH. She remembered how she didn't want to go, how it had felt all wrong, but David, her husband and producer, assured her it would be the exact resurgence her career needed. That was all Joey had needed to hear, for being the ambitious type, she was in.

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"Honey, I really don't want to do this. I just have a bad feeling about it." Joey finished applying her lipstick, and grimaced at her reflection. Her illness was outweighing any lingering ambition she had. The black dress hugged her tall, slender frame, without being too revealing. She had lost so much weight in the last year. None of the countless doctors she had seen were able to give her any clear cut answer as to what was really wrong with her. They speculated everything from chronic fatigue, to some type of auto immune disorder. She had come to one conclusion; none of those damn doctors knew anything. She sighed, her once golden, blond mane was now so shocked with gray that several of her friends had recommended letting it go completely. She couldn't. Some remaining part of her vanity clung to her hair color; it was one of the few things she had left.

Most days she woke up in an extreme amount of pain. Everything on her ached; bones, muscles, some days even breathing hurt. She had tried so many drugs, and while they seemed to work for a little while, eventually they failed. It was one of the main reasons, besides the obvious financial ones, she continued to do her show, it distracted her. Her show, The Joey Roxy Show, which had been on and off the air in various

incarnations for nearly 20 years, was a mix of conspiracy, politics, and the paranormal. Joey had the uncanny ability to tap into whatever people were feeling on any given night. She made a personal connection with almost every caller she encountered. It's what had made her popular to begin with, and what had continued to keep her show on the radar. That, and she didn't look like your average run of the mill talk show host, she looked like a model; tall, blond and statuesque. People had tried for years to figure out exactly how old she was, and she never gave them the satisfaction of a clear answer. It was none of their damn business, besides in her mind, a lady never reveals her age.

Joey was pondering retirement due to her ongoing health issues until the war between the zombies and vampires had erupted. She couldn't have planned for a better thing to happen career wise. *Doesn't get much weirder than that*, she thought, as she remembered exactly how she had wound up there, in a hotel room, in Dayton. She shook her head. Never in all her years on this planet did she expect to live long enough to see a war between what used to be classified as two types of fictitious, supernatural beings. The Holy War of the Undead is what the major news media outlets were calling it. She privately referred to it in her own head as one giant cluster fuck. She had to hand it to both sides, they were great for ratings. She took one last

glance in the mirror, grabbed her purse, and followed her husband out the door.

She stopped him in the hall, looked up into his warm, brown eyes and planted a kiss on him. He was as handsome as he had been on their wedding day. His 6'2" frame, which was largely still muscle, only carried a few more pounds than it had in high school. Other than a few wrinkles and the slight graying of his dark hair, not much had changed. These details mattered little to her, as it was his smile that undid her, still made her weak in the knees anytime he flashed it her way. His smile told her she was safe. She pulled him tighter against her.

"What's that all about?" He asked, breaking their kiss momentarily. She knew why he was asking. She was rarely so affectionate in public. But this time, she didn't care, she felt like it had been days since she had touched him. Had they not been running so late, she would have drug him back to their room and had her way with him.

"I just wanted to thank you for all the things you do for me, for us. I love you David. I couldn't imagine my life without you." He cupped her face, stared into her eyes, and kissed her again. He pushed her up against a nearby wall as their kiss intensified. Her pulse raced, and again she thought of going back to their room. She hadn't wanted to do this appearance anyway. She sighed as she broke their kiss, remembering all the

years he had supported her career, up to and including getting her booked there.

"If we weren't already late, do you have any clue what I'd do to you?" She purred in his ear.

"I've got some idea." He said as he grinned.

"You better believe the second I'm off that stage we're coming back here so I can show you exactly what I've got in mind." Reluctantly, he let her go. She took his hand in hers, and gave it a quick squeeze as they walked down the hall towards the bank of elevators.

She was shocked at the size of the crowd, but even more shocked at where she was going to be sitting. A long, rickety table had been placed in the middle of a stage in the hotel's parking lot. *Well at least I'm not alone in this disaster.* It was her and several other radio "legends", as the obnoxious neon banner proclaimed. Joey noticed the sun was beginning to set. *Just great, didn't it occur to any of these promoters that vampires and zombies love the night?* She was beginning to think her instincts were right and this was all a huge mistake. Then she spotted Johnny. She sighed with relief. He waved and smiled at her, she waved back. Johnny Graves was one of the men responsible for making overnight, paranormal talk radio into the huge commercial success it was. At one point she had been hired



to fill in for him whenever he went on vacation or wanted a day off. That had been years ago, and she couldn't remember exactly how long it had been since they had seen one another in person. *This is just terrific! Johnny and I can finally catch up.*

However, her happiness was short lived. She had to do a double take when she saw the man who was seated just two chairs down from Johnny. Nelson Diggs sat in his chair, surrounded by a crew of five, who were styling his hair, and applying make-up. One of the five had handed him some 3"x5" cards. Joey rolled her eyes. Apparently no one had bothered to tell Nelson this wasn't going to be televised.

Nelson was Johnny's less than stellar replacement, who was notorious for slinging any product the network handed him. Nelson had replaced Johnny when he had been forced into an early "retirement" due to a few differences with the management. Seems the main difference had to do with a pill that promised whoever bought it supernatural powers. That had to be at least 10 years ago now, if memory served her. At the time, they had offered her a chance to fill in for Nelson, as she had previously done for Johnny. She turned them down, not only because she tended to stand behind the products she promoted, but honestly, she had hated Nelson from the moment she met him. Nelson and his slicked back hair, and 70's porn star mustache. He still made her shudder with repulsion to this very day.

Apparently David had missed the hotel parking lot as the listed venue among the fine print, and that she could let slide. What she wasn't sure she could let slide was where she was to be seated, which according to her name tag on the table, was right between the two men. Whoever the promotions department was, they were either geniuses or complete morons, and she was still on the fence about which. As she headed past Nelson, to her seat, he snickered at her. Not wanting to dignify him with words, she merely glared back at him. Johnny, ever the gentleman, got up from his seat, and pulled her chair out for her. She sat, setting her purse down under the table. Johnny gently pushed her seat in, and then returned to his chair.

"Hey there, gorgeous, long time no see. How's David?" He leaned over and from his chair and kissed her on the cheek. Joey hugged him back, she was truly happy to see him.

"David's good. How's your wife? And new baby?! I can't believe you have a new baby! You dog, at your age!" She winked at him. His wife was 30 years his junior.

"They're both wonderful and would love to see you. After this thing's finished we should arrange a visit, it's been way too long." He looked out into the crowd, "I never, in my wildest dreams, imagined a world where we would have vampires and zombies, let alone them being on opposite sides of a war. Well, at least it's good for business."

"Sure is. Johnny, I've got to know, how the hell are you and Nelson on the same stage?"

"Well I figure it like this, at some point you have to let things go. I still hate the son of a bitch, but the way this war is going, doesn't look like any of us are getting out of here alive. Besides, he'll make an ass out of himself as usual, and we'll look great. So it's a good PR move. I need all the PR I can get with a new show, especially at my age." He winked back at her, causing her to grin. He was the same man he had always been, handsome, short cropped hair, wire rim glasses, only difference was a few more wrinkles, and some gray hair. *None of us ever really change, do we?*

She stared out into the crowd, slightly surprised at the sheer volume of people. She hadn't seen this many people at a public appearance since she had been nationally syndicated in the early 00s. There had to be at least 300 hundred people. Staring out into the sea of faces, she noticed all the signs regarding vampires, and their civil rights. *Good Lord, are these beings going to want a Constitutional Amendment guaranteeing their rights? Now I'm gonna have to argue with callers on a nightly basis regarding the plight of the undead to be recognized as American citizens. Hell, I probably have some of the undead calling me now as it is.* It was too much. Regarding humans, she was all for people being equal, regarding dead

folks, she was less than sure. Didn't they, as a country, have to draw the line somewhere?

She noticed the 'don't kill zombies, let's find a cure' poster and sighed. It was going to be a long night. It was then she heard a familiar voice. The voice was yelling her name, fairly loudly. She could almost pinpoint who the voiced belonged to, but not quite. She looked down from the stage. Almost directly in front of where she was seated, several feet below, behind security barricades stood a curvy red head. She was desperately waving her arms trying to get Joey's attention. It had worked. *Suzanne. It's got to be Suzanne.* She smiled.

Joey couldn't be completely sure it was Suzanne. They had never met in person. But given the pictures Suzanne had sent her via email, she was pretty sure that's who she was looking at. They had exchanged countless emails over the last two years since Joey had returned to the airways. They had tried to meet on several occasions, but their plans always fell through for one reason or another. *Of course, Suzanne would be here, it's only four hours from where she lives.* Joey waved. Suzanne waved back. *Wow, I guess we're finally gonna meet. I wonder why she didn't tell me she'd be here.*

The announcer began with the usual formalities, starting with who each of one the panelists were. He didn't get very far, before a gang of vampires began making their way to the front of

the parking lot. It was their signs and dress, which gave them away. *Not very subtle, are they?* Joey smirked. But beneath that smirk, she was uneasy. All of this was too familiar, like it had already taken place and she was simply re-living it. She motioned to Suzanne to turn around and look behind her. Suzanne, not being very tall, and not having the higher perspective Joey did, turned around to look, but saw nothing. She shrugged her shoulders as if to say, what? Had she been able to see, she would have noticed the same tall, teenage boy Joey had. His short, black hair was mostly concealed by a skull cap. His faded jeans had holes in their knees, and he wore a t-shirt which read, 'why bother'. On his feet were steel toed Doc Martens. Fingerless black and white striped gloves completed his ensemble. His sunken, dark eyes stared listlessly at the panel. He locked eyes with Joey, and she stopped, mid-sentence in her introduction, before continuing on. She knew him, she was sure of it. She regained her composure, and somehow managed to finish. Her heart started to race. The boy was approaching the stage at an inhuman pace. It was the first time in her life she had seen a *real* vampire. Sure, she had seen them on TV, everyone had, but she had not, as far as she knew, ever seen one in person.

Everything about this boy was wrong, and he was coming for her. She felt it in her core. The panic in her eyes was becoming

so clear that Johnny leaned over and whispered, "What's wrong, gorgeous?" She didn't answer him. She had lost her ability to speak. *Doesn't he see him?* The boy smiled, and she saw his fangs. They were huge, and reminded her of the canines on one of her dogs. But these were sharper, whiter, and so long. *Why are they so long? What the hell does a teenage boy need teeth like that for?* Her eyes frantically scanned the crowd for David, who had been standing next to the stage prior to the start of the presentation. *Where is he?*

She wasn't listening to a damn thing going on around her now, as all of her attention was focused on this boy. She had no clue if anyone was addressing her. The crowd had parted to let him through. He was approaching Suzanne. Joey opened her mouth to scream, to warn her, and nothing came out. That's when she saw the blur coming towards her. He jumped up and onto the stage, in one fluid motion, and stood before her. Joey looked around. *Why wasn't anyone stopping him, don't they see him? Am I the only one who sees him? Where the hell is David, and or for that matter, security?*

"Security!!!" She screamed. He smiled at her, just before he reached his arms out across the table and grabbed her. She stared at him, dumbfounded. Blackness washed over her, as an immense pain began to radiate from her one of her forearms. It felt like a set of knitting needles was being driven again and

again through her arm, directly to the bone. She tried to cry out, but before she could, she felt herself being completely drained. She was tired, so tired. *What the hell's happening? It's so cold here. I can't see...why can't I see?*

"You son of a bitch, Josh, get off her! Not her, she has nothing to do with Nikki!"

Joey heard what she was pretty sure was the snapping of bones, but she couldn't tell if they were hers or not. The blackness that had crept into her vision was making it hard to concentrate.

"Joey, punch him in the throat, he'll let go. I'll be there as soon as I can." Suzanne yelled. Somehow, through all the commotion, Joey heard her, and with her remaining strength landed a left hook to his windpipe. He dropped like a rag doll. Everything was in slow motion now, and none of it seemed real. It all seemed like some horrible nightmare. She prayed that any minute she would wake up, and find herself at home, in bed with David and the dogs.

"David? Where's David?" she whispered. She was fading out. She never imagined she would die at a public appearance. She tried desperately to picture her husband's face but came up blank. The face above her was covered in blood, fangs fully extended and snarling. Yet this *thing*, seemed to be protecting her. In the hazy darkness nothing was quite in focus. It

appeared she wasn't on the stage anymore, but in some dark room. She tried again to wake herself, this had to be a dream, how could she not be on the stage anymore? Why was no one trying to help her? Why had they left her with *this* thing? Her eyes glanced around the room, and as soon as the world came into focus, the pain was back.

"David's safe, along with most of the rest of the panel. Johnny was only splattered. I'll have to apologize to him for that when I see him later. I can't say the same for Nelson, although, someone may have turned him by now." The voice was attached to the red head, who was sitting on the bed next to where she lay.

"Suzanne?" Joey whispered. Her eyes widened in amazement as the woman nodded at her. Her voice, which was almost inaudible to the human ear, was heard quite clearly by the vampire. Joey felt her panic returning. She remembered the look the boy had on his face when he had approached her. She struggled to get up, she had to run. *Run! Run, damn you!* She ordered herself. As she attempted to rise, an intense, throbbing pain shot through her whole being. Her body, in its weakened condition, was unable to hold her weight. She collapsed, falling forward into Suzanne, who caught her, and gently wrapped her arms around her. Suzanne was like the boy, and the boy wanted her soul. She struggled again, but unable to get her limbs to cooperate, she stopped.



There was no point. It was over now. All the struggling in the world wouldn't change it. She was going to die.

When she finally stopped, she felt Suzanne's arms loosen around her, and ease her back, softly laying her down on the bed. Joey was terrified. None of it made any sense. *How the hell did I get here? I don't understand.* She began to cry. The fear was like nothing she had ever experienced, this waiting for death. *What is she waiting for? Do it already! And these things want equal rights!* Suzanne spoke softly to her,

"Shh...I'm not going to hurt you, I wouldn't dream of it. Listen to me very carefully. You were bit, in your arm, it's bad, I mean, real bad. He drained most of your blood. I'm actually not sure how you're still alive. Josh, the boy from the crowd, attacked you. It happened in an instant and that's why you don't remember any of it. I couldn't get to you in time to stop him. Security was a bitch. I brought you here, to my hotel room, as soon as I could. I'm so sorry, I should have fed first, I didn't know. To the humans it appears you were attacked then disappeared. We all have enhanced speed, so to speak. But none of that matters. What matters now, is what we're going to do, what you want to do."

"Do? I don't understand. And David, where's David? The boy didn't get to him, not my David!" She was screaming in her mind,

yet the voice that came out of her was no louder than a kitten's soft meow.

"Shh...Josh is severely injured to say the least, and with any luck, dead. Either way, he's not coming anywhere near you. You're safe, David is safe. But you have to listen to me. There's no cure for the bite once the saliva has infected you, and by the looks of your skin, it has. With the amount of blood you've lost, you will either die in the next few minutes or I can save you, but you have to decide now."

"All those years I was worried about dying in some embarrassing way, and this is how I go out, getting bit by some teenage vampire." Joey coughed, every inch of her hurt. Her vision was coming back a bit, and for the first time she looked at her friend. Blood covered her face, and was tangled in her hair, but her green eyes looked serene. Suzanne began to softly stroke her hair.

"It's your choice, but I need to do it soon, or else I can't guarantee you'll make it. Once you slip into a coma you won't be able to drink, and you've got to drink, drain me almost completely, to replenish all the blood you've lost. And Joey, this is not how I pictured our first meeting. I'm so sorry. I never intended for you to ever know I was a vampire." Suzanne was smiling softly at her. Joey felt her fear beginning to

subside. Suzanne's touch was gentle, reassuring her that she wasn't anything like the boy.

Memories flooded Joey's mind, as her life flashed by. The thought of never seeing her home, her dogs, or her husband again was too much for her. She felt the darkness slipping back over her. It was so cold there, she hated being cold. As she lay among the shadows of the hotel room, she knew there was only one option. Somehow, she managed to lift her head and clutch the black fabric of the vampire's dress. She locked eyes with Suzanne.

"Do it! Don't leave me here in the cold. I want to go home, I want to see David. Do it, before I change my mind."

## Chapter 2:

### *Never In A Million Years*

Joey paused, recalling the gory details of that night, before she continued with her monologue. No callers had graced her with their presence yet, so she continued to prattle. Her stomach growled, as the very memory of that night was making her hungry. *Hell breathing makes me hungry these days.* She smiled, recalling her first taste of blood. She had loved it from the moment it first hit her tongue. She hadn't fought it the way a lot of humans do, something about it seemed all too natural to her, too familiar. She continued her diatribe against *her* kind as she was not ready to reveal to her listeners she was one of *those* fiends. Eventually, maybe she would, but for now, being a vampire was bad for business. Besides, when she revealed her secret, she wanted it to have an impact, and not have it be just some circus stunt for ratings. At the moment, she wasn't sure what that impact was, so for now, she was keeping it to herself.

It wasn't the first secret she had kept, and she doubted it would be the last.

She reached into the mini fridge, which was now next to her desk in the studio, and pulled out a bag which looked a lot like a Capri Sun, complete with the straw. The packet was the same silver packet, except she was pretty sure it wasn't manufactured in the same plant, but then again, who knew. Hell, she wouldn't blame those folks for making a few bucks during a crisis. One thing they didn't get right was the straw. She never understood the straw; obviously humans were producing these packets of blood, as surely vampires would have known that no straw was necessary.

She started the break music, tore the straw off the back and tossed it into the nearby garbage can in disgust. As her fangs punctured the foil, blood began to spray everywhere. *Dammit, not again.* She reached for the box of tissues that were on her desk. Not once had she successfully fed without getting anything on her. *So I guess not much has changed since I was human, has it? At least now I can blame these stupid fangs when I wear my dinner.*

The fangs were trickier than she thought, or controlling them was, except around the presence of blood, in which case they seem to have a mind of their own, almost a separate entity entirely from her. They automatically descended as soon as she

saw, smelled, or heard anything that was possibly related to blood. They were generally, a royal pain in the ass. *I'm surprised the damn things can't read my mind. I really need to learn to control them. The last thing I need is to smile at someone and have them make an unscheduled appearance.*

Currently, however, she wasn't too concerned, as the only other person around was her husband. And David, well, he wasn't going to say anything. Oh and the dogs, who were currently in the studio with her. One lay at her feet and the other two by the door way. There wasn't much change in their behavior towards her. The only thing of note was they seemed to have more respect for her now. *I'm one of them, well, at least sort of. Maybe I should take them hunting some night.* As far as David was concerned, they were still arguing over whether or not she was going to turn him, as she had wanted to immediately, but he had a few lingering reservations. She'd get him eventually, she was sure of it. *He can't resist me forever.*

Until then, she happily sucked her meal, although the hunter in her was not satisfied at all with this supplement, but it was going to have to do. She had to lay low, at least for a while, as things had gotten a little out of hand at the conference. Besides, she didn't mind drinking the stuff cold, it suited her just fine. She was really hoping it was B negative. B negative blood was her favorite. In her human days, she had

always been a Coca-Cola girl, now she found herself becoming a B negative girl. *I wonder if I could do commercials for them? It's not like I don't use their products all the time. They need to label the blood type better, charge more for the rarer ones and stop producing so much damn O negative. Nobody wants blood that tastes like watered down cherry Kool-Aid. What they need is a vampire consultant.* Even as a vampire she was still a business woman, maybe she would call them up, and pitch the idea to them, as well as doing away with that damn straw. She smiled as she slurped the last of the blood from the pack, and tossed it into the bio-hazard container which now resided next to the garbage can. She glanced into the monitor again at her reflection, noticing any remaining wrinkles were quickly beginning to disappear from her skin. *It's not so bad being this way.* But being born, that had been a different story entirely.

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Her first taste of blood was not some sexy, erotic scene as all the vampire movies would have had her believe. It was a disaster. She had barely uttered her desire to remain on this side of the grass, when she felt Suzanne's hands lift up her head up and place a pillow under it.

"This is going to hurt a little. Sorry about that." Suzanne leaned over Joey, and she felt her heart begin to race. She closed her eyes, as Suzanne bit into her neck. The throbbing

pain suddenly returned as she felt her body being drained of the last of its resources. *Guess I should have expected that, not like dying is going to be any fun.* She longed for David to be there, holding her hand, comforting her. Whether or not he would even approve of this decision, she had no idea. *A little late for that now, isn't it?* The pain was beginning to recede; the hammering which had been her heart, was growing fainter with each beat. It was then her vision shifted. Suddenly, with no notice whatsoever, she was outside of her body, looking down.

*So this is it, this is death. This isn't so bad. Wow, that can't be me? When did I get so, so old?* The woman on the bed couldn't possibly be her. Was she really that thin, that frail? When Suzanne finished, she got off of the bed, wiped her lips on a nearby towel, and picked up her phone. She could hear Suzanne talking to someone, but the conversation sounded mushy, distant. *Guess clarity comes from actually having ears.* She heard bits of what sounded like, "Can you come now, I need help," followed by, "I'm not sure if I have enough," and finally, "Well bring Katie it won't hurt her to see how she was made. It might make her think twice before she chooses to make any others." She hadn't noticed the large amount of towels piled at the end of the bed, until Suzanne carelessly tossed the one she had just used onto it. She was starting to become a bit concerned.



Although, at this point, she wasn't sure they would be needed, seeing as how she was pretty sure she was already dead.

She watched Suzanne hit end on her cell phone. She sighed, "Ok Joey, let's do this. Again, not how I pictured our first meeting." Suzanne smiled at Joey's body. *Oh God, she doesn't know it's too late, that I'm already dead.* Joey wondered if there was some way to tell her, and opened her mouth to do so, before she remembered she had no mouth to open. She watched in horrified fascination as Suzanne tore off a piece of towel, and tied it tight around her arm. She tilted the body's head back and parted its lips, as if she was going to perform CPR. Except this was no version of CPR Joey had ever witnessed before. Suzanne bit into her arm and the blood began to flow splashing against the body's lips, then into its mouth. That was the last image she would remember from outside of her body.

What sounded like a tornado hit her first. The sound was akin to standing on the side of a highway as hundreds of cars whizzed by her at 80 miles an hour. This was followed by a loud popping sound. Then, the smell hit her, it was the most delicious smell she had ever had the pleasure of knowing. It was like an endless supply of chocolate chip cookies just out of the oven, or a freshly cut lawn on a summer's day. This smell was the smell of all smells. Sizzling barbeque, freshly baked sourdough bread, any smell she ever had recalled enjoying.

Everything she ever loved and would ever love was wrapped up in it. She couldn't move her limbs yet, but her vision was slowly returning. She fluttered her eyelids as if to say, please do not make it stop, not now, not ever.

"Welcome back." Suzanne said quietly. "You'll be able to move soon, I promise. I'm so glad I didn't lose you. I was worried there for a minute. And yes, there will be more."

Suzanne had spoken the truth, the moment the blood found its way down her throat, she found herself able to swallow. She sighed, for never had she known such bliss. She watched as Suzanne attempted to squeeze more blood out of her arm.

"I'm out on this side. Just give me a minute to tie off the other one. Hopefully by the time I run out, reinforcements will have arrived." Suzanne tied off her other arm, bit into it, and went to hold it up, but this time, it wasn't necessary. Joey regaining some of her mobility sat up and grabbed it, with a fierceness she had never known before. She pulled Suzanne towards her. She didn't get to it quite in time and the stream of blood shot straight up, and hit her square in the forehead. It slid down her nose, and pooled at her lip. She stopped sucking just long enough to take her tongue, and lick the blood from her upper lip. A low, guttural moan escaped her as she went back to feeding. She knew this was precious stuff and cursed

herself for wasting any of it. She wondered if she would or could ever get enough of it.

She barely heard the knock at the door when it came. This was not because of her hearing; her hearing could rival a dog's now. No, it was because of the sweet, bloody ecstasy which enveloped her. She noted that two people had entered the room, as well as their proximity to her food source, and the position of the nearest blunt object should they be dumb enough to approach her. The younger of the two closed the door and locked it. She noticed their similarities in looks, and realized they must be related. Same eyes, blue in color. The older of the two had long, dark blond hair. The younger was a strawberry blond. *Are they mother and daughter? Doesn't matter, I'll kill them if they come near me.* Her thoughts shocked her. Yet she knew instinctively she *could* kill them. She continued to watch as they set their supplies down. A cooler, lots of tarps and plastic, duct tape, and lastly a back pack. They were coming for her; she knew it, felt it. She let out a low growl, one which would have put one of her Siberian huskies to shame.

"Heeyy Nikki, Katie. Glad you made it. I might have underestimated the strength she has. I think I'm going to need you both to pry her off of me. I think we might be beyond reasoning with her at this point." Joey felt Suzanne attempt to pull away. She was having none of it, and as if to emphasis this

point, dug her nails into the soft flesh of her friend's arm. She looked up from drinking only long enough to glare at the others. For a moment she was offended they were not open to any diplomatic solutions. She might have been willing to listen to reason. *On second thought, why should I? They must know I can take them if it comes to that.* She sucked harder, attempting to coax any remaining blood out of Suzanne's veins. As Suzanne tried once more to pull away, Joey sank her teeth in. *Where in the hell do you think you're going? I'm not through with you yet!*

"Ouch! Dammit Joey, let go! It won't do you any good, I'm out. *They have more,*" Suzanne motioned towards the two women who were slowly approaching the bed, "IF you let go of me, you can have it, if not, I assure you, death awaits you, as I'm sure you're still hungry."

Joey was mentally preparing her attack, calculating the distance between herself and her enemies, possible weapons, and most of all who she was going to target first. A few moments later, two words Suzanne had said registered in her mind, *more* and *death*. It's not that she feared death at this point; she had already been dead once tonight, it's that she feared not having the ability to smell, drink, and taste this wonderful liquid. She let go, which surprised all three of the other women around

her. Suzanne took this opportunity to stumble over to an arm chair, and collapse. The older of the two vampires had tied her arm off in the same manner as Suzanne and sat gently on the bed next to her.

"I'm Nikki. That's my daughter Katie." She motioned towards the younger vampire, then, tapped her arm, to make sure the tourniquet was tight enough. "Katie," Nikki instructed, "get Suzanne a couple packs from the cooler. Hurry, she's fading fast." Joey watched as Katie pulled two silver packets from a soft sided blue cooler. She took them over to where Suzanne was sitting. She graciously accepted, but seemed to be waiting for something before she opened them. Joey turned her attention back to the woman on the bed, who was now reluctantly offering her arm to her, the same way Suzanne had.

"Oh sorry, silly me, I forgot to..." Nikki pierced her flesh with her fangs, but didn't get the chance to finish her sentence. The moment the scent of blood hit the air Joey was on her, moving at a speed which both surprised and delighted her. She wasn't sure she had ever been this fast, not even at her physical peak. She pinned Nikki to the bed with such a force that Nikki let out a yelp. In the distance she heard the tearing of something, she wasn't sure what, and it really didn't matter anyway. All that mattered was getting to that blood. Joey felt

the woman beneath her struggle, but with her new found strength, Nikki was no match for her, and she knew it. She wrapped her lips around the wound and sucked.

"Uh, I could use little help over here. Jesus, was I this big of a pain in the ass?" Nikki attempted again to push Joey off, but with no success. Joey, having felt the woman trying to escape, almost laughed as she continued to feed. She was growing stronger all the time. *Does she really think she could get away at this point? If I can stop another vampire, how can any human ever stop one of us?* She knew the answer, they couldn't. She suddenly understood why the boy had acted attacked her. He couldn't control it. She could almost forgive him, almost.

She caught some slight movement out of the corner of her eye. Katie had grabbed the lamp closest to the door, in an attempt to free her mother. Joey marveled at her new found ability to see in low light, or see at all without her glasses. Katie launched the lamp towards her. She took one of her hands off of Nikki just long enough to redirect the lamp, which sent it sailing into the nearby wall.

"What the hell's going on? How did she even see that?" Katie exclaimed. She got up ready to attack again. Joey prepared for the incoming attack, and when none came she refocused her efforts on drinking. *Smart girl, maybe she can tell she's no*

*match for me.* As she drank, she began noticing the bright blue hue of Nikki's eyes. For the first time, she really looked at Nikki, she was quite striking. Nikki glared back at her.

"Getting full now, aren't you? You should let me go, because my daughter will keep attacking you. She's quite strong, and you're about to be the sickest you've ever been in your life. It would be a shame to waste such a beautiful creature as yourself, as well as all that blood. But you know how it is; the mother daughter bond is extremely strong." Joey stopped a moment as if to contemplate what had just been said to her. It was eerie how the woman had read her mind. She was getting full. She could care less about being attacked; she hadn't felt this good or this strong in years, if ever. But truth be told, she was full, a little too full. Her stomach had started an awful rolling sensation. One she was all too familiar with from years of being sick. She let go of Nikki, curled up into the fetal position, and closed her eyes. How could she go from feeling like she could take on take on army, to this?

### Chapter 3:

*When You Move You Lose*

There was a fury of activity going on now around her. They seemed to be preparing for something. She heard the distinctive sound of duct tape being torn, and rustling, so much rustling. She was going to throw up. There was no doubt about it. She prayed for her new found strength to hold out just long enough until she could make it across the room and into the brightly lit bathroom. She tried to sit up, but when the room began to spin, she laid back down. Suzanne, who was now upright, got on one side of her, and Katie on the other side of her. Nikki was resting in the arm chair, drinking a blood packet, and rubbing her arm where the wound was still fresh.

"Easy. Remember how sick you were? The less we jostle her the less we wear." Katie nodded. They coaxed her into a sitting position, lifted her off the bed, and carried her to the bathroom. The whole room had been covered with thick panels of plastic. *Well, that explains the duct tape.* Katie pulled the shower curtain back.

"What the hell?" Joey croaked.

"Well, this is the worst part..." Suzanne started.

"This is the worst part!" Joey exclaimed. She wasn't sure she could take anymore of "this".

"Yup, and it's gonna be messy. Ideally we usually do this in an enclosed, glass shower, you know, to avoid the mess. But



seeing as how we're doing this here, in a hotel room, this is the best we got." Suzanne explained, as they carefully set her down in the tub.

"Uh, Suzanne, what about her clothes?" Katie called as she walked out of the bathroom.

"Oh, right. Joey, can you get out of your clothes or do you need help?" Suzanne offered a hand to her.

"I think I can manage..." Was all she got out before she threw up. The blood sprayed everywhere, coating herself and Suzanne. "I'm so sorry."

"That's ok. It's not the first time a newborn has puked on me and I doubt it'll be the last. Try and get out of your clothes, it helps. We'll be right outside should you need us. But trust me; you'll want to be alone when you go through this." Suzanne stepped out of the tub. She grabbed a towel from the under the plastic, and closed the door behind her.

Joey struggled to stand. She grabbed the shower bar to pull herself up. She managed to stripped off her dress, unhooked her bra, and take off her hose and panties, before the next wave hit.

"Oh God." She mumbled. The blood was escaping her body in any manner possible. "What the hell's happening to me?" She yelled.

Suzanne yelled back at her through the closed door. "Any remaining human blood and plasma has got to leave your body before you fully transform. It's going to get worse before it gets better. Nikki and I are going to find your husband. That way you two can be reunited as soon as possible. Katie will be here if you should need anything while we're gone. Good luck. Don't fight it. Oh, and be ready for the exploding skin. That's normal."

"Wait, what?" Joey asked, as she caught a glimpse of herself in the full length mirror hanging on the back of the door. Her whole face was covered in blood as well as her body. All the pores on her body were oozing a red mucus-like substance. "Ugh. What the hell is this? It's so sticky."

"Joey, did you close the curtain, you're going to want to do that before the explosion." Suzanne called out.

"EXPLOSION?!!!!"

"Trust me," Suzanne yelled, "That sticky stuff coming out of your skin is just the beginning."

Joey felt her skin begin to burn, and then swell. Tiny blisters were appearing everywhere.

"Oh God, are the blisters normal..." Was all she got out before the explosion hit. Blood burst forth from every inch of her body, including all of the pores on her skin. It covered

everything within a three foot radius like some kind of stuttering lawn sprinkler.

"What the hell!"

"Turn on the shower and get in, the worst of it's over. You'll feel better after you've showered." Suzanne yelled.

"So what other fun things should I expect?" Joey asked, in a snide voice.

"You're going to peel like a sun burn. There's a special shampoo and conditioner combo pack on the back of the tub. It's designed by a vampire for vampire." Suzanne couldn't help but giggle before continuing. *Smart ass.* "It'll get any remaining bloody ooze out of your hair. There's also body wash made by the same company. You'll find a robe and some towels on the back of the toilet behind the plastic for when you're done. Oh, and one last thing, and it's a big one."

"What?" She wondered what *could* possibly be next.

"Try to prepare yourself for who you'll see in the mirror. I think you'll be pleasantly surprised."

*Dear God, what in the hell could she possibly mean by pleasantly surprised?* She'd have to wait and see, but in the meantime, it didn't matter. She felt great, really great, except for one thing. She was starving. She was about to turn on the water, when she decided to take one last look at the bathroom. It was a disgusting mess, but a contained mess. Clots of blood

were clinging to the plastic, along with bright red splotches, and a black tar like substance. *Suzanne had been so prepared. How many times has she done this? A hundred, a thousand? How old is she? No way she's in her 30s.*

She pulled the curtain closed and turned on the water. She stood in the shower for what seemed like an eternity, as the hot water continued to beat against her pale skin. *This might be the best shower I've ever had. Ok, the best solo shower I've ever had.* So many thoughts were rattling around in her head. They were interrupted by a quiet knock on the door.

"Yes." She answered, while reaching for the shampoo/conditioner combo pack. She picked up the shampoo bottle, and wiped the remaining goo from it so she could read it. She smiled. *It really does say, 'made by a vampire, for a vampire'. What is this, some kind of subculture I didn't know about? They have their own line of hair products? Our own line of hair products.* She corrected herself. *It's no longer theirs, but ours. You're a vampire now.*

"Joey, are you ok? Do you need anything?" She had forgotten about Katie until the moment she had knocked on the door. Katie, who looked no older than 18 at the most, was now going to live forever, an eternity in that young, perfect body. She let out a long laugh. It would be just her luck to be made a vampire at her age. This made her even laughed harder. *Only you Josephine*

*Mary Rockwell, would get made eternal at your age. Oh no, I can't be made a vampire at 30, or even 40, that would be too easy.* She roared with laughter, as she rinsed her hair, and moved onto the conditioner.

"Yeah, I'm fine. I'm just laughing at this ridiculous situation." She moved onto the body wash, as the conditioner's instructions had recommended leaving it in at least 5 minutes. She noticed the texture of her skin had changed as soon as she rinsed off. It was smoother, and so soft. She finished with her hair, turned the water off, and was about to pull the curtain back when she remembered the mess. It was going to take some effort to get to any towels without getting covered in the sticky, red residue.

"Katie, I don't suppose there are any garbage bags in that backpack?"

"Oh, right, sorry about that. Hang on." She heard the zipper of the pack, and the familiar sound of a garbage bag being shaken out. "Can I come in?"

"Please do." Joey heard the creak of the door, realizing how loud the smallest sounds were. She recalled from earlier how her hearing had immediately improved upon feeding. *I wonder what else has improved.* She grinned, thinking about all of the endless possibilities. She heard Katie as she pulled down the plastic, and stuffed it into the bag.

"That should be enough for you to get out of the shower without getting all bloody." A hand suddenly thrust into the shower, with the robe and some towels. Joey took them.

"Thank you."

"Welcome." The door was shut once again and she was alone. She pulled the curtain back. The plastic from the floor, ceiling, and shelves across from the vanity had been taken down. A single panel remained, over the mirror and the sink. On the back of the bathroom door hung several extra towels. *These vampires think of everything.* She stepped out of the shower toweling off as she did. The robe was soft, fluffy, and white. *Maybe white's not the best color choice here.* She shrugged, she was going to have to get used to things being messy. Also, wearing less white was probably a step in the right direction. She slipped into the robe, tossed the towel on the floor, and opened the door.

"Thanks for your help." Was all Joey got out of her mouth before Katie gasped.

"Oh no, what now, am I missing some part of my face or something?" Joey asked, as she began to towel dry her hair.

"No, it's just," Katie stammered, "you're beautiful. I mean really beautiful, like a model, or something."

Joey couldn't believe it. Was this kid messing with her, after all this? Katie walked into the bathroom, past her, and

yanked the remaining blood covered plastic down, the one which had been over the mirror.

It was Joey's turn to gasp. The reflection had to be a joke. There was no way she could possibly be the woman who was staring back at her in the mirror. She might have looked this good at 40, maybe, but not in the same way. Most of the gray was gone from her hair. She was full on blond again. Her eyes were purple. Actually more like a deep plum, now that she studied them. She waved at herself, and Katie giggled. She turned to the girl, and stared at her in disbelief.

"Is this really me?" She asked her. All Katie could do was nod. Joey stared, noticing most of the wrinkles were now gone from her face.

"You know who you look like?" Katie asked.

"Well certainly not myself. I'm up for suggestions though." Joey laughed.

"You ever hear of this DJ, well talk show host really, Suzanne listens to her a lot. Her name is Rollye James. Anyway, I've seen pictures of this lady, and you look so much like her you could be twins, especially now."

A smile crossed her lips. She sure did know who Rollye James was. At one point she had done an interview with her. Joey had been promoting her band, The Translations. But that had to be 30 years ago, maybe 35. *Back when I was Josephine*

*Rockwell. That seems like another lifetime now. I wonder what Rollye is up to now? She certainly didn't look like your average DJ, more like a model. I wonder if she's one of us?*

"I think I've heard of her. Thanks for the compliment. And thanks for coming in. To be honest, I didn't want to be alone anymore. I can't believe you went through all this too." Joey turned and smiled at her.

"Oh yeah, and it wasn't fun. I didn't want it. Much like my Mother didn't want it either. We weren't really given a choice. I went through it alone. I was trying to hide it from everyone."

"How did you know what to do, to feed, and all that?"

"Instinct, I suppose. The same way you knew the moment you drank. How does any animal know what to do? Speaking of feeding I was supposed to give you something as soon as you were done. I'm sorry, hang on, I'll be right back." The girl disappeared from the room. She heard what sounded like her digging around for something. Katie reappeared in the door way, with two silver packets which looked suspiciously like Capri Sun, complete with straws on the back.

"What's this?"

"Here, I'll show you. You aren't quite strong enough yet to hunt, we'll probably do that tomorrow, or the day after. For now, drink this. You won't need the straw, well not after the first time anyway, because of your fangs."



Joey interrupted, "Fangs?!!" She uttered in disbelief.

"Well yeah, haven't you ever seen a vampire movie? Or read any vampire books? All vampires have fangs. I'll show you, watch." Katie held the pack up to her mouth, and as if by magic, her fangs came out of their hiding place and pierced the foil packet. Joey smelled it as soon as she heard the sound of the foil against Katie's fangs. She felt an odd sensation stirring in her mouth, and a slight throbbing.

"Now you try. Oh and I picked out the last B negative for you, it's my favorite. O negative blood is just awful, it tastes like watered down Kool-Aide. For anyone's first time, B negative should be mandatory." She handed Joey the pack. "Hold it up to your face." Joey did, nothing happened.

"What am I doing wrong?" She laughed.

"Nothing, I forgot something. May I?" Katie asked politely. Joey handed her the packet, and she again pierced it with her fangs. She handed it back.

"Now try. Smell it first."

Joey did as instructed, and felt her fangs descend for the first time. There was a slight bit of discomfort as they pierced through her gums. *Ah, so that's what that throbbing was. This feels so weird.* Katie held her packet up to her mouth as if to demonstrate, and Joey mirrored her, sucking and slurping on the first of many blood packets that would follow that evening.

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*I really should call them.* She thought as she came back from the break. The memory, she now realized, hadn't been from the hunger itself, no, it had been the packs that triggered it. It had been a few weeks since she had talked with them. They had all went back to their normal lives. *Maybe they're trying to forget and I can't blame them for that. That wasn't exactly the best night.* The name blinking her screen told her otherwise.

"Suzanne, in Dayton, Welcome. Dayton? Really? What are you doing in Dayton?"

"Good Evening lovely Rock Star. What am I doing in Dayton? I thought you knew. I live here part time. When the first outbreak of zombies happened I was visiting my friends Jesse and Jane, and I got stuck there for almost six months. It was before they isolated the outbreak, or tried to. I was stuck here so long I decided to get a place. Now I split time between here and Detroit."

"I didn't know that. So, what's on your mind?"

"Well, I think it's about time I came out about something..."

Joey felt a small amount of panic. *Oh God, Suzanne, don't out us, not to all these people.* If she still had a working heart, it would have been racing at the very thought of that happening.

"Well, are you sure you want to do that?" Joey asked.

"Yes. I think it's time the world knows the truth." Suzanne paused, for dramatic effect.

"And what truth is *that*?"

"That our government, once again, is getting involved in the rights of others." Joey sighed with relief. *Thank God.*

"How so?"

"Well take these vampires, for instance. They want a Constitutional Amendment guaranteeing their civil rights. I somehow doubt our founding fathers had undead, supernatural beings in mind when they wrote the Constitution. Just sayin'."

"I couldn't agree with you more. I'm not for limiting the rights of any human, living being, but dead people, c'mon, where does it end? I mean, wouldn't we have to write a whole new document? And as much as I'm for equal rights, if we offer these rights to vampires and zombies, aren't we slowly destroying the very ideas that were the framework for our Constitution?"

Joey couldn't believe how well she was faking it. Although, she really wasn't faking it, it really was how she felt. Her becoming a vampire had just muddied the water a bit on this particular topic. But her audience didn't need to know that. Besides, she often forgot she wasn't human anymore. Even though, at this exact moment in time, she was busy using her fangs to pierce another blood pack. She beamed with pride. For the first

time since this whole ordeal had begun, she had finally used her fangs without spilling any blood down the front of her shirt.

This, however, didn't lead to any sudden revelations on the topic at hand. She still wasn't sure she should have equal rights, or even exist. The idea that God, or whoever was in charge of the universe, would allow the creation of two separate factions of undead beings was beyond her comprehension. Incorporating that into a workable belief system was going to be damned challenging. It was a lot to deal with in such a short amount of time. It was the main reason she hadn't taken any time off after the trip. She didn't want to think.

She occasionally cursed the fact she had made the decision to go to that damn convention. But honestly, there were so many others worse off than she was. Yes, being a vampire had proven to be damned inconvenient at times. But other than that, none of the clichés she was concerned about were true. Most were urban legends, made up largely by the vampires themselves according to Suzanne. *Suzanne really needs to write a handbook. Remembering all those rules is a hassle. Maybe I will suggest that to her. Better yet, a website and an app. Yes, an app, for the vampire on the go.* She recalled them going over some of the rules with her that first night, in the diner. Some of those rules were so confusing. The one that stood out in her mind the most, and made

absolutely no sense at all, was that she could walk in the sun if she had fed the night before from a live human. If not, she would get a horrible sun burn and peel as she had in the shower. She sighed. *Human logic no longer applies here, does it?*

There were so many people she could blame if she wanted to. She supposed she could blame Suzanne for all of this. If not for her, maybe the boy wouldn't have attacked her. But there's no way of knowing for sure. Besides, any number of vampires could have attacked her at the conference. It's not like she hadn't ever made any enemies. The odds that some of them had become vampires during this time were probably good. *Or maybe some of them always had been vampires and I just didn't know it.*

She could blame her husband for setting up that appearance. She could blame anyone but herself if she really wanted to. But in the end, all those decisions had been hers, and she came to the only conclusion that made any sense. For some reason, God wanted her, Josephine Rockwell, to be a vampire. And who exactly, was she to question the will of God? *Ah, hell, maybe I will reveal the truth at some point, but not tonight.* She smiled, as she continued listening to Suzanne. She felt a pang of sadness, as she remembered the last time she had been among her kind. She missed them, and the way they understood her, the way no human ever could.