

**KITH**

**PART TWO**

**“IF EVERYONE’S EVIL IS UNIQUE, HOW CAN ANYONE CLAIM TO  
HAVE BEEN HARD DONE BY?”**

## Chapter One

Trent found pleasure in many tastes, but none were quite as delectable as the night air. It had texture; soft and tender. Over the past few nights he had grown to love it more and more, and when night ended the craving began.

On the other hand, sunrise frightened him. He didn't understand why, but it did. Dawn's piercing rays struck him like shards of glass, pilfering his power like blood gushing from an open wound. Trent breathed the night air, shuddering at his last thought.

He wondered where exactly Keelin was taking him, and what was going to happen once they got there. He knew they were in Banff, headed west toward British Columbia. They had slept under the open sky since leaving Minnow Creek, but for Trent it was becoming increasingly difficult to sleep at night. Perhaps it was the closeness the mountain range brought, as compared to the freedom of the prairies. Snow capped mounts glowed blue beneath the moon and a nearby lake reflected every star. But for Trent, beneath the encroaching trees and surrounding stone walls it still felt like a prison closing in.

He watched Keelin dream, tucked inside a warm sleeping bag. She hadn't said a word since they left, and whenever he prompted her with questions she'd say only, "Wait till we get to the Circle." Trent suddenly felt insignificant beneath the vast sky.

"Hey kid," Keelin startled him, "if you don't quit that pathetic sighing neither of us will get any sleep."

"I'd apologise, but I don't want you to think I'm weak."

"Is that a spine I hear in your voice?" She sat up, her eyebrows sitting high atop her forehead and a graceful smile caressing the tension between them.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to sound rude..."

"Be rude! I'm starting to respect you."

"Enough to call me `Trent` and not `kid`? I hate being called that."

"Don't push it kid," the emphasis she put on `kid` let him know she was being sarcastic, "siblings aren't supposed to get along."

"Is that what we are? Brother and sister?"

"Yep."

"And old man Whittaker's our father?"

"Technically."

"Why do you keep saying that? What did he do to you that was so unforgivable? I have a lot of respect for him."

She cocked an eyebrow.

"Well, until he bit me."

"And his bringing you over shows he's as self-serving as he always was. You didn't deserve this. No one does."

"Good job avoiding the question, but I still want to know what he did that was so unforgivable. Even I can forgive him..."

"Of course you can!" She rose, casting the sleeping bag aside. "He bit you out of respect and insured you wouldn't be taken by Cimmeria." Closing her eyes Keelin took a

few steady breaths. Sitting by Trent she opened them and said, "I'll tell you what happened, but only because you're my brother."

"I'll keep it a secret. I prom..." Trent was cut short by Keelin placing her hand on his lips.

"First lesson: Don't make promises."

"Why?"

Keelin smiled. "Trust is gained through action, not words. 'I promise' guarantees nothing. You don't know what the future holds, so don't vow it'll turn out a certain way."

"But I won't tell anyone."

"Then you will earn my trust through action."

"How were you Begotten?"

"I was sixteen, promised to a man I didn't love, and cock-sure I knew all there was to know..."

Keelin always felt safe when she rode Thunder. He was the fastest steed in all Ireland, and the toughest to train. Sitting upon his back proudly, enveloped by the moor's thick fog as though held by a Blacksmith's glove, she listened to the hunting hounds bark as they drew near. She had hoped to lose her pursuers in the thick woodlands, but as Thunder crept forward at a snail's pace she knew they would soon catch her. Had it not been for the smith's glove she would have kicked her stallion and turned his gallop into a storm! But as the barks grew ever louder, Keelin knew that where blindness encumbered her scent aided them.

Her greatest foe this night was not the howling from within the mist, but a more terrifying enemy that followed. One that transformed gnarly branches into sinewy fingers and every shimmer of light eyes that studied her every step. The cold air reminded her that as autumn passed the world would soon die, covered in a death-blanket made from an Angel's frozen tears. And, Keelin knew, death begot death.

She listened to the hounds' barks grow louder. Closing her eyes she felt glad that Thunder knew the way, for her imagination fooled her less when she shut her eyes. Or, at least it seemed that way until her horse stopped.

Keelin opened her eyes reluctantly, expecting to see her Father and the men he'd hired to hunt for her. Her heart pumped heated blood to her head as she looked upon the men and hounds who stood in her way. The quick wisps of smoky air leaping from her throat stopped. She hadn't opened her eyes to look upon her Father, hunters, and hounds, but six strangers and six wolves.

The barking hounds, separated from her by the smith's glove, howled as if they knew they had lost their prey.

Keelin noticed a seventh man draw from the mist before her as if crafted by the woods itself. He donned a long, midnight cape clasped at the neck by golden hooks, and a collar that rose above his head like a mouth poised to scream. From within the silent bellow two icy blue eyes glowed above pursed lips that sat relaxed in an ebony grin. The mist parted into a dome around them, as if his glee were a command for it to abscond, and though Keelin found it in herself to scream her voice was lost in the echo of the dead woods.

The stranger threw his cape over one shoulder and crossed his arms, bellowing a laugh so dire that Keelin's echoing scream died.

“What would bring such a fair maiden out on a night such as this?” The stranger made an odd gesture with his hand, and Thunder closed his eyes. Then he bowed, saying, “I am called Naztar.”

Keelin tried to respond, with what she wasn't sure, but it mattered not for her voice was lost upon the figure as he rose from his bow. He had fangs, and the material on his cape opened as if it were wings. Rising from the ground he hovered waiting to feast.

“Child,” he said, his soft voice comforting like a mother's caress. “You need not be afraid. I am going to release you from your bondage.”

As Naztar enveloped her, the cold air turned warm and his moist breath calmed her terror. Keelin looked deep into his icy blue stare and saw forever; an end to the life she so detested. Her heart pumped rhythmically as if to keep time for the wolves that had begun to sing. Tipping her head back to expose a pulsing arterial vein, she offered herself to the demon heart, mind and soul. There was something intoxicating in his stare that stole her fear of death and of that she was thankful.

But a voice, resounding beside Thunder, woke her from this daze: “Naztar! Find her hunters to feast upon. Her life belongs to me.”

Naztar spread his cape to create a barrier between the vampires and this challenger. He stood tall, bearing a snarl that told he was a man unaccustomed to challenge. Keelin's heart pounded and she shivered, but craning her head she saw who had claimed her.

He was a boy her own years, gallant and proud. His complexion reminded her of men who had died recently, but his long blonde hair, tussled to the side, made him appear quite handsome. His physique looked as if he were bred for war, but his smile said he never had to fight. He wore well-tailored grey dress: a velvet tunic, cotton breeches, and tights. He stood with one foot propped upon a fallen tree and the other rested firmly upon the ground. He crossed his arms and pivoted his body as if ready to leap to her aid. He glared at Naztar with the same icy stare and did not flinch when the larger Kith breathed so low he growled: “Rafgard, you have no right to this feast.”

The challenger laughed gaily as if he'd just recalled a funny joke, and drawing near he said, “I have not welcomed you to my abode, friend. You will give me this woman, or your riches will end. Perhaps you feel you can steal enough gold from the overtaxed villagers to bring you Pleasure?” Rafgard laughed, each one of his bellows stabbing Naztar like a knife.

“You will pay for this Dragon Slayer,” Naztar's lips curled, and in a soft thump he disappeared. The wolves and vampires followed, leaving Keelin alone with Rafgard.

He walked around Thunder to stand in front of the beast. The stallion breathed puffs of smoke the same hue as the fog surrounding them, each one a frightened wish to end his paralysis. Rafgard reached out and caressed the steed, meeting the animal eye to eye.

“Sleep, stallion. Sleep and dream of pleasant pastures.”

Thunder's eyes closed, and gently the beast collapsed onto the damp sod, rolling onto its side. Keelin leapt from her seat to avoid being crushed and nearly ran, but when she met Rafgard's pleasant smile she felt drawn to him. It was as if he had reached into her soul and stolen part of it so that she would only feel whole when with him. He reached out to her like one would to a drowning friend, “Invite me to you, Keelin. Come to me and I will give you Forever.”

As she walked to him she took each stride like a babe taking its first steps. When she was near enough he reached out with both hands and she took them, leaning on his strength for support. He embraced her tightly, sending goose-bumps around her neck where his hot breath lay. With a gentle stroke of his hand he brushed away her long hair while caressing her spine with his other. Keelin felt drunk by his power and asked, "Are you going to bite and drink?"

"Nay," he whispered, the word caressing her lips. He had moved so their eyes met and their lips brushed, continuing the gentle caress on her spine. "I shall bite but not drink. But first..."

"But first," she repeated.

"Pleasure." Rafgard pressed his lips over hers and directed her to the ground. She felt his one hand open her blouse, and the other undo her dress. A sober part of her begged for help, but the rest that drank on the vampire's power gave in freely.

"I had no idea old man Whittaker was like that," Trent said, reaching out to grasp Keelin's shoulder. She trembled and looked at the ignited sky, as one who had seen one too many sunsets.

"Does knowledge of his past change how you knew him?" Then she whispered, "He isn't like that." She reached for her sleeping bag and draped it over her shoulders. "At least not when he bit you. He had a lot of contempt for evil, mostly as a result from what he saw in himself."

"How can you defend him, and yet not forgive him?"

"I was there when he tried to change, when he started the Circle. I saw what it was for him to turn against vampirism, and, I didn't exactly live a perfect life myself."

Peter trudged through the fog, holding his arms out before him. His hounds barked ahead; each one possessed with the scent of their prey. He had veered away from the other hunters and chose to search a path they had dubbed as treacherous. Wolves lived in this part of the Greenwood, and with such a shortage of food humans had become welcome fare. Surely if Keelin had taken this route he would find her dead.

Peter took out his pipe and packed it with tobacco. The reward for the girl was dead or alive, so it mattered not to him how he found her. But it mattered, at least to the other hunters, the shape in which they found themselves. Should the wolves attack, no hunter or hound would escape alive. That was why this path lay untread.

But unlike the other hunters, Peter dared risk the hungry wolves to seek his prey. He dared, because it was not only the wolves whose food supply was low.

He listened to his hounds'; Black's low, rumbling bark, Night's high-pitched yap, and Sunrise's that sounded like a bridge between the two. He only missed Barnaby, the oldest and best hound he owned. It was a sore day when that hound lost its sight. As he lit his pipe he took comfort in knowing that each dog was safe, since if they were safe then so was he.

And then he heard it ... a shrill yelp, followed by silence.

The silence killed his confidence as true as a knife plunged into the back of an unsuspecting merchant. The yelp drove away the barks, leaving Peter to find his way in the

dark. He stopped and listened. Nothing. He heard nothing. Drawing his sword he yelled, "Who goes there?"

"Just a dream," a woman's voice whispered in the fog.

"Keelin? Is that you?" Peter said, listening intently for any noise that might lead him to his dogs. "Don't be afraid young lady, I have been hired by your father."

"I know," the voice whispered as a patch of fog parted to create a tunnel before him. At the tunnel's end Peter saw a woman's silhouette, sending his heart fluctuating. It was as though someone stood on his chest when he breathed, and where he once felt warm he suddenly turned cold; yet he perspired. He had found his prey and had won the prize, but as he stared into her crimson eyes he wondered who was the hunted.

"K-Keelin?" Peter choked, his sword trembling in his grasp.

She advanced toward him, swaying her hips and rubbing her hands along her body. "Do you want me Peter? Is it reward you seek or virtue?"

Peter stared deeply into her hypnotic gaze. His head grew tingly and his vision blurred, much as if he had partaken in too much spirit. His tongue was all twisted and he could not speak, not even when she pressed her body against his nor when her hands slipped into his breaches. The sword he held fell from his hands, and the thump it made as it hit the hard ground echoed like a dream. Keelin leaned in with her lips to his mouth, and as her hot breath caressed his he became hard in her grasp. He knew his hands had moved onto her breasts and had begun to massage, but it wasn't until she had begun stroking his hard flesh that he felt completely taken by her enchantment.

But when he heard a voice from behind say, "Intoxicating, isn't she?" Peter snapped back to reality.

"What manner 'o demon are you?" Peter whispered, pushing Keelin away and knocking her to the ground.

"Demon?" the man's voice whispered around him as a gust of wind rose to envelop him. Peter dashed for his sword, but just when he grasped its hilt a man grabbed his wrist. Peter looked at him, dropped his sword, and stood. The man let Peter's wrist free, smiling as gently as the cool nip in the air. "Do you think a sword will save you from this hellish spawn?"

"Nay," Peter said, reaching into his belt purse. "But this cross will!"

Peter brandished the crucifix before him, recoiling the two vampires away. But the man began bellowing laughter, and walking right up to the cross he wrapped his fingers around it. Then he said, "Foolish man. You do not know its meaning! This is no more than a symbol to you."

"Having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross!<sup>1</sup>"

The vampire's hand burst into flame. He yelled and buried it into his cape, staring at the crucifix with wide eyes. "Why does that thing hold so much power?"

"You don't understand its meaning, do you?" Peter asked.

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<sup>1</sup> Col 2:14 (NIV)

“Nay! I care not for mythology.” The Kith waved his cape and closed the tunnel. After he’d disappeared inside the fog Peter sighed, his racing heart slowing as he heard a wolf howl somewhere close.

“But you didn’t kill him, right?” Trent asked, waving his hand over Keelin’s eyes.

“No, not then.”

“What d’you mean, ‘not then’?”

Keelin rose and walked to her bike. Checking the saddlebags as if she suddenly wanted to start packing up, she wiped a tear from her cheek. Trent waited for her to answer, and when she didn’t he asked, “Keelin?”

“You’d best get some sleep if you’ve been awake all night.” She turned to face him, “Dawn will be here soon.”

Trent shuddered.

“It works fast, doesn’t it?”

“What?”

“The vampirism. One minute dawn represents love and security, and the next it’s the most frightening thing in the world.”

“Why is that?”

“Because our power is diminished during daylight. Don’t worry, you’ll get used to it.”

“Why does the Circle stay out during the day?”

“Because being Christian means learning not to use power. Think of the might Jesus had. He could have brought Jerusalem to their knees, but instead he surrendered to them His life.”

“How is that the same as mine?”

“You have the ability to bring any mortal to his knees.” She turned and looked right at him, the blue in her eyes growing misty like a brewing storm. “What will you do with it?”

“What did you do?”

Peter sat in his “thinking” chair, smoking his pipe and tapping his hands on the arm rest. His feet lay on a wooden stool he’d crafted from a simple stump, and a warm fire, as it burned the rest of the tree, caressed him with a crimson glow. He missed the company of his hounds, but at least he had Barnaby. The oldest of his canines, the dog had turned blind long ago. It curled itself on his lap and slept, giving Peter an easy mind.

A clove of garlic lay on the front door and a wooden cross over each window. Beside the chair he kept a wooden stake and a vial of holy water. Across the room, resting tenderly upon a torn pillow, was his Bible open to the book of John. Peter closed his eyes and considered going to sleep, but a tap on the door as light as the first few raindrops before a storm woke him.

“Peter,” a woman whispered, her husky voice brushing the flames of the fire into a rage.

“Leave, demon. You have no power here.”

“Haven’t I? Then why do you cower in your home? Why do you not come to the window for a look?”

Peter took a long drag of his pipe before waking Barnaby. The hound sniffed and stared up with two grey eyes at its Master, while licking the hand that scooped it to the ground. Barnaby walked to where its blanket was usually set by the fire, found it and settled into it. Sighing, the beast fell back into a deep slumber.

But Peter knew the beast outside would not give up as easily.

*"Come, Peter. Invite me in,"* she said.

"Nay, I shan't. Begone and leave me be." Peter followed each word with a puff of his pipe. The hound by the fire yawned and rolled onto its back.

*"Do you have such little faith in your god? Will He not protect you should you let me in?"*

Peter closed his eyes and pulled a blanket over the spot where Barnaby had laid. "Tis not right to test God. It is He who tests us."

*"Are you afraid He will fail a test?"*

Peter laughed and opened his eyes. Walking to the window he said, "Me pride is not toyed with so easily. Go find a child to play with."

But outside, amidst the eerie wind and fog, Peter saw the vampyress holding a tiny child. The boy was no more than five with sandy hair and blue eyes that could melt a winter away.

"You beast ... how could you..."

*"Give your life for the child and we won't,"* said a man's voice. Peter recognised it as the same one he had repelled earlier. *"Do you believe in Eternity? Invite me in..."*

Peter bowed his head and ignored Barnaby's snoring. "You will release the child if I do?"

*"Aye, that we will. Invite me in, and invite Keelin to you."*

"That I do, damn thee!"

The wooden doors to the cabin slowly creaked as the rusted hinges moved. Peter looked to the entryway and saw the male demon standing with the same glint in his eyes as his own when he looked upon a prized skin caught in a trap. The demon entered and walked to him, saying, "You best go outside, Peter. T'would be a shame to kill the child in hunger."

Peter tried speaking but a lump caught in his throat. Silently he walked outside and stood before Keelin, opening his arms wide.

"Let the child go," he said with the last of his voice.

"As you wish, Master." Keelin released the child, whose eyes turned ablaze. Long fangs grew in a mouth that once looked innocent and claws lashed out as the child saw Peter.

The only sound that night louder than the hunter's screams was the laughter from the vampyress.

Trent listened, hypnotised by Keelin's story. She looked at him while smiling, and lying back on the ground in her sleeping bag she closed her eyes.

"Bet you wish you never asked, huh kid?"

"No ... I'm glad I did. It's just..."

She propped herself onto one elbow and opened her eyes. She stared at him. "You thought I always denied Cimmeria?"

"Yes."



“I never had anyone there for me when the Voices took hold. I obeyed Them, and now I must pay for it with the memories.”

“But you aren’t like that anymore. Why remember?”

“So I don’t repeat myself. Look kid, we live in circles. However terrible I may have lived I have to deal with it, or else when I find myself at the beginning of the circle I’ll wind up making those same mistakes. You do learn to deal with it.”

“How?”

“By remembering what brought you from Cimmeria.”

Rafgard ignored the evil revelry-taking outside. Upon his mind lay a heavy burden, a question so in need of an answer that he thought it might make him mad. Or prove that he had gone mad long ago.

“*There is no God, Rafgard. There is only the Pleasure!*” the Voice that had haunted him since Naztar bit him said.

“Then why are we repelled by His name? How can Nothing hold so much power over us.”

“*He doesn’t! ‘Tis all in your mind.*”

Rafgard ignored the Voice as he searched the tiny cabin. He felt each and every thing Peter owned. He ransacked the cupboards, closets and drawers, until he found what it was he sought. Sitting atop a torn pillow lay a book; leather bound and well read. Rafgard touched it and recoiled from a burn. The Scripture read, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”<sup>2</sup>

“He is in there,” Rafgard whispered. Ignoring the pain he scooped it into his satchel.

Keelin’s glee reached his ears, and he left the cabin as if nothing were amiss.

“Daughter!” he called. “We must return. It will be dawn soon.”

“And then you and old man, Rafgard, became Christian?”

“Not quite kid. That’s when Whittaker started acting strangely. He stopped coming out at night, turned down sex and quit drinking blood. At the time I didn’t know what to think.”

“Didn’t he tell you about Christ?”

Keelin’s eyes turned glossy and her lips tightened. She caressed Trent’s cheeks and whispered, “Yes.”

“Tis a new moon, our power is at peak!” Keelin sang, twirling like a dancer unable to control her excitement.

Rafgard sat at his bureau, hunched over a book in pensive admiration as he had been for the past few months. He hadn’t dusted his quarters, and had left most of the housekeeping to his daughter. She didn’t mind. Strangely enough it gave her pleasure to clean all the golden trinkets her Sage had brought from the dragon’s lair. It gave her a chance to admire them up close and imagine that they were hers. She sat on his large brass

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<sup>2</sup> John 3:16 (NIV)

bed, her tiny buttocks sunk deeply into the straw mattress, and smiled like a child when given a new toy.

“That must be an interesting book. You’ve been lost in it forever.”

“Lost,” Rafgard repeated softly as he turned his chair to look at his daughter. His smile soundlessly sang pleasure, but not any that Keelin recognised. She did not understand when he said: “I have found my Shepherd. I am lost no more.”

“Then let me have him first, so after I take his virtue we can both get drunk on his life.” She rose from the bed and walked to him, straddling the chair so that she sat upon his lap. “Or we could find pleasure together, and drunkenness later.”

Rafgard pushed her from him before their lips met, knocking her to the floor. “Damn it Keelin! I am your father, it isn’t right this life we lead.”

“Isn’t right? What say you? We are Kith! We live for Pleasure.”

“And what Pleasure have you found in this? Is it joy or what we have come to know of joy? *But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!*<sup>3</sup>”

Keelin rose from the floor, and reaching for the book she said, “What madness have you found in ... ouch!” she screamed and recoiled from it, her fingers smoking where she had touched it.

“Is it madness Keelin? If it is then why does it burn you when no other book does. Why is it we cannot harm those with faith? Why are we repelled by the very name of... ”

“Do not speak His name!” Keelin screamed louder, covering her ears with her palms.

“I will, Keelin, I will say His name and beg forgiveness for the wrong I have done.” He turned from her and said softly, “For that wrong which I have done you.”

“Why would you seek a god that turns Pleasure to vice?”

“Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.<sup>4</sup>”

“Stop those words! No god of man will take you! We are, by nature, what evil is!”

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith ... and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God ... not by works, so that no one can boast.<sup>5</sup>”

“If Naztar hears you speak this madness he will take away your Forever.” She fell to her knees before him, her eyes wet with moisture.

“Forever? What is that compared to Eternity? Go if you want to get drunk but I am staying in again. I will speak to Him tonight. And beg His forgiveness.”

“Then tonight you will die, foolish Rafgard. Treasure or not, Naztar will kill you.”

“But he didn’t,” Trent said, shocked that his tone equalled the one with which he once prodded old man Whittaker.

“I have said too much already. The sun has begun to peak, and we must continue.”

“You can at least finish.”

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 6:23 (NIV)

<sup>4</sup> Rom 5:7-8 (NIV)

<sup>5</sup> Eph 2:8-9 (NIV)

Keelin started gathering the supplies and, without looking at him, she said, “You will learn all you need at the Circle.”

## Chapter Two

Trent looked up at the structure like some cliché'd character in one of his horror novels. He considered pinching himself to make certain he was real, but decided against it. After all, he would rather not be in pain, and the fact that he stood before a Christian Kith house confirmed it must be real. As strange as it seemed, horror novelists never wrote about vampires turning to God.

And since it was real, he had to deal with it.

He stood at the bottom of a steep incline with eighty steps. He knew how many because of a mat cast carelessly at the bottom that read: "Please watch your step. ALL EIGHTY OF THEM!" Two marble pillars rose on opposing sides of a giant set of wooden doors at the stair's top, and the building itself was cut into the side of a mountain. Trent turned and glimpsed Keelin taking her stuff from the bike, but a lake that appeared to have been carved into the mountain valley caught his eye. In the setting sun it reflected the snow capped mountains, smashing the image wherever a wave rose. He could have stared at it for hours.

"Hey kid! You gonna help me here?"

"Huh? Oh, sorry. I just."

"I know." Keelin rested the pack she carried against her hip and stared at the lake.

"I can see why you chose this place."

"You think we chose this place for the view?" she asked with an edge to her voice. She walked to him and handed him her pack.

"Why else?"

"Look kid. It's been a long drive and I feel grungy. You already kept me awake all night with 'story-time', so at least let me sleep tonight."

"I was just curious."

"I know. And lucky for you, we have a large library filled with answers."

She shot him a wink and grabbed another pack. At the top of the stairway she knocked and tapped her foot. Trent took one last look at the valley below and wished he had Jen with him to share it. The large double doors creaked open as Trent walked up the steps, and as he came beside Keelin he faced a stoutly woman with purple hair, thick black eye-shadow, and long, fake eyelashes. Her cheeks blushed like two stoplights and embracing Keelin she left a large black mark on her cheek from a kiss.

"Keelin! It's so good to see you home. How was your trip dear sister?"

Keelin smirked at Trent and said, "She means 'sister' in a generic way," then to the woman: "Gertie! I would have to say that my trip was a dismal failure. Shall I introduce that failure to you?"

Gertie pouted and lunged at Trent. "You poor dear!" Letting him go she said to Keelin: "It may be a good thing we have, pardon the expression, new blood amongst us."

"Why?" asked both Keelin and Trent in unison.

As Gertie's eyes narrowed her eyeliner resembled bat wings. "This is Council business."

Keelin nodded. "C'mon kid, I'll show you to your room and then the library."

“No!” Gertie shouted, pulling Keelin close. Then whispering she said, “*He’s* in there. You know, Whittaker’s friend.”

Keelin smiled. “I almost wish I could be a fly on the wall when I take Trent to the library ... and I will take him there, first thing as a matter of fact.”

Trent slung his pack over his shoulder. “Why? What’s up?”

“Nothing,” Keelin said as she followed Gertie inside. “What makes you think something’s up?”

Following her Trent said, “You called me ‘Trent’ and not ‘kid’.”

The floors were polished hardwood and tapestries adorned the marble walls. Wooden-stained doors with brass hinges and handles littered the hallway, each with a placard that read “This Kith Believes.”

“Wow. This place must have taken a long time to build.”

Keelin laughed. “Kid, when you have a life-span of eight hundred and fifty human years, seven hundred and fifty for males, you have a lot of spare time on your hands.”

“Guess so. Guess I should start thinking up a hobby.”

“Later.” Keelin stopped in front of a door with a sign that read ‘Library’. Pointing to it she said, “For now you can read.”

“Read what? Where do I start?”

“Whittaker’s diary.” Keelin started walking away with Gertie but stopped. Turning she said, “Good luck kid.”

Then she left, leaving Trent alone in the dark hallway.

As Trent opened the door he closed his eyes and stepped into the library. Shutting the door he opened his eyes a crack, letting them adjust to the light. But when Trent looked about the room not only did he find he was in near darkness ... he also found that he was not alone.

“Oh! I’m sorry ... I, uh, didn’t know someone was here.”

“Perchance next time you will knock before entering a room,” the stranger growled, not looking up from the leather bound text from which he read.

Trent stuttered something incoherently. A single lamp burned from the table, casting an amber glow over the stranger’s dark features. The sight of him made Trent step back, and when his right foot tripped over his left he barely caught himself from falling. The stranger laughed.

“How odd it feels, to have frightened a Kith.”

“You didn’t frighten me,” Trent said as the stranger sat back in his creaky, wooden chair. Blushing he added, “...much. Guess I’m still new at this.”

The stranger flipped to a page in his book. “Ahh, yes. Vampires propagate through their bite. Proof it is a disease and not a true race outside the humans.” Then, looking at Trent he said, “You are lucky to be alive. Cimmeria no longer Begets.”

Trent sighed, and walked to a chair on the table’s opposite side. He sat, placed his hands on the board; the one embracing the other. He again looked at the dark man and said, “They left you alive.”

“I am not a Kith!” He slammed a fist upon the wooden table and rose. “I am called Rancour, of the clan Wulfsign. I am a werewolf.”

“Then how could you understand, you were probably raised by your pack.”

“I was not raised by my village, no.” Rancour’s focus was upon the book before him. The light from the candle cast shadows over his features that made him appear stone, as if the years of immortality had turned emotion solid and meaningless. “The man I knew as father kidnapped me and raised me as one of his own.” He sighed and whispered, “As if I would never know the difference.”

Trent stood and walked to a bookshelf, mentally counting the volumes. “That you could shape shift?”

Eyebrows raised on the Wulfsign’s brow and he looked up at Trent. A half-smile grew on his face as he said, “And is your vampirism what makes you different from your clan? Are you otherwise the same?”

“No.” Trent absently reached for a volume entitled, *Christ and His Triumph Over the Addiction*. It was leather-bound with gold trimming and lettering, it was at least two inches thick and very well-read. He felt the Wulfsign reach out and push the book back into place. Ignoring Trent’s startled face he spoke:

“I was different because I had compassion where my brethren had none. I had power that they desired, but a conscience not to use it.” Turning his back to Trent he said, “Now please leave me be. I have no use for your kind.”

“I’m still more human than vampire,” Trent muttered, “and I can’t leave you alone. I don’t know where else to go. I only came here to read my father’s diary.”

“You are Whittaker’s boy?” Rancour craned his head, the long eyebrow that spanned his forehead raised over his right eye.

“Yeah, I guess. Wasn’t exactly my choice. I wanted to read his diary to try and figure out why he wanted a Progeny so badly.”

Rancour sat, never taking his piercing emerald gaze from the boy. “I wondered the same of my father. Why he would steal me from a clan that loved me and bring me into one that barely tolerated me.”

“I always thought Old Man Whittaker was a good guy, wish I could figure out why he ruined my life.”

“He was full of good intentions, for a Kith,” Rancour said, cocking a half-smile. “He did much for me, and now it’s time for me to do much for him.”

“What’s that?”

“Let his Progeny learn who he was. This diary is yours, I have read all that I need.” He sighed and said, “For today.” Rancour rose with book in hand, and walked to a shelf. Before placing the volume into its place he turned back and growled, “It was good to meet you.”

“Thanks. It was good to meet you, too. It felt so strange to be in a place without friends...”

“You are still without friends! I have no need of Kith.” Rancour spat.

Trent wished he had Jen with him.

“Am I interrupting?” Keelin called from the doorway, snatching both men’s attention.

“You are always interrupting,” Rancour muttered and concentrated on the book before him.

Keelin stood for a moment in the doorway before flipping a switch on the wall. Lamps suspended from the ceiling suddenly glowed, chasing the darkness away. Keelin meandered toward the table, a smile echoing the deviance draped across her face, and

stood before the werewolf. With two fingers, she squeezed the wick on the candle and extinguished it.

“We have this thing called ‘electricity’ now, you should consider trying it.” Then she said to Trent: “There’s a service about to start, follow the hall the opposite way we came and it’s on your left. We’ll be there shortly.”

Trent rose and simply wanted away from their glares. “O-kay,” he said and exited the room. But outside the door he stopped and listened to the voices inside.

Keelin said, “Have you no empathy? He’s a good kid and deserved to live out his life.”

There was a shuffling of papers. “You always disturb me when I am working.” A long silence, then: “If I had no empathy, would I have sought you to bring you here?”

“I thought you were just doing Whittaker a favour.”

“There you go putting words in my mouth. And it was just a favour ... blast woman, leave me be!”

Keelin started laughing and Trent decided he’d eavesdropped enough. There was a strange dynamic between these two, one he would learn in time. But first he had to figure out his own strange dynamic in this place, and why Whittaker thought God wanted him here.



It was not at all what Trent expected, although he wasn’t sure exactly what he was expecting. The room was most certainly what he would consider large, but plain and not at all imposing. There was a picture window on the North side as well as a skylight, but neither was crafted of stained glass. Two couches, an overstuffed comfy chair and a dozen folding seats were laid out before a podium. Every piece of furniture looked garage sale and when all the seats had been taken Kith took to sitting on the floor. There was no raised platform, no statues, nothing save for a plaque that read, “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Trent sat on the floor beside Keelin, but could not see anything. He tried shifting his body hoping for a better vantagepoint but it was to no avail. He sighed.

Keelin said, “What’s the problem, kid?”

“I can’t see anything from down here.”

His sister smiled and stared at him awhile. “What are you trying to see?”

“The preacher.”

“Is that why you’re here?”

Trent considered, then said, “No. I am here to honour God.”

“Then if you must look anywhere, might I suggest you look up.”

Before Trent could answer he heard someone at the podium say, “Hi, my name is Lucy and I am a redeemed sinner.”

The audience responded, “Hi, Lucy.”

She paused and Trent sensed her uneasiness. He still tried shifting to see her but eventually settled on staring up. He looked upon the blue sky outside the glass window, and thought of Old Man Whittaker. How strange, he thought, everyone else must have seemed to him.

The girl continued, "Before we begin, are there any new or returning Kith?"

A deep, nervous voice, the kind one forces out during a third grade class presentation, spoke from somewhere to the eastern side of the room, "My name is Jared, and I am a redeemed sinner. I left the Circle two years past, it's good to be home again."

Lucy said, "Welcome back, Jared. Anyone else?"

Trent felt his heart beat. He wondered if he should stand, speak and proclaim his presence but he just couldn't. Fear held him back, the same fright that he saw conquered in the eyes around him. Keelin took his hand.

"There is no pressure."

Lucy continued, "Would someone read the Twelve Steps?"

A soft-spoken woman read:

"One: We admitted our powerlessness over sin – that our lives had become unmanageable.

"Two: We came to believe in a Power greater than ourselves, and that Jesus the Christ was the Son of that Power, and only He could restore us to sanity.

"Three: We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God through Christ Jesus.

"Four: We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

"Five: We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another Kith the exact nature of our wrongs.

"Six: We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

"Seven: Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

"Eight: Made a list of all the people we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

"Nine: Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

"Ten: Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted to it.

"Eleven: Sought through prayer and scripture to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

"Twelve: Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of those steps, we tried to carry this message to other Kith, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

Lucy then said, "Is there anyone who would like to share?"

Trent still could not see. There was relief in the assumption that if he could not see the speaker, then the speaker could not see him. His heart pounded, still not as much as when he was human but more so than since his Begetting, and it was silenced only when a man took the podium.

"I am Rancour of the Wulfsign, a sinner saved by Christ. I despise you all, and I ask for your forgiveness."

The room was silent and Trent turned to ask Keelin what was going on, but she had left. After a few more moments of silence he heard her at the podium.

"Christ, our Sage, forgave you when you accepted Him into your heart. But it is not our forgiveness you need, but your own."

Trent remembered the service back home as he looked into the eyes of the Kith around him. These vampire came before God truly knowing that without Jesus there were powerless to sin. By sharing their darkest secrets they conquered fear and shame, and



because they shared they could not judge. He recalled Whittaker sitting in the back pew staring up and how the whole congregation thought he wasn't paying attention. Trent now understood that though the old man may not have been focusing on the pastor, he was paying heed to God.

Chapter Three

OCTOBER, 1989

*Dear Trent,*

*I wish you'd write me back. There's so much going on that I need to share with you, and I miss you terribly. I finally told my Mom about what Billy did, but don't worry, I never told her about what happened to you. I'm moving to Winnipeg. My Mom thinks it would be best if we weren't in Minnow Creek after what happened. Too many sad memories.*

*I'm giving you my new address. Please write.*

*Love, Jen*

“Must be interesting reading. I’m nearly done an entire page and you have yet to disturb me.”

Trent looked away from the letter and folded it. Rancour stared at his own text. Trent sighed. “I won’t disturb you today, maybe not ever again.”

“You bothered me just by your presence.” Rancour cocked a half-smile. “Why don’t you write her back?”

“And say what? What do you say to someone who’s like a sister and has suddenly become a stranger.”

“Farewell.” Rancour’s glare turned as cold as his voice. “You say farewell.”

A cool autumn mist settled over the Irish highlands, covering rolling mounts of emerald and brown. Rancour lay in the grass, stretched lazily onto his back, enjoying the feel of warmth on his bare belly. A smile was over his lips threatened only with the knowledge that he would soon have to return to the Alsandair. He scanned his surroundings, the beauty of the wild hidden beneath the smoky grey. If only the mist would rise, reveal the wonder it covered, set free what the gods had made.

Unless the gods had nothing to do with beauty, and had sent the grey as a covering for their mistake. For they did make mistakes, there were anomalies for which they could not account, beauty did exist under bane. Rancour closed his eyes and the hair over his body sizzled, bones cracked and shifted, and the garments he wore melted into skin. There was no pain, oddly, but rather there was elation. He imagined the transformation was much like setting a spark ablaze, where the spark was the desires in his heart and the timber the prejudice of his brethren. But not even the threat of torture or banishment would stop

Rancour from shifting into the wulf, for it was in this form where he found liberation and joy. Even if he had to do it in solitude.

Sunlight burned soft yellow beneath the overcast sky, and sometime during the late afternoon mist had turned to light rainfall. Beside him, blade down in the sod, protruded a sword honed as perfect as a clear night sky. Druid-carved lettering down one side read, "Damned Be Him Who Knows This Steel", where on the other was, "Rancour of the Alsandair". The wulf opened his eyes and caught a glimpse of the weapon, never seeing in it the pride of his kinsmen but the nightmare that was his life.

A voice from shadows and mist bellowed, "Brother!" sending wulf back into man. Rancour stood, spun and faced his brother who stared wide-eyed and ghostly.

"Kendil, how - how long ye been there?"

A pause, as uncomfortable as it was long. Kendil spoke in a voice confident, but not relaxed. "That is unimportant. Ansgar has declared war on the nearby village. When we attack you must steal their two new-borns."

"Steal children?"

"Aye, it is a great day my brother. The gods demand a sacrifice, one that will make us prosper."

"What prosperity can come from the slaughter of innocents? Perhaps it be the gods whom we should wage war upon!"

Kendil turned his back on Rancour and stared off into the mist. "It is because of comments such as yours that we do such things. You would do well to mind your tongue."

Rancour stared after his brother. He did not know what to do or say, only that he must comply. Right and wrong rarely had anything to do with duty.

"Farewell," Rancour repeated in a voice as soft as a mother's caress. "Had I the strength to say that word, I would have seen that right *is* stronger than duty."

Trent stood. He walked to a shelf and slid a book out, blew away the dust, and carried it to the table. "I'm afraid to say good-bye. I'm afraid."

"That it means an end? It does." Rancour stood and walked to the same shelf from where Trent had taken the book. Sighing he said, "But an end is not always a tragedy. And that was what I had yet to learn."

"How did you learn?"

Rancour looked suddenly sad. His eyes moistened, breaths quickened, and he sighed.

The Alsandair stood, poised for battle, upon the peak of a hill that overlooked the neighbouring village. Rancour, sword at the ready, stared at the hut where he was to steal two infants. One to be sacrificed at the end of battle the other tomorrow at dawn. It was at times like these when Rancour did not believe in gods, for how could he knowing such mighty beings took pleasure in the destruction of men? How could his clan take such pleasure, he wondered.

But what difference was there in him if actions did not reflect desire? He was no better a man for wishing virtue if he followed his bent kinsmen. And that was what he did. As his kinsmen rushed toward the unsuspecting villagers Rancour fell into line. His blade drawn, ready and thirsty as any. Men ran from homes but were no match for the Alsandair. Cries

of defeat echoed within the valley ending in throes of death. Rancour fought with superhuman strength. He snapped necks with his bare hands, sliced guts with one sweep of his blade and often intentionally took blows that would have killed most men. But he was not a man and thus fought unfairly in an unjust war. Fought and killed men who protected themselves with tools meant for tending fields.

*They are not warriors*, he thought as he threw a man from his back. Just then Ansgar came to him and said, "You are a tribute to the Alsandair, now go and take what is ours!"

Rancour ran to the chieftain's hut and kicked in the door. Inside he found a mother coddling two new-borns, and a tall slender man standing before them armed with a pike.

"We signed a treaty. We paid your tribute. Why?"

"The gods demand it," Rancour said as if that should be reason enough. He wished the battle fever would overcome him as it had the others, he wished his conscience would subside and let him do as the gods command. He wished an end to the bent life he lived.

"Wow, what did you do?" Trent asked, as engrossed in the storytelling as he had been with Old Man Whittaker.

Rancour looked hundreds of years away. His lower lip trembled, but no tears fell. Muscles tightened as he said, "I killed the family. I stole the children. And I aided in the sacrifice. When the villagers came for revenge, I slaughtered them and captured two for another sacrifice to the gods."

The candle upon the table had burned halfway and flickered with a sizzle. Trent looked everywhere save for the Wulfsign and he wondered if he should say anything. The werewolf continued:

"How can you treat us with such malice? Have you no kindness in your heart?"

Rancour stood outside the gaol and sighed. When he had agreed to take guard duty he had done so only because no other villager than the chieftain could speak Alsandair. But it had not taken long before Rancour learned their tongue as easily as his own.

The prisoner said, "I know you understand me, I can see it in your eyes. If you have no conscience, then why are you so afraid to speak with me?"

"Aye, I understand you. Please leave me be, I do what I do because the gods command it."

"You follow false gods then. Why would a god create such beauty if he wanted men to spoil it?"

"It is not my right to question."

"Serve a god that says you must serve others. Do not question, seek."

Rancour faced the two men within the prison. One sat weeping on the floor while the other who spoke stood grasping the bars. He said again, "Seek."

"I would have to leave my clan, my life. I cannot."

"You cannot lose what was never yours." He reached through the bars and grasped Rancour's shoulder. "But whatever you choose know this: I forgive you."

"And did you?" Trent was not certain if he wanted to know.

"I set them free. But I did not set myself free, and so my father hung me on the gallows as an example to the others."

“What did they do when they couldn’t kill you?” Trent asked, his mind ablaze with an image of such a horrible society.

“They let me hang for days. It was my father, Ansgar, who finally brought me back to the Council for banishment.”

“I’m surprised they didn’t just let you hang.”

Rancour chuckled. “They wanted to use the gallows again, and I was in their way. At the time, I thought it would have been better to die.”

“And now?”

“Now I see circumstance for what it is. I left the Alsandair and met Ariana, who gave me a home.”

“Irish dog! Why don’t you go back to where ya came from?”

Ariana walked tightly beside Rancour through the crowded, narrow cobblestone streets. Many stared, few shouted, but all showed their disgust for him in some manner. She looked up at his rigid jaw, bushy low-lined eyebrows, and playful grin. He seemed completely undaunted by the remarks, as if he had not heard them.

She said, “They do not bother you?”

“Why should they? I don’t know them.” And to him it was that simple. Or, could it be she wondered, that as brawny as he was he was that much ill-equipped to fight? Is that why he was banished by his people? Rancour pointed to a minstrel and laughed. His eyes widened and he hurried close. Closing his eyes he listened as intently as a babe suckling candy, each note a sweet to his ear. Ariana was amazed by him.

“Have you not heard a lire before?” she inquired.

“I have not. How does it work?”

But before she could explain a tall, wide fellow stepped between them and the musician. He glared with wide blue eyes, chest heaving and muscles flexed. He stood with no more than a hair’s width between he and the Wulfsign, a challenge thrown for all to witness. When he spoke his voice was harsh and controlled, like boiling lava about to burst its summit.

“We do not want your kind ‘ere.”

Rancour reached out to bring Ariana safely behind him. He met the gaze head on without blinking, but when he spoke he did so calmly. There was even a smile over his lips. “I mean to show no disrespect, but I cannot help the circumstance of my birth any more than could you.”

“I was born English by the will of God.” The burly fellow did not back down. Several others stood behind him, urging him on.

Rancour looked pensive. “Then perhaps you would share your noble position with me by allowing me a life ‘o peace.”

Silence. Both men glared at one another. Until finally the burly fellow laughed and, patting Rancour on the shoulder, he said, “He’s all right! This newcomer is all right!”

The crowd dispersed and Rancour, as though nothing had happened, turned to Ariana and said, “A lire you say?”

“Were you afraid you could not best him?” she asked though she knew better.

Rancour threw a coin at the minstrel and said, "There is no honour returning to a life I have chosen to leave."

Ariana could not help herself. Standing on her tiptoes she kissed his cheek and said, "Wait here, I'll gather what we need from the market."

"Aye," he said caressing the moist spot on his face. He watched after her as she walked off into the crowd. He did not know exactly the words to describe the emotions he felt when with her. It was unlike anything he had known, his heart fluttered, his lips smiled and there was sorrow whenever she was not near. Was it love?

"What else could it be?" asked a man beside him.

"Pardon?" Rancour said and turned to face a tall, thin man.

"Your bravado, I witnessed everything. You are the bravest man I have ever met. Allow me to introduce myself, I am Shay Jackson." The tall man bowed. He was pale and quite sickly. It was as if he had not eaten in weeks.

"You are met well, friend. Might I ask, and forgive my imprudence, if you are down on your luck?"

"Had I known the treachery that was to unfold I may have reconsidered my acts of kindness." Rancour snapped a pencil in half when he spoke the word 'treachery'.

Trent knew he was hearing a tale better than any he could have read in a novel. "Shay was a vampire?"

"He was Kith. A Sage filled with more bane than any other I have met."

"He killed your true love?"

"Is that the worst act in your mind? There is an evil beyond murder that I pray you never comprehend. One I cannot comprehend.

"Did you ever tell her of your lycanthropy?"

Rancour focused on the candle and for a flash Trent saw the darkness in his features for what it was: a mask over a broken heart. His muscles tightened, his breathing laboured and deeply he said, "I could not for fear our love would not endure."

Rancour ran through the woods to where he had left Ariana alone with the wagon. He stumbled over overgrown roots and burst through thickets that cut through his cloak. But still he hurried, his parting words to Ariana still fresh in his mind. "I 'ave some personal business to attend to. Wait 'ere, Shay cannot find us now." And that had been truth, had Shay been mortal.

He cursed aloud at having left her alone. Why could he have not brought her with him to meet Indigo, what could have been the worst? He came into view of the wagon, but not of Ariana. Samson, his prized stallion, was asleep on the sod. He took a few steps forward, still he could not see her, fell to his knees and cursed once more. He left her alone for fear of what she might do if she learned of the wulf.

With eyes shut tight he rose to his feet. Looking upon the world he took a few paces forward, followed by more and more until he stood before the wagon. From the ground he could see that all his belongings were gone. Hoisting himself onto the seat he looked inside where he found the Wulfsign sword and his love. She was pale, pale as fresh snow, and had two bite marks on her neck.

Rancour screamed a cry of anguish as she opened her eyes. He knew what he had to do.

“Which was?” Trent asked but knew straight away that he shouldn’t have.

Rancour was silent for a long time. He whispered, “I saved her.”

“But I thought you could not murder?”

“I did not! I saved her from an existence devoid of redemption, one that I would save you from but only because of my pact with Rafgard do I not. I leave those Kith alone who join the Circle, I save the rest.”

“Have you loved anyone since?”

He smiled, sort of, and stayed fixated on the candle. Sighing he replied, “I have not. There is a prophecy: ‘when a Wulfsign truly loves a mortal, she will be born one millennium from her death. Should their love be reunited and true, the werewolf shall become human and both will grow old together’. I will wait a millennium, but I would wait my immortality.”

“What do you do with your time?”

The Wulfsign’s focus returned to the book and he growled, “I have learned to hunt Kith.”

“You kill us to avenge your girlfriend.”

“I kill Kith to kill Kith.”

“Why would Rafgard teach you to do such a thing? Was it to give you power to see if you would use it?”

Rancour laughed. “You are a quick one. Your father did not come to me, it was I who happened by him.”

Rancour’s steed travelled the dark, narrow dirt road. It never made any noise, as if it knew when its master needed silence to think. To become so submerged in his thoughts that he forgot even those of his own kind. The horse snorted, quietly, comforted by its master’s gentle touch.

“Easy Samson,” Rancour whispered. “‘Tis a road we must travel.”

He looked about himself in the dark woods, recalling the last time he had come this route. It had been years since he buried Ariana, a task that had taken him two full days, but it wasn’t so much the labour he remembered as the foul stench of vampyre that lingered in the air. The same stench he smelt now.

“Samson, take heed. I smell company ahead.” Then in a growl, “Damned company.”

Samson stopped when his master pulled on the reigns, and stood stoically for Rancour to dismount. He gave the “stay put” hand-gesture and crept along the dirt road toward the familiar scent, listening to voices; two men and a woman.

“If you wish to kill me Naztar, then do so!” one man said.

“I will leave this task for your daughter. Will you kill her to save yourself?”

“Nay,” the man whispered.

Rancour growled, “Such honour is ‘ard to find.”

The one he assumed must be Naztar faced him. He was tall, much taller than the mortal cowering on the road, and donned a cape that flowed as if a wind were trapped

beneath it. When he laughed his long pointed teeth reflected the light from the full moon, and his eyes drew into tight slits.

“And who is this that has come to die?” Naztar bellowed.

“I need you to challenge me before I can fight in mortal combat. I ‘ave met evil but never one so vile that ‘e would hypnotise a daughter to kill her father! I shall reward this man by saving ‘is life.”

“Man? You think this is a mortal like you? Begone foolish one, or you shall take this ‘man’s` place.”

As Rancour changed into the wolf he thought: *I will show you what kind ‘o man am I!*

“A powerful one I see,” Naztar’s cheeks flushed with colour. “Telepathy and shape-change. Perhaps I shall battle you.”

“Then do so!”

“Before I kill you, I pray you tell me why you wish to save this man.”

“A vampyre killed me soul-mate. I would sooner die then let another suffer me fate.”

Naztar laughed so loudly that tears came to his eyes. “You would save this man because you abhor my kind?”

“Aye, that is why. Now have at you!”

“Nay, werewolf. I shall leave in peace so that you might see what it is you have saved.”

Naztar opened his cape and disappeared in a puff of smoke and the girl, shooting the man on the ground a hard glare, disappeared herself.

Rancour meandered to the man and extended his hand. “You are met well, friend. Do not be afraid, I shan’t ‘arm you.”

The man faced him and took the hand offered. Standing he said, “I thank-you for your kindness, but why did you not kill him?”

“I did not because I cannot.”

“You are one of Faith...”

“Nay! I am one who lacks knowledge. I did not kill because I do not know ‘ow.”

The man’s shoulders drooped. “I thought you might know how to save me.”

“I did save you. Now go and forget what you saw tonight. I ‘ave a grave to visit. Go now. In peace.”

Rancour turned and started toward Samson. He stopped only when the man said, “I can teach you about vampyres.”

The Wulfsign turned and growled, “Do not mock me mortal.”

“I do not.”

“Then do not assume that whatever knowledge you ‘ave of vampyres is truth.”

The man spread his cape wide and flew into the air. Hovering above Rancour he said, “And do not assume to know a man, when you have only just met.”

“Mockery!” Rancour shouted, shifting back into the wulf.

The man returned to the ground. “I will not challenge you, I have lived an evil life for long enough. If you will not befriend me, then begone!”

The vampyre turned to leave, but stopped when Rancour shouted, “Wait!”

The wulf turned back into a human and, with a hushed voice, he said, “Please teach me how to triumph over one ‘o you.”



“He was a real friend to you then,” Trent said.

“Aye, that he was. I had thought him an anomaly, but knowing he Begot you eases my heart.”

“How do you mean?”

“Kith are evil, sinful creatures without redemption. You are proof positive. Relax, I will not kill unless I am challenged.”

“I won’t do that.”

“Or I catch my enemy in an act of evil.”

“Well, I won’t be doin’ anything evil either.”

“So say you now. So also said Rafgard, and after having lived with this Christian sect for so many years I almost believed it might be true. I recall a time when Whittaker forsook his evil ways, a time when...”

The sun fell against the uncaring horizon as Rafgard watched the unholy act take place within a cabin. He’d heard rumours of a vampyre that had recently been Begotten, and had hoped to tell whoever it might be about the Circle. He stood outside a bedroom window; the day had been hot and the sheepskin that normally covered such openings had been removed to allow in the gentle breeze. Three men stood around a bed where a sick woman lay, one holding a crucifix against her forehead, the other two standing in pensive thought.

“She is a demon, Kyle. We must put her to death,” the one holding the cross said.

A tall, stocky man, to whom the first had referred to as “Kyle” said, “Nay, Tristin, I cannot. If she ‘as been bit then it is up to you to save ‘er. I shall take no part in this.”

Rafgard cringed from a sharp pain in his head. Then, as the sun poured from sight a Voice said: *“This is the humanity you wish to love? They do this unjust deed in the name of your God!”*

“They do this in the name of Ignorance. How are they to know she is not a vampyre?”

The third in the cabin, a shorter balding fellow, turned his back on the three and began collecting his things.

“She is no demon. There is no need to burn her, just let her die in peace.”

“Are you daft man?” Tristin towered over the bald one as he spoke, “There is blood on her lips every mornin’!”

“She is sick. It is this way with this disease.”

“Perhaps the devils have got you.”

The bald one turned to Tristin with eyes as cold as dawn. “Do not anger me, friend. I know of things that you can only dream.”

Tristin and Kyle shouted after him as he walked out from the cabin to where a horse and cart waited. As he pulled himself onto the riding bench he took the reins and muttered, “Ignorant fools.”

“And what made you so wise?” Rafgard said, appearing on the riding bench beside him.

The man didn’t even flinch. “Experience,” he growled, lashing out with a wooden crucifix.

Rafgard reached out and wrapped his fingers around it, never taking his gaze from him.

The man said, “So it would appear that one needs faith for this to work. Life was so much easier when I had guns.... ”

"It would not work anyway. I am a follower of Christ, a Kith turned repentant."

"What kind of fool...."

"Do I take you for? Perhaps I am the fool for having ventured so close to a vampyre hunter."

"I know you will not kill me, I know when I die. What I don't know is what Pleasure you have found in this game."

"Game? What game could I play with one so knowledgeable of the future and past?" Rafgard waited for an answer, and when he got none he asked, "How did you know that woman was not a vampyre?"

"I am Indigo Anterior and I have hunted your kind since 2100. You have no idea with what..."

Rafgard's eyes grew, as did his fangs. "Aye, I do. And it is good that we met!"

Rancour paused, and stared past the young Kith. He sighed. "Indigo is a strange being." As he looked past Trent his gaze turned soft, yet as sharp as a freshly honed blade. "Do you believe that vampire's are the only creature's outside the human race?"

"I never really thought about it."

"Neither did I, till the first time I changed into a wolf. Don't look so surprised. You will soon learn about all kinds of strange beings."

"Is Indigo a werewolf, or human?"

"A Descender. A being cursed to ride time backwards, living his first moments last and his last moments first."

"It sounds to me like he hated Kith and werewolves."

"He read a passage in a history text that told him he would be killed by unnatural means in the year 992. He thought that gave him the right to kill all supernatural beings."

"So how do you know him?"

"A few months before he was killed he befriended me. Until now I never understood why."

"How long do you intend to keep me here?" Indigo yelled, his voice bouncing from the cell's walls.

"*You are not my prisoner,*" a voice answered from the darkness. "*'Tis your curiosity that binds you. Quench it and you are free.*"

Indigo relaxed into the simple wooden chair. Upon a stone table he had set out several books with which he'd been reading to learn ancient Gaelic. In his hands he held a leather-bound text that made him afraid. Light from an oil-burning lamp caressed the yellowed pages, but thick black letters on its cover clearly spoke: "Journal of Rancour the Wulfsign."

Indigo's heart beat like thunder, so loudly that the tiny room echoed. He opened the book to its middle, and continued where he had left off the day before: "992. Today I have lost everything, both my love and Indigo, my friend. I can take comfort knowing that in one thousand years Ariana will be mine again, but what comfort can I find in knowing that Indigo will forever be my enemy?"

Indigo closed his eyes and buried his face in his palms. He wept and fell to the floor, curling into a ball.

"What have I done?" he whispered. "What have I done."

“It wasn’t long after when he came to teach me about my race. I never knew why he had, but now I do.”

“Why hate Kith who have redeemed themselves?”

“Because Kith cannot be redeemed.” He sighted. “And now I leave you, and the Circle, so that I may see prophecy unfold.”

“Will I see you again?”

Rancour fixated on his clasped hands before him. For but an instant the darkness in his features disappeared and Trent saw him as the man in the stories. In a tone only an octave higher than a whisper he said, “If my faith is a fallacy, you will not. But I believe this god of ours will be as true to me as he is to you.”

And he stood, a smile over his face like none other Trent had seen. In that expression was told a love so true that it could only have come from God. A love that, Trent realised, he would never experience.

## Chapter Four

**JANUARY 2001**

Trent sat on a lawn chair that overlooked the valley. Mountains made up its perimeter, each one a wondrous shade of emerald. The lake below sparkled a placid blue reflection of its supernal wall and criss-crossing with lines of frothy white were water-skiers out enjoying the sunshine. In his hand Trent held a book about the legend of Ogopogo, a serpentine sea monster said to still inhabit this water's depths. He scoffed at such a ludicrous notion, and then laughed as he thought of Rafgard entering the dragon's lair.

"Should I be concerned of a Kith who has found such joy?" spoke a raspy voice from behind.

Trent leapt to his feet and spun. There he was, Rancour the Wulfsign, returned from his trip. "And is she?"

Rancour's brow lightened and he exclaimed, "I felt her soul return! Ariana and I will be together again." Just then the werewolf ran to Trent and embraced him, just as if the rivalry of their races was no more.

Trent ended their hug and sat on his chair. "Why did you come back? It's been so many years."

Rancour walked to the edge of the balcony and leaned on its rails. Darkness returned to his features and his upper lip curled as if in a snarl. When he spoke the words growled within his throat and there was a hint of hopelessness. "She is just now born, young Trent. I must wait until she nears adulthood, when her soul remembers the man I was." Then in almost a whisper, "The man I no longer am." More loudly, but as if he were speaking not to the Kith but into the Heavens, "If we still share a true love I will become human. I will grow old with her, and I will die in her arms. How I want to die in her arms."

Trent kept the silence for a few moments. He said, "Become human? I thought you were a race beyond Man's, and not a curse such as the Kith."

There was a stillness between them that made Trent wonder if he had pushed too far. But the Wulfsign laughed, and said, "I have missed these bantering, even if you are a Kith."

Trent, too, laughed and was glad to have his friend back. Even if it was for a short interlude. "I think old times sake would have us go to the library, what do you say?"

"After you," Rancour replied.

## Chapter Five

**FEBRUARY, 2001**

“A man has been Begotten.”

Rancour ignored Keelin and perused a bookshelf, placing the diary he'd been holding between two other volumes. He said, “How do you know?”

“Yeah, how – how do you know?” Trent asked, sitting at a table while reading a diary of his own.

Keelin smiled and walked to where Rancour had been sitting. She took the seat, clasped her hands before her, and narrowed her eyes at Trent. She threw a newspaper upon the table, and both Trent and Rancour read the headline: “BLOOD BATH AT PUZZLE.”

Rancour growled, “Is there any wonder why I despise your kind so much?”

Trent slowly reached for the paper, but was not able to bring himself to read the article. When he looked up he saw Keelin glaring at the Wulfsign.

“Even Cimmeria has given up murder in the Modern Age. This is unprecedented.”

Rancour turned to face her. “This was a matter of time. I assume I will be welcome on this journey, or shall I venture alone?”

Keelin leaned into her chair and kicked a foot to rest upon the table. “What would a journey be, without the Angel of Death.”

Rancour walked to sit between the two vampires and glowered at the woman. “I have saved more lives than any demon here.”

Keelin raised her palm and the werewolf fell silent, save for a long sigh that echoed like a growl. “My father may have regarded you as a friend, but I do not share his sentiment. If you wish to accompany us I will allow that but...”

Rancour rose. “You *allow* nothing!”

Keelin shouted, “I will *allow* it so this Kith may have a chance against you!”

Rancour paused; his eyes narrowing as his grin grew into a smile. “And what would you do to stop me? Would you challenge me?”

Trent's knees felt like ice, but swallowing hard he forced himself to stand. “Uh ... couldn't we settle this issue of pride after we save ... this new recruit?”

Keelin and the Wulfsign glared hard at one another for a moment longer. Rancour said, “We'll take the 'cuda.”

Keelin, her voice cold and steady, replied, “Trent and I will take my bike. You can follow, if you can keep up.”

Rancour smiled. “You have not seen Manitoba in February.”

The highway twisted and dipped as it wound down the mountains, often it was so severe that the car's tires left long marks of tread. Trent held his breath tight, grinding his teeth and holding his eyes shut.

“Hey kid, we may not be mortal but it's still rather uncomfortable not to breathe. Deep breaths now.”

“Huh?”

“You’re holding your breath.”

“Oh.” Trent relaxed, but as the ‘cuda screeched around another corner he resumed his tight grip.

“I’ll slow down,” Rancour said as the vehicle decelerated

Trent relaxed again. “You were driving like a maniac. You could have....”

“Killed us? Relax kid.” She chuckled. “If we fly off the mountain, we’ll do just that. Fly.”

“What’s with this rivalry between you two anyway?”

Keelin sighed. “It isn’t that simple. Sometimes people are more complicated, so complex in fact that it isn’t a matter of ‘liking’ or ‘disliking’ them.”

“There’s a story here, isn’t there?”

“You’re catching on kid.”

“You think so ill of me that you would force me to climb this summit?” Rancour spat once he reached the ledge where a frail woman sat with her legs dangling over the side. The crag was weak and its edges crumbled. Beneath was a valley of white, puffy cotton that made them seem only a few feet high. Above was opal ether, with the Milky Way an eerie reflection of the blue-capped cloud.

The woman had still not spoken. Her gaze was on the empty horizon, a seemingly flat ledge much like the one on which she sat. Her hair was tattered and clumped with dirt. Her shoulders shivered and her hands lay clasped in her lap. Rancour approached carefully. From his sack he drew a wooden stake and advanced closer. But she did not move. Though the wind beckoned her over the edge, to escape her hunter yet again, she stayed as still as a porcelain doll.

The Wulfsign placed the tip of his stake, a tool stained with the blood of Kith, gently against her back. One push and she would know Hell firsthand forever.

At last she said, implored, “End this voice in my mind. Save me from a life dedicated to, yet void of, Pleasure.”

But Rancour could not, without understanding why he removed the weapon from her and sighed. Later when he reflected on the moment he would remember a vow to Whittaker that should he catch Keelin he would beseech her to join the Circle before killing her. He would deliver her to death only if she refused. Off in the distance the sun was peaking over the clouds cascading the sky in scarlet and amber.

“The sun will not kill you, that is myth.” He told her. “Why do you now forfeit your life to me?”

She began to sob. Tears, blood red, streamed from her eyes to fall off the edge of the precipice. In words as broken as a fallen mirror she whispered, “I Begot a woman, I empowered her.” She looked up at her hunter and he could see in her gaze the disgust she had found for what she’d done. “I made her like me.”

Rancour sighed. “I will save you, Keelin. On my honour, I will save you.”

The ‘cuda rumbled louder, silenced only by Trent’s thoughts. He wondered how Rancour, who claimed to hate Kith could show so much love for them. As they rounded a mountain curve Trent said, “You brought Keelin to the Circle?”

Rancour said nothing as he concentrated on the road. Keelin said, "Yeah, he did. I owe him entirely too much."

The Wulfsign grumbled, "You owe me nothing. I did what was right because it was in my honour to do so."

## Chapter Six

Rusted winter beaters, stained orange from cancerous salted roads, pushed over fresh fallen snow. Rancour entered Winnipeg via Portage Avenue heading east, on a Saturday night when the city bustled with traffic. Moonlight had replaced sunlight long ago, although a neon clock read only 6 p.m. The light snowfall raised the temperature to a balmy minus twenty, and though the cuda's heater was cocked full it did little against the chill. Trent shivered, but knew what he felt was only a prelude of what awaited beyond their metallic shelter.

The Wulfsign sighed. "I can hear the salt eating my pride."

"I never realised how much I missed Manitoba until just now."

Keelin scoffed. "It's like Hell encased in ice. Do we even know where we're going?"

Another traffic light turned red just as they approached. Three cars zipped through the intersection and the one behind sounded his horn. The Wulfsign muttered, "Nothing like winter drivers." Then to his passengers: "One of the dead, whose body was not found, went to a Church in the Core. I thought we could start there."

They followed Portage Avenue east until Broadway, where they followed the yield until they came to the first side street which they took. On the right were decrepit homes, and behind a high school barely kept up to code. On the left was a Church, the only building in the area not falling down.

Snow began accumulating on the car the instant they stopped. Rancour was first out followed by Trent and Keelin. A blast of cold air assailed them as they walked to the front of the building to stand before a mass of cement steps leading to two double doors. A sign read: "Please use the door to the left. Steps are icy."

A ground floor door opened into a vestibule, where Rancour led followed by Trent and Keelin. To the left was a flight of stairs that led into a basement where a service could be heard singing the hymn "Mighty Is His Name". To the right was a flight of steps leading up with a sign that read, "CHAPEL".

Keelin said, "I'd rather not disturb a service in progress, we'll go upstairs."

High ceilings, stained glass portraits, intricately carved wooden fixtures. A skylight from above was positioned so the Sunday morning daylight illuminated the raised podium. Dust covered everything, revealing that this chapel had not been used in some time. Trent was first down the aisle, oblivious to the fresh footprints he upset.

"Nice Church," he whispered as though he might disturb the empty room.

"We haven't seen the Church," Keelin said. After a pause she added, "People are the Church of God, this is just brick and mortar."

Trent was about to speak again when he heard someone, a woman, say from behind the podium, "You shouldn't be in here until they finish the repairs."

Keelin took the lead with Rancour falling behind. She said, "Why are you here?"

"To be alone with God. Please leave me be."

Sawdust, the scent of fresh cut pine, saturated the air. Wind whistled from cracks not yet fixed, and there was little heat in the room. Rancour sighed and said, "Please forgive our imprudence, but we seek information."

"I know who you are, but I've told the police all I know. Jack must have died in the slaughter."



A gust of wind took hold over a cloud of dust and landed on Trent's feet. He took no notice and pushed past Keelin and the Wulfsign. He walked the steps of the platform until he was behind the podium where he found a woman in her mid-twenties, shoulder length blonde hair and eyes so green they could make an emerald blush. Her cheeks, rosy and tear stained, were tucked into her palms. When she looked up at Trent her brow crinkled and her mouth opened in silent disbelief.

Trent kneeled and held out his hand, palm up. "You know what I am, don't you? All your fears are truth but one: not all vampires are evil. Help us save Jack. Please."

Cecil began to shake and her eyes widened. At first Trent thought he'd made a grievous mistake, but when she took his hand he knew that he had done well. *Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.*<sup>6</sup> Trent could not help but smile.



"But before he left Jack told me of the haunting cloaked figure, all the doubts he had and of how I abandoned him." Cecil sobbed into her palms and Keelin embraced her. Trent looked at Rancour whose upper lip was curled into a snarl and his sigh reverberated like a growl.

The Wulfsign said, "Naztar's work."

"He's the one who Begot Old Man, I mean Rafgard?"

"He Begets most."

"Can Jack be saved?"

Rancour's eyes glowed crimson as he stared at Trent for many uncomfortable moments. Zipping up his leather jacket he said, "He will be if I find him." Then he walked outside to his 'cuda.

The room filled with a pocket of freezing air that disappeared as quickly as it had come. Mutterings of curses came from those within the café, but not from Trent's table. He thought of the night he was Begotten, of how he wanted to kill Billy Bender and of that voice unleashed in his mind. What would he have done had it been Naztar and not Keelin who had found him? Would he, too, have betrayed his faith and joined Cimmeria?

Keelin spoke to the distraught girl, "There were forces at work here unlike any you can imagine. You were not prepared to deal with them."

"Is Jack gone forever?"

"I don't know. God gives us many paths, and so long as we honour him in whatever we choose he will direct us. I will honour God by returning one of his sheep to the flock."

Trent said, "What if this sheep never belonged to the flock?"

"Then I will honour God with my life." There was a silence between the three of them. Keelin cupped Cecil's chin in her palm and gently brought her gaze to meet hers. Whispering she said, "You have a choice. You can hide from the world using God's word as your wall, or you can be His example in the world using God's word as your shield. Honour God, Cecil."

Keelin stood and signalled Trent by raising her eyebrows that it was time to leave. They left out into the cold, crunching fresh snow beneath their feet and walked to

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<sup>6</sup> Prov 3:5-6 (NIV)

Rancour. He sat inside his car with the engine running and the heat on high. When he saw them approach he stepped from the car and shut the door.

“Have you made a decision?” Rancour’s breath left his stern jaw in frozen clouds.

Keelin paused before she said, “Take Trent back to the Circle. I’ll stay here.”

“And do what?” asked Trent.

Rancour opened his car door and said, “She doesn’t know.” Then he got back in, closed his door and unlocked the other. Revving the engine he glared at Trent.

“Am I going to see you again?”

“Kid, if not in this world then certainly in the next.” She smiled, hugged him and said, “You taught me what it means to forgive. I owe you.”

“You kept me true on God’s path, I don’t know what I’ll do without you.”

“Honour God. Now get out of here, last time I caught a cold it took me half a century to kick it.”

Trent walked around the cuda, got inside and held back his emotions. His gaze stayed fixed with Keelin’s as they drove off. Somehow, he knew that would be their last time together.

## Chapter Seven

**MAY 2010**

A dark figure paced the room, and along the walls were silhouettes donning hooded cloaks. In the centre of the area, encased inside a sealed glass prison, Keelin lay huddled.

The figure stopped pacing and yelled at the dome: “Did you believe this charade would last?”

Keelin glared at the world outside her prison, brushed her long hair from her face, and let tears flow undisturbed. “You have already lost. The War ended two thousand years ago!”

The figure walked to the glass and smiled, his ebony grin, the only visible feature on his face, not cast in his reflection on the glass. “Then I shall give you your tribute.”

He pressed a button and flames leapt from the jail’s floor, bringing from its prisoner screams.

The silhouette laughed....

Trent woke, yelling, “Keelin!”

And moments before the dream washed away, he heard her call back. And saw the strange figure look about himself, as if he, too, heard the call.

Trent sat upright in his bed, forcing himself to breath steady. This was quite unlike the other nightmares, and he wondered when they would end. A strange feeling came into his thundering heart, one that brought him no relief, that they would end today. Trent stretched, and ignored the sound of his creaky bones as they snapped. The worn-out spring in his mattress made the terrible noise again, but today he took special care not to promise himself that he’d fix it. It had been like that from the day he’d joined the Circle, and, if after two vampire years he hadn’t repaired it, then it just wasn’t going to happen.

He kicked his feet out of bed and, only when he felt the fuzzy hug of his slippers, he stood. The rock floor was cold in the morning, even with slippers, and glancing at a roll of carpet that leaned on end in a corner Trent wished he’d put it down months ago. He walked to his mirror and stared at the stranger within; the image was faded like an old photograph. He wondered how much longer till he could see it fully. He sighed, and taking a hard-bristled brush from his bureau he ran it through his long, thick hair. After only fifteen strokes the image in the mirror disappeared, leaving Trent to stare at the reflection of an empty room.

He grabbed a sweater from a near-by chair and flung it over his head. After stepping into a pair of jeans he took an old shoe-box out from his sock drawer, but completely forgot to take out a pair of socks. The shoe-box was tied with white shoe lace, but had no shoes within it. He unravelled the knot and released the lace’s grip, then he removed the lid and stared at the letters within. He read the date on the first one: 1975. He had opened that one immediately. The last, dated 1986, hadn’t been opened and of those between he couldn’t be certain when he’d stopped reading. Trent sighed, wishing that Jen had continued to write the past nine human years. Even if he had never written her back.

A quiet tap on his door was almost lost in his leviathan of thought, but somehow it reached him. He walked to his door, opened it, and greeted Gertie with a smile as distant as the eyes with which he welcomed her.

“Happy birthday Trent,” she sang, reaching out to hug him, “we’re waiting for you for breakfast.”

“Thank-you,” Trent embraced her, then followed her downstairs to the dining-room.

Along a giant round table sat ten vampires; six men and four women. Simple tin plates and metal cutlery dressed each setting and, in the middle, sat bowls of fruit and platters of eggs and bacon. Trent took his seat and waited for grace, but stood like he had sat on a pin when he realised it was his turn to say the Thanks.

“Dear God,” he bowed his head, closed his eyes and clasped his hands before him, “we thank-You for this meal before us. Help us to appreciate such fare and to remember those less fortunate without such bounty.

“I also pray on this day that You be with Keelin who is on a mission to Cimmeria. Thank-You for getting us the information that another human was brought across, and let us show that vampire Your love through our actions.

“Be also with Rancour the Wulfsign who left us three human years ago. We have not heard from him since, and I pray that he is well.

“I also ask that You take good care of my parents. I received news that they were killed by a drunk driver, and so I also pray for that driver. May he receive the help he needs to never repeat this mistake again.” Trent paused and cleared his throat and, with a shaky voice added, “I also pray for Cimmeria. Bless them, and help us to forgive them.

“I pray these things in Your Son’s Name, Amen.”

Trent opened his eyes and reached for the eggs. Scrambled was his favourite, but today the cooks had made poached. As he reached for the bacon he thought ketchup might be nice, but saw none on the table. He stood.

“I’m getting ketchup from the kitchen, anyone want anything while I’m up?”

That’s when he noticed that no one else had begun serving themselves. All ten plates lay empty, the vampires before them staring at Trent in silence.

“What’s going on?” he asked, looking at each one, “Are we celebrating a birthday or mourning a death?”

“Trent,” Alkazar’s husky voice brought the boy back into his chair, “this morning we received news of Keelin.”

“First or second-hand?”

“Trent...”

“Answer me!” he screamed, rising as his teeth grew and his eyes turned crimson.

But no one said anything further.

“I apologise. If you will all excuse me, I need to be alone.”

He turned from them and returned to his quarters, leaving his door open for Alkazar who had followed. Trent walked to his mirror, rubbing the reflection of the barren room with only Alkazar as its inhabitant.

“I almost had my reflection. Keelin would have been so proud.”

“Your sister was a wonderful woman who would have been proud with anything you did.”

“I hardly even knew her. I always hoped that when her mission ended we could get to know one another.”

Alkazar walked behind him and placed his hands on the young vampire's shoulders. He stared at his full reflection. "Her mission is over. When the New World comes, she will get to know you then."

"How did they know? Do we have a spy?"

"No. Naztar is back and he recognised her. For all we know Keelin was killed the very day she arrived."

"Is it over Alkazar?" Trent walked to a bookcase and took out an old leather-bound text. "Did she find the vampire?"

"I don't know, but Naztar's presence means it's over. He knows us all."

"It isn't over."

"Trent, don't be a fool! If we send another vampire Naztar will recognise and kill him."

Trent looked at the leather-bound text and sighed. With a voice nearly as weak as his morning reflection he said, "Naztar doesn't know me."