

THE FINAL VICTIM

YOU SHANT
NOT
SUFFER
A WITCH
TO LIVE

ROXANNE BLAND

The Final Victim

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CHAPTER 1

Isadore Drummond, Chair of Seattle's Grand Elven Council, stood in the spacious, gracefully appointed foyer in Facility No. 3, staring at his cell phone with teeth clenched almost hard enough to break them. Katy, his adopted daughter, had just sent him a text. *Going out. Bye.* "That girl," he muttered. He'd told her before he left for work this morning she was to stay home tonight. *She never listens. I'm going—*

The main door thumped against the rubber wall protector, letting in a frigid blast of air. He looked up. A stout, expensively-dressed woman wearing a fur coat, open and billowing, stormed over the threshold. She marched up to him, her eyes blazing with anger. "I want to speak to Mr. Drummond. Now."

Slipping his phone into his jacket's breast pocket, he composed his face into a pleasant, smiling mask, the one he reserved for irate customers. "I'm sure I can—"

"I don't talk to niggers," the woman spat. "Get me Mr. Drummond. Tell him Mrs. Tagworth is here." Mouth set into a line, she whipped her head to the side.

His anger at Katy threatened to ramp up into rage. He stared at Mrs. Tagworth's powdered, sagging jowls, his hands twitching as he fought the urge to wring her fat neck. "Very well, madam," he said, somehow managing to maintain an agreeable tone. "I'll see if Mr. Drummond is on the premises today. Please wait here."

Mrs. Tagworth said nothing.

Isadore, head ready to explode, walked to the foyer's far end and rode the elevator to the second floor. Slamming the door of his large, tastefully appointed office, he paced around his hand-carved oak desk while smacking his fist into the palm of his hand. Jaw working, he barely

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stopped himself from punching a hole through the desktop's thick wood.

"All right, calm down," he muttered. "Just calm down. It's not as if this hasn't happened before."

He paced a few more circuits, taking deep breaths. Slowly exhaling his last breath, he tapped a button on the intercom.

"Yes, Izzy?" a male voice answered.

"Stan, I need to talk to you. Please come to my office immediately." Stan was the director of this facility and like Isadore, an exotic—zot—and a wereleopard.

In a few moments, Stan came in and frowned, his hazel eyes crinkling at the edges. "What's wrong?"

"There's a hopping mad woman in the foyer who's demanding to see Mr. Drummond. She says her name is Mrs. Tagworth. Do you know anything about her?"

Stan fell into the nearest leather Chesterfield chair in front of Isadore's desk and let out a heavy groan. "Oh, God-Khensa. The widow from hell." He leaned forward and shook his head. "Couple of years ago, she and her husband bought a Package A with all the trimmings. Paid upfront. Since her husband died a week ago, she calls almost every day, badgering the staff about this or that, insisting on knowing every detail to make sure she's 'getting what she paid for,' as she says." He shook his head again. "Yesterday, she had Jenny almost in tears."

"I see." Isadore punched a speed dial button on the desk telephone. Two rings later, the office filled with a soothing, feminine voice. "Dietz and Son. How may I help you?"

"Hello, Karen. Isadore Drummond. Is Ron available?" He sat in his high-backed, Chesterfield desk chair.

"Of course, Mr. Drummond. Just a moment."

He waited a few seconds, and then the line clicked over. "Izzy," Ron said. His voice sounded just as soothing as Karen's. "Good to hear from you. What can I do for you?"

"I need a favor. I've got a client, a Mrs. Tagworth, who's very unhappy with our services. Do you have an opening? We've already prepped her husband, and I can have him transported today." He looked at Stan, who nodded.

"Let me check."

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The line went silent for a few moments, and then Ron's voice filled the room again. "Yes. Day after tomorrow. Send her over."

"Thanks, Ron. I have to warn you, she's quite...insistent."

Ron chuckled. "A real live one, huh? Don't get many of those in our line of work. And you're foisting her on me, too. Appreciate it, Izzy." He laughed. "No problem. I'll handle her."

"Great. I owe you one."

"You sure do. Give Katy my best."

Isadore winced a little at the mention of Katy's name. "I will. Say hello to Gina and Mike for me."

After hanging up with Ron, Isadore looked at Stan and gave him a sly smile. "So she wants to see Mr. Drummond, eh? And so she shall." He rose from behind his desk and stood before a large, gilt-framed mirror on the far wall. Staring at his reflection, he released a cloud of glamour. His image wavered and was replaced by a tall, patrician white male with a head full of thick, wavy silver hair. Heavy, neatly-shaped black brows framed a pair of piercing blue eyes. The man's bespoke suit was a silvery gray instead of black, complemented by a shimmery, wine-colored tie and fixed by a discreet platinum and diamond tie pin.

Selecting a card from a small silver box on his desk, he slipped the card into his jacket's breast pocket and turned to Stan. "Shall we?"

Stan grinned and stood. "After you, Mr. Drummond."

Mrs. Tagworth's back was to the two men as they exited the elevator. Their shoes made no noise on the dense carpeting as they approached her. Stopping about three feet from where she stood, Isadore cleared his throat. "Mrs. Tagworth."

She jumped and spun around, her expression startled.

"Mrs. Tagworth, I'm Isadore Drummond. I understand there's a problem?"

Her brows screwed downward, threatening to crack her heavy makeup. "Mr. Drummond, what kind of funeral home are you running? I paid good money to give my husband a proper burial and your staff is completely incompet—"

"Mrs. Tagworth." His tone was pleasant, but the look in his blue eyes was not. "From the time we transported your husband to this facility, you have done nothing but harass my staff. They are working hard to

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give you what you paid for, but your constant bullying is preventing them from doing that.” He pulled the card from his pocket and thrust it toward her. “Here is a card for Dietz and Son. I have informed Mr. Dietz that you will be taking your business there. We are transporting your husband to his facility as we speak. Be assured we will refund every penny of your good money.”

Mrs. Tagworth’s brows shot up. Her eyes widened and her jaw dropped. “B-but...you can’t—”

“Please take the card and leave my premises, Mrs. Tagworth. Otherwise, I will call the police to escort you out.”

Her face reddened, visible even through her caked foundation. She snatched the card and glared. “I have never... Mr. Drummond, you have just lost the business of several very influential customers. All my friends will hear about this.” Turning on her heel, she flounced out the door and slammed it.

Both men stared at the door. “Well done, Mr. Drummond,” Stan said.

“Thank you, Mr. Fazel. Shall we call the staff and begin our meeting?”

“By all means, Mr. Drummond.” They looked at each other and burst into laughter. Isadore dissolved his glamour and the two men headed for the conference room.

After the meeting, he drove to his private office in the central business district to complete the paperwork he’d left undone. By the time he finished, he was more than ready to go home. It had been a long day, and he could feel his tiredness creeping through his muscles. Driving through the streets, he remembered the enraged look on Mrs. Tagworth’s face after he’d ordered her out and smiled. *She’s never, huh? Wonder if her husband had ever stood up to her.* He snorted. *Probably not, and that’s probably why he’s dead.* Still smiling, he gave his head a small shake. *Wish I could have done it in my own skin but I’ll take it.*

He reached his mansion in Seattle’s Capitol Hill neighborhood and turned into the driveway. He sighed. Tired as he was, his day wasn’t over yet. He’d one more meeting to attend and there wasn’t any way he could beg off. He glanced at the dashboard clock. The Council would start arriving in an hour. Rounding the driveway’s curve, he slowed the car to

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a stop. Lips tight, he stared at the garage's rightmost bay where Katy's BMW X5 should have been.

No doubt she's in some dive bar, drinking with her so-called human "friends." One of these days she's going to slip up and once they find out she's zot, she will disappear and take the rest of us with her. Corellon, what is wrong with her? he thought, invoking the ancient, supreme elven god no one believed in anymore. He blew an explosive breath. *At least she doesn't look like me. With her blonde hair and blue eyes, if she's stopped, the cop might just give her a ticket instead of hauling her to jail.*

Still staring, his anger slowly melted away. *Maybe I should've been stricter with her when she was growing up. Maybe I should've remarried after Alma died—maybe having a mother would have helped.* He closed his eyes. *Maybe I should've spent more time with her instead of working so hard building the business.* And he'd been successful. With four facilities, Drummond Funeral and Mortuary Services had a solid lock over Seattle, handling well over half of the city's funerary needs. He sighed. *I'm not greedy. I just thought having enough money could give us a better chance of surviving the next pogrom. Alma died in the last one because I couldn't protect her, but I can protect Katy. We could escape, get to someplace safe.*

He opened his eyes, shook his head, and pulled the car into garage bay on the far left. Jones, his butler and most everything else when needed, met him at the door. He took his coat and briefcase. "Welcome back, sir. Would you like a drink?"

"I would. The usual. I'll be in the study." As Jones turned to leave, he added, "Wait. Did Katy say where she was going tonight?"

A small, worried frown creased Jones's forehead. "No, sir. I didn't realize she'd left until I looked out the window and saw her car wasn't in the garage. I called her cell several times, but was always routed to voicemail."

Isadore grimaced. "Okay. Thanks." Jones disappeared with his coat and briefcase.

He gazed at the empty doorway. *He worries about Katy, too.* Letting out a sigh, he started for his study. Crossing the foyer, he wondered about Jones for the umpteenth time. *Guess you could say I adopted him and Katy. The difference is I know almost everything about Katy, but Jones? Nothing, not even his full name.*

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Isadore had stumbled across Jones while walking through Pioneer Place Park on a cold winter afternoon over a decade ago. Giving him a glance, he'd been about to pass the obviously homeless man by when he'd called out "Sir, please help me." The desperation in his voice had made him stop. He'd pulled out his wallet but Jones had shaken his head. "Sir, I need your help." Frowning, he'd sensed there was something different about this pale, gaunt man huddled on the park bench, wrapped in a thin, tattered blanket for protection against the cold. He'd glamourised him and almost gasped when he saw Jones sparkle. He wasn't human—he was zot. Isadore had brought him home, no questions asked.

After cleaning up and a hot meal, Jones confessed he was scrum—part human, part zot. His zot heritage was elven, but he'd made no mention of his tribe, and answered the rest of his questions with smiles. Asked for his name, he'd smiled again. "Jones, sir. Just Jones." Within the week Isadore had planned to let him stay, he'd managed to make himself an integral part of the household. And Katy, who'd been just a little girl, had loved him.

Inside his study, Isadore had no sooner made himself comfortable in the leather wingchair by the unlit fireplace when Jones entered with a scotch-and-soda highball balanced on a silver tray. Taking the glass, Isadore settled back in his chair. "Thank you."

"Will you be wanting dinner tonight?"

He sipped, thinking for a moment. "Maybe. After the meeting. I'll let you know."

"All right. Is there anything else I can get for you?"

"No...oh. Would you secure the dining room, please?"

"It's already done, sir."

He smiled. "Always one step ahead of me, aren't you?"

Jones returned his smile. "Yes, sir." He gave him a nod and left the study.

Isadore took another swig. Setting the glass on the side table, he stretched his legs and folded his hands on his stomach. *At least I have time to get a little rest before the meeting.* He settled back further into the chair and closed his eyes. In moments, and without meaning to, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER 2

The next thing Isadore knew, someone was shaking his shoulder. He jerked awake.

Jones stood over him. “The Council is here, sir.”

“What time is it?”

“Five minutes to eight.”

He nodded. “Okay.” Jones reached for the highball glass, but Isadore shook his head. “Hold on.” Taking a last hefty gulp, he handed him the glass. Standing and straightening his suit, he blew a heavy breath. “Lead the way.”

Inside the dining room, he strode to the head of a twelve-foot-long rosewood banquet table, pulled out the chair, and sat. His gaze swept over the other nineteen elven tribal leaders. Some sat at the table, while the rest sat in folding chairs arranged behind the table’s foot. All wore their bright tribal colors in varying designs, racing flag checkers, paisley, and other patterns that would give him a headache if he stared too long. His tribal colors were drab by comparison—black, white and silver-gray—which happened to be the colors he wore every day to work.

He cleared his throat. “Let’s begin.” He looked at the elf sitting at the foot of the table. “Mr. Secretary, call the roll.”

The secretary picked up an electronic tablet and stylus. “Rodney Callen, Segoy tribe,” he said, announcing himself by name and clan. He made a mark on the tablet.

“Cyril McLaughlin, Eroya.”

“Aye.”

I hear his wife isn't doing too well after her nervous breakdown. Having him around can't make it any easier.

“Shona Hugh, Cairn.”

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“Here.”

Her mother told me she's pregnant again. How many elflings does this one make? Five? Six?

“Myles Azzaro, Pisa.”

Isadore's thoughts wandered, and finally settled back to Katy. *Where did she go? I'm sure she's with Cindy but I hope they don't have that moron Doug with them. And whatever else happens, Corellon, please don't let her get stopped for drunk—*

“Isadore Drummond, Grenden.” His tribe's elven type was morran.

Jerking his attention back to the meeting, he pushed Katy from his thoughts. “Present.”

“The seventy-fifth emergency meeting of the Grand Elven Council is now called to order.” Rodney looked at him. “Mr. Chairman?”

Isadore nodded once. “I'll get right to the point. I called you here because I've had word that Balthus Coven will cast the Saperet spell on Feburary fourth. Today is the second. I know many of us feel compelled to glamour humans and sometimes other zots, but for the next two days, we have to be very careful. Humans are already on edge and it won't take much to push them over the brink. The last thing we want is a pogrom on our hands before the Saperet is cast.” He paused. “I'm giving the order. No glamouring, human or zot, until after February fourth.”

A woman raised her hand. Isadore looked at her and nodded. “Kylie Wentworth, Shira tribe. I'll make doubly sure Elon Alverin obeys.” Alverin was notorious for his passionate hatred of humans. He glamoured them at every opportunity, often causing a hapless human serious injury or even death, which he celebrated with unrestrained glee. Kylie had punished him any number of times for his behavior, but to no effect.

“You do that. Tell him if I hear of anyone glamouring anyone over the next couple of days, the Council will hold him responsible whether he did it or not.”

“Yes, Mr. Chairman.”

He looked at his watch. “Is there any new business?”

“I have new business,” a loud, rough voice called.

Suppressing a groan, he turned to an ugly elf with thick, unruly brows sitting three seats away. The elf fixed him with an angry glare. “Cyril McLaughlin, Eroya. I want to know what's going to be done about

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my son Arik. That bit Master Kurt fed me about Arik's accidentally being eaten by a justborn is pure hogwash. He had him killed and I demand retribution." He pounded the table with his fist.

Master Kurt was the vampire who ruled over Seattle's zots. Cruel and capricious, and with seemingly unlimited vampiric powers, every zot Isadore knew was afraid of the Master, including him. Cyril was probably right about Master Kurt murdering Arik, but the Eroyan was treading on mortally dangerous ground. If the Master got wind of his accusation, the repercussions could be dire for all the tribes, and maybe even for zots who weren't elves. As a father, he could understand how Cyril felt, but he was not about to endanger Seattle's zots for the sake of Cyril's feelings.

Isadore gave the Eroyan a cool stare. "And how do you know the Master had Arik killed?"

"I just know it. Arik was afraid of vampires. He would never have been caught anywhere near a justborn."

"Could he have been curious? He'd been living with the colony for quite a while."

Cyril shook his head vehemently. "No. Not my boy. And Sarena, his fiancée, is missing. No one's seen her in four or five days."

Isadore narrowed his eyes. "Are you blaming the Master for her disappearance, too?"

Cyril sat back. "I wouldn't be surprised if he had something to do with it."

Isadore said nothing for a minute. "Cyril, you have absolutely no proof the Master had Arik killed. I'm sorry your son is dead—"

"He sent my boy back in pieces," Cyril shouted and leapt from his chair. "How would you feel if someone did that to Katy?"

Isadore stared at him. He knew exactly how he'd feel, but that was beside the point. Cyril was an ass, and a dangerous one. *Your threatening war with the Ryish left all the tribes open to Master Kurt's punishment. We were lucky. Instead of punishing us, he made Arik a hostage—to make sure you behaved.* He took a breath. "I understand, Cyril. But the bottom line is your guesses about what may or may not have happened don't matter. You have no proof. And without that, this Council can do nothing."

"But—"

"That's enough Cyril," he snapped. "I said it once, I'll say it again.

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This Council can do nothing about Arik's death." He looked at the other tribal leaders. "I've told you what you needed to know, and we have no more new business. We are adjourned." He stood. The rest of the elves got to their feet and began filing out of the big room.

Cyril, the last to leave, tarried in the doorway. "I will get justice for Arik. The Master will pay for killing my boy."

Isadore's temper rose. His eyes narrowed. "Cyril, are you saying you're going to declare war on the vampire colony?" he said, surprised that his voice sounded so unruffled. "You do that, I guarantee you will lose."

"Not if I had—"

"The Council will not back you up. I'm truly sorry about Arik, but I won't allow you to put the rest of the tribes in danger again. If you go to war with the colony, you're on your own."

"You can't—"

"Yes, I can. And I just did. Good night."

Cyril stormed out of the dining room. Isadore heard him stomping across the foyer and then the front door's slam.

Gripping the edge of the table, he closed his eyes and willed his temper to cool. After he'd calmed, he walked to a bank of switch plates on the far wall and pressed the button on one set apart from the others. A soft whirring filled the room, the sound of the metal blinds sliding into their wall pockets. He didn't use them often, mainly for Council meetings. The blinds kept anyone from peeping inside while they met. It might be overkill, especially with the heavy velvet drapes covering the tall windows, but zots couldn't be too careful.

He thought about the Saperet spell Balthus coven would cast in a few days. The spell, cast after every mayoral election, draped like a blanket over the city, a shield to protect humans against the zots' preternatural powers. Yet the Saperet not only protected humans, it protected zots, too. The spell kept humans quiet for the most part, lessening the chance of a pogrom. Pogroms were when humans went on a murderous rampage, cutting down every zot they found, and in their madness, often killing each other.

His thoughts returned to Katy as he climbed the steps to the second floor. He glanced at his watch. *It's still early. She might come home soon. And*

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maybe even somewhat sober. Entering his bedroom, he decided to shower before asking Jones to fix his dinner. He stripped off his clothes and draped them over the back of a comfortably upholstered chair, a signal to Jones they needed cleaning.

He walked into the spacious bath and stepped in the shower. Water jetted from the stall's four corners, as well as from a nozzle overhead. Enjoying the shower's massaging heat, he took his time. Upon returning to his bedroom, he picked up the custom-made, silk pajamas Jones had laid out for him. All his clothes—and Katy's—were custom-made. It was a necessity, not a luxury, at least for those morrans who could afford it. Built like bulls, with overly broad shoulders, thick, muscled arms, long torsos, and comparatively short, muscular legs, mass-produced clothing rarely fit well. Katy was more slender than he but from their looks, one would think both were professional wrestlers. His lips pursed. *Katy has a temper but drunk or sober, she knows better than to get into a fight, especially with a human. She'd break their neck with one punch to the face, and everyone would know she's zot. Somebody would call the police and then she'd disappear.*

Wrapping himself in a satin robe with velvet cuffs and collar, he shoved his feet into slippers, decided to skip dinner, and then headed for his study. Inside, he walked to the liquor cabinet and poured a snifter full of cognac. Setting the glass on the table, he sat, stretched his legs in his wingchair, and shivered. *Why is this room always the coldest in the house?* Annoyed at having to move, he stepped over to the fireplace and pressed the ignition button on the mantle. Flames shot up from the hearth. He returned to his chair and picked up his cognac. Staring into the flaming depths, he took a sip of cognac, and tried not to worry about Katy.

As the clock in the foyer struck three a.m., the front door slammed. Brows furrowed in anger, Isadore leapt from his chair and strode to the foyer, then stopped short. Katy's coat was open and her hot pink linen dress was wrinkled and soiled, as if she'd thrown up on it. Blue eyes red-rimmed and bloodshot, she swayed and staggered a few steps.

"Katy," he bellowed. "I told you not to go out tonight. Where have you been?"

"Buncha places," she slurred.

"Did you drive home like that?" *Corellon, it's a wonder she didn't have a wreck!*

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“How do you think I got here?”

Her insolence drove his fury near to its breaking point. “Dammit, Katy! I told you about driving drunk. What if you’d been stopped by the police? If you’d been arrested, you know damned well they’d run a GST and then you’d disappear!”

“Well, I didn’t get stopped, and I didn’t get arrested. So there.”

Isadore threw up his hands. “What’s the matter with you? Don’t you understand? This isn’t a game!”

Katy shrugged. “I like getting drunk with my friends.”

“That’s another thing. Those humans you hang around with are *not* your friends. Do you really think your ‘friends’ would defend you if you got caught?”

She shrugged again. “Cindy would.”

His chest tightened. *Has this girl lost her mind?* “Don’t be so—”

“Listen.” Katy glared at him. “I’m twenty-two years old. I’m an adult. I can do what I want.”

“Oh, really? That’s not the way it works. As long as you’re living under my roof, you’ll play by my rules—”

“Fuck you and your rules,” she shouted.

Isadore snapped, and smacked her across her cheek. “How dare you speak that way to me!” Then he stepped back, feeling as if he’d been gut-punched. He’d never struck her before.

Katy’s shocked look morphed into rage. She narrowed her eyes. “That’s it,” she said through her teeth. “I’m outta here. I’m leaving tomorrow!”

“And just where do you think you’ll go?”

“Cindy’s.”

His feeling of having been gut-punched disappeared and anger tightened his chest again. “Fine, then,” he spat. “Go. But don’t think you’re taking anything from this house with you. Your car, your clothes—everything stays here. And I’m cutting you off. I’m canceling your credit cards and freezing your bank account.”

Her eyes widened. “You can’t do that!”

“Yes, I can. Everything you have I bought with my money. Everything you spend I give to you. You want to be on your own? You’re on your own. Get a job and pay your own way.”

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“But—”

“That’s right. Who’s going to hire a college dropout with no skills except getting drunk? Nobody. We’ll see how long Cindy puts up with you.” From the look on her face, he knew his words had hurt. A pang of regret lanced through him, then vanished.

Katy’s lips tightened, but she said nothing.

“By the time I come home tomorrow, I want you gone.” He spun around and marched back to his study. Pouring another snifter of cognac, he sat in the wingchair and took a gulp. He stared at the flames, thinking on what he’d just said. Did he really mean it? He shook his head. He wasn’t sure. But one thing was certain. He was at the end of his rope with her.

Isadore sat for a long time, sipping his drink and staring at the fire. When the glass was empty, he set it on the table and got to his feet. He glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. *Better go to bed.* He had a meeting at nine a.m., and it was after four-thirty. He turned off the fireplace and left the study.

His thoughts churned as he climbed the stairs. *Am I really going to do it? Throw Katy out? Could I do that to her? She might be an adult, but she’s still a child in so many ways. I...maybe she’s so wild because she’s having subconscious memories of the night her parents died? Maybe therapy would help?* He sighed. *No. She’d never go.*

He walked into his bedroom, shed his robe, and crawled beneath the heavy blankets. Closing his eyes, it seemed he had just fallen asleep when his alarm went off. He dragged himself out of bed and got ready for work while resisting an almost overwhelming temptation to call off his meeting and go back to sleep. Leaving his bedroom, he trotted down the stairs and walked into the dining room. Jones had just finished setting up his breakfast. “Morning, Jones.”

Jones’s head snapped up, his face stricken. Frowning, Isadore walked to the table’s head. “What’s wrong?”

“Sir, I-I...I’m sorry, sir.” He pointed to a folded piece of paper next to his egg cup with two sets of keys lying beside it.

Giving Jones a glance, Isadore picked up the white square and opened it. His eyes widened and his heart jumped into his throat. There was just one word written on it.

“GOOD-BYE!”

CHAPTER 3

The bizarre murders started in early April.

The victims, all human, had been found naked and exsanguinated, their blood sucked out through holes drilled into their bodies. *The Times* and the *Post Intelligencer* had dubbed the killer “the Seattle Slayer.”

Isadore didn’t believe the murders were the work of a single killer. His gut told him there was more than one.

He worried about Katy becoming one of the Slayer’s victims, but he also knew it was unlikely. She could easily glamour her way out of that situation.

The humans, however, did worry him. The newspapers cautioned no one should assume the killer was zot, but that didn’t stop everyone, zot and human—including him—from assuming that, anyway. The tension in Seattle’s atmosphere from humans and zots sharing the same city was always present and palpable, even on a good day. Now, with each victim found, the tension rose higher.

Isadore wondered if the Saperet spell Balthus Coven had cast in February would hold. The spell usually kept humans quiet enough to leave zots alone, but the murders threatened the uneasy truce that allowed zots to freely live and work in Seattle. His lips tightened. If the Slayer wasn’t caught soon, it could spark a pogrom.

And Katy’s out there somewhere. From the time she was old enough to understand, he’d shown her the places where she’d be safe—Underground, one of his facilities, or here—and how to get there from anywhere in the city. If a pogrom started, the trick would lie in safely getting to one of those places. She could glamour herself invisible, except glamour wouldn’t stop a stray bullet.

Many times over, he’d decided to go look for her, but didn’t. He

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hadn't a clue about where to start. Though he'd met some of her friends, she'd refused to give him their addresses and telephone numbers. He could trawl the dive bars she frequented, but there was no guarantee she'd be in any one of them on a given night.

Images of where his daughter might be, *how* she might be, all but blocked out Isadore's sense of time and place. He looked at his watch, then looked at the office around him, blinking to orient himself. Today...today he was at Facility No. 1 for a meeting with the director, Will Sorenson. Like all his employees, Will was zot.

If only the humans knew we were taking care of their loved ones, he thought, lips stretching into a small smile. *They'd lose their minds. They're convinced we celebrate human deaths by dancing naked around the corpse and then eating it. Where on earth do they get such madness?* He'd no sooner finished the thought when Will walked through the door. "Izzy. How are you?"

Terrible. "I'm fine."

Will handed him a small sheaf of papers. "Here's the quarterly financials. It's looking good."

The rest of the meeting went well. Afterward, Isadore decided to go home instead of to his private office in the central business district. He tapped a small panel on the steering wheel. "Jones." The call was picked up after the second ring.

"Hello, sir."

"I'm coming home early. Just wanted to let you know."

"Is anything wrong?"

"No...no. Have you heard from Katy?" *Please, say yes.*

"No, sir."

Isadore sighed. "Okay. I should be there in about a half-hour."

"Yes, sir. I'll see you then."

He ended the call. Sitting at the light, he stared at the car in front of him without seeing it. *The one time in my life I wish I was human...I could've called in a missing person report the day after she left.* But that was something he'd never do. It was standard procedure for anyone picked up by the police to have a genetic screening test. When it confirmed she was zot, Katy wouldn't be allowed even a phone call. She'd just disappear. And there was nothing he or anybody else could do about it without risking their own lives, and the lives of the other zots in their tribes. He sighed again. *All I can do is wait...and pray.*

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By the time he turned into his driveway, over an hour had passed. Traffic had been hopelessly snarled, and his frustration at being stuck every few blocks had now left him feeling as if he'd been through the wringer. Rounding the driveway's curve, he prayed Katy's car would be in the garage but the bay was empty. He stopped the car, let his head fall to his chest, feeling dejected. A few moments later, he parked and walked to the house.

"Welcome back, sir," Jones said as he stepped inside.

Isadore gave him a small smile. "And believe me, it's good to be back."

"Rough day?"

"Not really. Getting here was the problem. Traffic was crazy. Accidents everywhere. I tell you, some people in this city are in serious need remedial drivers' ed. I squeezed past this one accident where a lady had hit a bus. I heard her tell the cop she didn't see it." He shook his head. "I checked and it hadn't been glamourous, so tell me—how the hell do you not see a damned *bus*?"

Jones chuckled as he took Isadore's briefcase. "Would you like a drink, sir? The usual?"

"Ohhh, yes. I'll be in the study."

Inside what he thought of as his sanctuary, Isadore sank into the wingchair and blew a heavy breath. He thought about Katy and a stray thought loosed a soft chuckle. *At least she had the good sense to take the money.* He'd meant to close her account first thing the morning she'd left, but he'd gotten tied up at Facility No. 2. When he'd finally called the bank, the manager had told him she'd cleaned out the account just after they'd opened. He snorted. *Almost twenty thousand dollars, plus interest...* His smile died. *I just hope she didn't drink it all away.*

Jones walked in with his highball, and after a short discussion about Isadore's dinner plans, left the study. He took a swallow of his scotch-and-soda, leaned back in the chair and stretched his legs. Staring at the ceiling, he then closed his eyes and tried not to think about Katy. He was successful for all of about a minute.

What could he do to bring her home? *Maybe an ad in the paper?* He rolled his eyes. *Ridiculous. Why would Katy read the want ads?* Lips pursed, he stared at the carpet. *Hm...a billboard? I know the sales director at Clear*

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Channel. Two, three, maybe four—spread them around the city. I could word it so only Katy would understand. A small frown creased his brow. But what if she never sees them? Okay...maybe one of those planes that tow advertising banners? Or even a skywriter? Clapping his hands to his face, he finally gave up and admitted really wasn't anything he could do, except wait for her to come back. If she comes back.

Isadore jumped to his feet. He was *not* going to start thinking like that. *A shower and a change of clothes would do me good.* He left the study and was back a half-hour later, dressed in a pair of soft cotton drawstring pants and a matching shirt. He picked up his highball, stirred his now watered-down scotch-and-soda with his finger, and sipped.

Leaning back in the chair again, he stared at the ceiling and waited for Jones to bring his meal.



Katy isn't dead.

Isadore shoved the thought aside and concentrated harder on the electronic death certificate showing on his monitor. *Cause of death: Pancreatic cancer.* In Washington, assisted suicide was legal for terminal patients, but the Dignity in Death Act forbade referencing anything other than the illness itself on the death certificate. He needed to make sure the certificates he had to file were in compliance.

Katy. Is not. Dead.

Zots were immune from almost every human affliction imaginable, including cancer. Why was he seeing her name on every death certificate he reviewed?

Deciding he needed a break, he stood and stretched. The waistband of his drawstring pants sagged. He frowned. *Just bought these, what—a few weeks ago?* Making the rounds of his facilities, several employees had complimented him on his new, svelte look. A few had even asked about his weight-loss program. *It's called stress. Helluva diet, but it works.*

He sat and swiveled the chair to face the window. The trees outside his home office were almost in full leaf. Today was May second. *Three months.* It had been three months since Katy had left.

Katy...might be...

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He worked from home most days now. He didn't dare take the chance of losing his temper with the staff—or worse, his grieving clients. He'd learned long ago how to control his morran temper but now his famed coolness had eroded, worn down beneath the weight of Katy's absence, his visceral imaginings of all the worst possibilities, and his powerlessness to do a damned thing to bring her home.

Katy...might be...dead...

A soft knock came from behind the door. "Come in."

"A young lady to see you, sir. She says it's urgent," Jones said.

"Tell her to go away."

"Sir, I really think you need to see her."

Dammit. "Jones, I said tell her to go away," he bellowed.

"Daddy?" a soft, tentative voice sounded behind him.

He froze in shock. A second later, he spun the chair and leapt to his feet. "Katy," he shouted and barreled toward her.

She met him halfway. "Daddy," she cried and fell into his arms, bursting into tears. "I'm sorry, Daddy. I'm sorry—"

"Shh, shh. Shh."

Katy's hot tears soaked through his thin cotton shirt. She raised her head and he looked into her blue eyes, now red and puffy, and smiled. He looked over his shoulder. "Jones, could we have some iced tea?"

A wide grin split Jones's face. "Certainly, sir."

Isadore led his daughter to the loveseat not far from his desk. He draped an arm about her shoulders and studied her. She was thinner, but her cheap, button-down shirt still strained at her shoulders and her jeans skin-tight around her thighs. A small bruise on her hand healed even as he watched. He gave her a little squeeze. "What happened, Katy? Where've you been?"

She let out a little sigh. "It's like you said, Daddy. I went to Cindy's and I stayed with her. We partied a lot and about a month later, she got a new boyfriend and said I had to leave. I found a little apartment, and that was okay but I'd spent so much when I was with Cindy, I was running out of money. So I started looking for a job." She fell silent. "I couldn't do anything," she said, her voice trembling. "I didn't know anything. I tried working at a coffee shop but got fired after a week because I couldn't keep the orders straight. Then I went to work at a clothing store but got

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fired from there because one of the customers made me mad and I lost my temper. And it went on, and on, and on.” She took a shaky breath. “I didn’t know what to do. I had no money, I was getting kicked out of my apartment, and I..I didn’t have any place to go.” Katy sighed again. “Daddy, I’ve been such an ass. You’ve done so much for me, took me in and adopted me...I—”

“Shh, shh. You’re fine. Growing pains, that’s all.”

“At twenty-two?”

“A late bloomer.”

Squirring out of his hold, she stared into his eyes. “Daddy, can... can I come home?”

He stroked her short, badly-cut blonde hair. “Of course, honey.”

Katy bowed her head. “Thank you,” she whispered. “I-I thought you wouldn’t—”

He kissed the top of her head. “Silly girl. I love you, Katy.”

She looked up and smiled. “I love you too, Daddy.”

Jones walked into the office with a pitcher of iced tea and two tall glasses, already filled. He handed one glass to Katy and the other to him. Jones gave her a gentle smile. “Welcome back, Katy.”

“Thanks, Jones. It’s good to be home.”

He turned to Isadore. “Anything else, sir?”

“Yes. Would you get Katy’s room ready for her?”

Jones’s smile widened. “I’d be happy to.” He left the office.

Isadore raised his glass. “A toast. To your coming home.” He paused. “Where you belong.” They clinked glasses and drank.

All was right with his world.

CHAPTER 4

Katy's disastrous foray into real life had been the best thing that could have happened to her—and to Isadore.

A week after her return, he sat at the table in the breakfast room reading the newspaper while waiting for Katy to join him. He sipped his water and frowned. Another of the Slayer's victims had been found last night. His mood darkened in stark contrast to the bright sunshine streaming through the tall windows. *Corellon, when is this going to end?*

"Morning, Daddy." He looked up to see Katy enter the room with a big smile.

His dark mood evaporated, and he smiled back. "Morning, dear." Over the past week, Katy always had a smile for him. He hadn't seen her smile so much in years.

She took her seat, then picked up her coffee and sipped. "Daddy, I've been trying to figure out what to do with my life. I mean, there are so many choices."

Isadore forked a bit of sausage into his mouth and nodded. "Mm. Brain surgeon?"

Katy giggled. "Daddy, stop. I'm serious."

"Well, you could always join me."

"I'd thought about that, but...I don't think so. It's not that I wouldn't," she added hastily. "It's just...I'm not sure it'd be right for me."

Isadore nodded again. "I understand. The funeral business isn't for everybody." He paused. "But whatever you decide, the most important thing is that you be happy."

She squinted at him. "Are you happy with what you do?"

He gave a little shrug. "I'm content with it. My choice was pragmatic. Growing up, we weren't dirt poor but it was a real struggle. I tried

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to talk to my father once about the same thing we're talking about now. He looked up from his paper and said, 'Izzy, the richest men in town are the doctor and the undertaker,' then went back to reading. Not long after that, I apprenticed to a local mortician and the rest, as they say, is history."

"What would you have done if you could do anything you wanted?" She picked up her cup again.

He grinned. "A surfer dude, fer sure."

Katy nearly choked on her coffee. "Daddy," she said when she could speak again.

"Hey, why not? Living on the beach, tons of sun and endless waves... what more could anyone ask for?"

"What would you do for work?"

He winked. "I'm sure there'd be plenty of lovely ladies with money to burn who'd go for a big, handsome guy like me."

Katy burst into laughter, and so did he. "No," he said when their laughter had subsided. "I'd like to have been a vet."

She looked surprised. "A vet? Really? I didn't know you liked animals. How come we never had a dog, or something?"

"I wasn't home a lot, remember? Wouldn't have been fair to the dog. And you never seemed interested in having a pet, so I didn't ask." He cocked his head. "Would you have liked one?"

Katy looked thoughtful. "Yeah, I think so. A nice, fluffy cat."

His lips tightened and a pang of regret lanced through him. *Dammit, I should have paid more attention.* "I'm sorry, Katy. I—"

"That's okay, Daddy." She smiled. "To be honest, I think it's more the idea of having a cat than actually having one. I don't think I'd have been so good about cleaning the litter box."

He smiled back. *My little girl is growing up.* "Well, if you change your mind, we'll get you one. A nice, fluffy cat?"

She grinned. "No. A tiger. I'll call it Bubbles."

Now it was Isadore's turn to nearly spit his coffee. They laughed, and were still laughing when Jones came in to clear the breakfast dishes.



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A few days later, Isadore looked up from his computer as Katy walked into his office.

“Daddy, I’ve finished picking out my courses. Wanna see?”

“Sure.” She handed him the course catalogue from Evergreen College, a small, private institution catering to older students whose academic lives had been interrupted. Reading the first few pages she’d marked, he started to worry. The classes met in the evening. One class started at eight p.m., and didn’t end until ten. It’d be dark by the time she got out. And the Slayer hadn’t yet been caught. He looked up. “Katy, are you sure you want to take evening classes? Especially since—”

“Oh, Daddy. It’ll be okay. The campus is well-lit and so is the parking lot. And a lot of classes meet then, so there’ll be plenty of people around. Besides, the Slayer is only going after humans. And if he changes his mind”—she grinned—“I’ve got more than a few tricks up my sleeve.”

He chuckled. “That you do.” He flipped a few more pages, and then frowned. “Programming? Graphic design?”

“Yeah. I’m thinking about designing virtual reality games. Maybe partner with some other students and when we graduate, start a company.”

Isadore raised his brows. “Really?”

“Sure. VR games exist now. Video is still hot, but the price for VR equipment has dropped, and it’s going to drop even more. All those people are going to want lots of different games to play. When the technology improves, I’ll get into VR movies.”

He peered at her. “How do you know all this?”

“There was this guy at one of Cindy’s parties who’s really into it. We got to talking, and what he told me sounded pretty cool.” She shrugged. “I thought I’d go for it.”

Love swelled his heart. *She’s going to be just fine.* “When do classes start?”

“Monday. But I have to be there Saturday and Sunday for orientation.”

After classes began, Katy threw herself into her studies. Isadore met three of her new friends one night when she’d brought them over for a late-night study session. Glamouring the small group, he was pleased to see all were zots. Following them to the dining room, he watched as they clustered around the table’s head, then boot up their laptops. A tendril of alarm crept into his mind. *It’s already so late. What if the Slayer’s out tonight?*

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He cleared his throat, and the four looked up. He smiled. “Just wanted to say you’re all welcome to stay over if you like. We’ve plenty of room.”

Katy beamed. “Thanks, Daddy,” he heard her voice over the chorus of thank you’s from the other students.

Heading for bed, a wave of happiness washed over him as he climbed the stairs. He grinned. *Yep, she’ll be just fine.*



Isadore sat in a generously padded wicker chair on the mansion’s expansive side porch, listening to the gentle rain pattering against the porch’s now-closed glass doors. He tightened his lips. He’d picked up the morning paper while Jones had been busy making breakfast and on opening the front door, he felt the city’s tension over the unsolved Slayer murders so strongly the air seemed to vibrate. Reading while he ate, he’d scanned the news reports and read that the ongoing investigation had made progress, but the police weren’t yet ready to release information. He’d shaken his head. *Just like yesterday, the day before, and the day before that. Admit it, guys—you got nothing.*

“Afternoon, Daddy.”

He looked up to see Katy cross the porch and plop onto the chair next to him.

“Afternoon yourself, sweetie. Want some iced tea?” He poured a glass full, and handed it to her.

She sipped. “So what you were saying last night about when you were a boy—sounds like you were a goody-two-shoes.”

Isadore laughed. “Not really. I just never got caught.” Then he sobered. “Zot kids have to be careful. That’s why the other parents and I arranged playdates and parties for you children.”

“I remember. Arik was always a brat. Cried or got mad if he lost a game.” She paused. “And now he’s dead.” Her lips tightened. “Arik was a pain, but he didn’t deserve to die. And he wouldn’t have if his father hadn’t been such total asshole.” She glanced at him. “Sorry.”

“Don’t be. My sentiments exactly.”

Katy peered at him. “I heard Councilman Cyril thinks Master Kurt had him killed. Do you think so?”

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“Yes, because Arik did something to provoke him. Cyril was hell-bent on going to war with the Eroyans, and if the humans found out, who knows what might’ve happened? So Master Kurt took Arik and said he’d kill him if Cyril didn’t back down. Cyril did, so what would’ve been the point in killing Arik?” He sipped his tea. “Zots think the Master is plain crazy, but I think he’s crazy like a fox. He doesn’t do anything without a reason, and whatever that is, he keeps it to himself.”

“What about his fiancée, Sarena? Do you think Master Kurt killed her, too?”

“Sarena’s just as arrogant and self-centered as Arik was. Whatever he did, I’d bet money she was involved. So, yes.”

Katy fell silent for a moment. “Are you going to do anything about it? About Arik?”

Isadore gave her an incredulous look. “Like what? March up to Master Kurt and demand to know what happened?” He snorted. “You’d never see me again.” He gave his head a small shake. “I’m really sorry about Arik. His was a hard death. And Sarena, too. I’m sure hers was just as hard. But unless the Master tells us what happened—which he won’t—there’s nothing I or the Council can do. And Cyril will just have to accept that.”

They went back to sipping their drinks. Katy emptied her glass, then reached for the pitcher and poured another. She took a gulp and gave him a thoughtful look. “Can I ask you something?”

Isadore frowned. “Of course.”

“I talked to my tribe brother Scott this morning, and he told me he overheard his parents talking last night about someone named Alma. He said she was your wife. I never knew you were married.”

He closed his eyes. *Alma, my darling.* Opening them, he gave Katy a sad little smile. “We met during my apprenticeship, and married after I’d finished. We were married only three years.”

“Why?”

He closed his eyes again. Images of the night Alma died blossomed in his mind’s eye. Tears formed under his eyelids and threatened to spill over. It felt like only yesterday. He waited until his tears receded, then opened his eyes. “She was killed in Seattle’s last pogrom. That was long before you were born,” he said, trying to keep the huskiness out of his voice. “I didn’t know people still talked about her. It was thirty years ago.”

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“Do you have any pictures of her?”

Isadore nodded. “In the attic. I couldn’t bear to throw them away. But I also can’t bear to have them around the house. It hurts too much, even after all these years.” He sighed. “I don’t think about her as much as I used to, but when I do, it still feels like a stab to the heart.” His sad smile returned. “I guess that’s why I never told you.”

“I’m so sorry,” she said, compassion written on her face. “That’s awful.”

They fell silent for a long while. Katy looked into her glass and stirred the iced tea with a finger. “How did my parents die?” she said in a low voice.

His heart jumped. *I knew this would happen someday.* Trepidation filled him. How would she react? Would she blame him for not telling her sooner? He took a deep breath. “They died in a raid,” he said, his voice gentle. “Someone—it had to have been a sniffer—tipped off a few bands of human vigilantes that zots were living your neighborhood. They went in one night and torched every house where they lived, including yours. After the fires were put out, searchers went looking for bodies. That was before they knew everyone who had died were zot. Anyway, when your parent’s bodies were found, the searchers said they’d been shot execution-style before the fire started.”

He watched a tear fall, and felt her sorrow. “We’ve no idea how you managed to escape. I and a few others in our tribe were leaving Magnolia Park about a week after the raid and found you unconscious,” he said, remembering his dismay at the sight of a small, unconscious Katy curled beneath a tree. “We took you to Dr. Mortimer to have you checked out. You were severely dehydrated and a couple of other things, but otherwise you were okay.”

She looked up, her tears now coming in full.

He gave her a small smile. “And you know what else? We don’t know your exact age. Your parents came from the East Coast and any papers they may have had, like your birth record, were lost in the fire. Dr. Mortimer said your physical development was consistent with that of a three-year-old, so that’s what we went with. She was the one who suggested your birthday should be on the day we found you.”

Tears still streaming, she stared at him. “Why didn’t you tell me this before?” she said, her voice choked.

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Isadore's gaze was soft. "Katy, I don't know what you witnessed that night, but you'd been so traumatized you didn't speak for almost a year. I debated whether I should tell you when you got older, but in the end decided it'd be best not to say anything unless you asked. You never did, and I figured it was because you'd repressed the memory. And the last thing I wanted was to trigger that memory and traumatize you again."

She sniffled, then nodded. "So why did you adopt me? Why you and not somebody else?"

"Because I saw a little girl who'd been badly hurt and needed help. Needed my help. I volunteered before anyone else could." He chuckled. "Besides, you were cuter than a button."

Katy gave him a big smile through her remaining tears. "I love you, Daddy."

His return smile was just as wide. "I love you too, baby mine."

CHAPTER 5

Sitting at his desk in his home office, Isadore clicked “send” and glanced at the wall clock. *Almost five. Better finish this up. Katy will be here in about a half-hour.* He smiled. Today was her birthday, and he had a big surprise for her. First, they’d have dinner at her favorite restaurant, and then they’d go to her favorite pop star’s big show. The performer was a huge celebrity, and the tickets had been hard to come by. But he’d managed it—and the tickets were for front row seats. His smile widened into a grin. *No studying for her tonight. She wouldn’t miss this for the world.*

At six-thirty p.m., he sat on the loveseat in his office, still waiting. He frowned. *Where is she? Her classes ended early today. And I asked her to come straight home afterward. Could she have been held up at school?* He’d told Jones she was late, and asked the other man to let him know when she called, since he couldn’t hear the house phone in his office. He got up, went to his desk, and pressed the intercom button.

“Yes, sir?”

“Jones, have you heard from Katy yet?”

“No, sir.” There was a pause. “Do you think she’s all right?” he said, his voice holding a note of worry.

“I-I don’t know.” An uneasy feeling crept over him. “I’m going to call her. I’ll let you know.” He disconnected and punched the speed dial button for her cell. *I should have done this earlier.* Normally, he wouldn’t call her. Katy had regained his trust and if she came home late, he knew it wasn’t because she’d been out drinking. The phone rang three times, then connected. Her voice filled the room.

“Hi. I can’t talk right now, so tell me who you are and leave your number. I’ll call you back.”

Isadore heard a beep. “Katy, it’s your Dad. Where are you? I’m at

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home. Call me as soon as you can. The office number.” He pressed “off” button and stared at the phone. A moment later, he opened a drawer and pulled out a small, leather-bound book. Flipping through it, he found the page he wanted and dialed.

His call was answered after two rings. “Hello?” a woman’s high-pitched voice said.

“Alicia? This is Isadore Drummond. Have you talked to Katy today? Like in the past hour or so?”

“No, Mr. Drummond. She left right after class. Said she had some errands to run so she wouldn’t be joining our study group this afternoon. Is everything okay?”

No. “Yes, it’s fine. I just need to talk to her. Thanks.”

He stabbed the “off” button and pursed his lips. *Katy never misses a study session. What kind of errands would have been so important?* Tightening his lips, he punched the speed dial button, and got Katy’s voice mail again. He hung up without leaving a message. *Should I call someone else?* He started flipping pages, then stopped. *They’re all in the same study group. They wouldn’t know any more about Katy than Alicia did.*

His uneasiness growing, Isadore left his office and climbed the stairs to the second floor. He entered Katy’s bedroom and sat at her computer, feeling like a snoopy parent invading her privacy. He switched on the computer and while it booted up, he reached forward and popped open a hidden compartment in the antique desk he’d given her for her fifteenth birthday. The computer’s password had been taped on the inside of its tiny door. The antiques dealer had told him the desk had twelve hidden compartments, and before giving it to her, he’d searched for a month without finding them. Katy had found them within days. She’d kept their locations secret from him until just a few weeks ago.

He entered her password and the computer granted him access. On the web, he found the “find my phone” link in her bookmarked list, and clicked it. The login page appeared, and after typing in another password, he entered her phone number. The page was replaced by a map of Seattle with a red line snaking through it. A red dot pulsed at the line’s end. He zoomed in and his uneasiness grew stronger. *What’s she doing on that side of town? There’s nothing but warehouses over there.* He looked at the screen’s upper right-hand corner. His stomach dropped. The green power

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indicator was black, which meant her phone was dead. He knew Katy always kept her phone charged, and even carried a power pack in her bag. And the pulsing red dot didn't pinpoint where the phone was now—only its last location before it died.

Isadore leapt from the chair and ran to his bedroom. Grabbing his wallet and cell phone off the dresser, he stuffed them into his pockets. On his way out, he slammed his fist against the intercom. "Jones," he shouted. "Get my keys and meet me at the back door!"

Jones was waiting for him by the time he got there, looking worried. "Sir, is anything wrong?" He held out the keys.

Isadore snatched them. "Very wrong. I tracked Katy's phone. She's someplace where she has no business being, and I'm going to get her."

Jones opened the door and Isadore sprinted toward the garage. Jumping into his car, he backed out, and with a squeal of tires, shot forward. At the end of the driveway, he glamoured the car into invisibility. He was about to break every traffic rule in the book, and he had no intention of being caught doing so.

Barreling along the avenue toward the warehouse district, he wove in and out of traffic, running red lights when he could, and driving on the sidewalks if they were clear of pedestrians and there were too many cars on the street. *Hang on, baby girl. Daddy's coming.* He screeched around the final corner to the street where the map had shown the last location of Katy's phone. His heart sank. He'd hoped to see her parked BMW, but except for his, there were no other vehicles. *Why isn't she here? What could've happened?*

Isadore stopped before a small brick warehouse. *The map said her phone would be here.* Jumping out of the car, he left the door open and the engine running, and ran to the warehouse's door. He pounded it. "Katy! Katy," he shouted, banging hard enough to leave small dents in the metal. No one answered. He pulled the door's handle. Locked. His jaw clenched. *Dammit, I'm getting in there if it's the last thing I do.* Placing his foot next to the jamb, Isadore wrapped both hands around the handle and yanked. The door didn't move. He tried again and heard a faint scraping sound. Heartened, he tried a third time, and was rewarded by another scraping sound. *Fourth time's the charm.* He yanked with all his preternatural strength, but this time he heard nothing. He gave the door five more yanks, each time hearing nothing. Finally, he gave up.

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Stepping back, he swiveled his head left and right, but couldn't see anything. For a split-second, he had a hopeful thought that maybe he'd misremembered the address. But he knew he hadn't. The numbers had been seared into his brain. *But where's her phone?* Turning to his right, he started walking. He'd taken four or five steps when he noticed something on the ground jutting from the narrow rain channel between this building and the next, and hurried over to it. He tugged until it came free, then held it up. It was Katy's computer bag. *Maybe she was mugged?* It was unlikely, but not impossible. Clutching it to his chest, he ran to his car.

Sitting behind the wheel, Isadore set the case beside him and unzipped the bag's main compartment. Her laptop was inside. He rooted about but found nothing else. Unlatching the first of four small pouches, he plunged his hand inside and pulled out a fistful of folded paper strips. He tore through them one by one, hoping to find one that would give him a clue, but they turned out to be just old receipts. The second pouch held her power pack. The third was empty, and the fourth held her phone. He sat back, staring at the case. *She must have been mugged, but where's her wallet? If they stole it, why didn't they steal the laptop, too? It's high-end, and new. They would've gotten real money for it.* He inspected the main compartment again and saw a zippered pouch he hadn't noticed. Opening it, he stuck his hand inside and felt a couple of lumps, one soft and the other hard. His heart beat faster. He snatched them out and saw they were her wallet and credit card case. Searching her wallet, he found only a few wrinkled bills and her driver's license wedged inside its holder. He flipped through her card case. There wasn't a note in there, either. A sense of unreality washed over him. *Has she been kidnapped?* It was possible. As many times as he'd told her to keep it quiet, Katy had never been shy about broadcasting her relationship to him. And his wealth was no secret. He straightened in his seat and stared through the windshield, then let out a roar of anguish while pounding the dashboard.

"Nooo! They've got her...oh, Corellon, *they've got my little girl!*"

CHAPTER 6

In the early hours of June third, Isadore stared out his home office window, barely noticing the fast lightening sky. The house was deathly quiet. He'd been up all night, waiting for Katy's kidnappers to call, but the phone had remained silent. By now, his nerves were frazzled.

I'll pay anything. Please, just don't hurt her.

"Are you going to call out the troops to look for her, sir?" Jones's voice sounded beside him. Isadore hadn't heard him enter the room.

He didn't turn. "No," he said, his voice carrying a slight rasp. "They've got Katy hidden away someplace. The troops would never find her." He paused. "The vampires could, though. They'd smell her, and then they could mist and slip under the door. And that would be the end of the kidnappers." He snorted. "But I'm sure Master Kurt wouldn't be interested in my problems."

Neither man said anything for a few minutes. "Would you like a cognac, sir?" Jones's voice sounded again.

"Yes."

"All right."

Isadore sensed the other man leave his side. He wasn't a praying man, but he bowed his head. "Please, Corellon," he whispered. "Let Katy come home. I'll do whatever you ask. Let her come home, please. Just let her come home."

But Katy didn't come home.



That afternoon, Isadore sat on the loveseat in his home office, elbow on the armrest and head resting on his hand, staring at nothing. He hadn't

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left the room since he'd come home from his fruitless search for Katy.

There was a knock on the door. He didn't move. "Come."

The door opened. Jones stepped inside and closed it behind him, his expression grave. "Sir, the police are here. And they have two special agents with them."

He froze, staring at Jones with wide eyes. His thoughts stuttered. *Oh, no. Did they...? And special agents...Corellon!* Special agents worked in an exalted branch of the police department, and whose sole purpose was to hunt down and murder zots.

His movements slow, Isadore got to his feet and went to his desk. Running his fingers under its lip, he found the small depression and pressed it. A little drawer popped out. Inside, a massive silver ring, elaborately chased and with a large, round, light blue sapphire in its center, lay on a bed of soft black velvet. The ostentatious ring was something a pimp might wear rather than a wealthy and respected mortician. But Isadore didn't have it made as a stylish accessory.

It was insurance. One press upon the sapphire and the house would implode. Isadore had designed his home as a trap when he'd bought it, and the ring as its detonator. He'd vowed long ago he wouldn't disappear like other zots who'd been taken by the special agents. He would kill himself, and take as many humans as he could with him.

Isadore stared at the ring and all his emotions fled, replaced by a cold, calculating emptiness at the thought of what might happen. He slipped the ring on the third finger of his right hand.

Katy's always known humans for what they are. Once she got over her death wish...if it comes down to it, she would've been glad to be here.

He looked up and gave Jones a slow nod. "Show them in."

Jones gazed at him for a long moment, then returned his nod. "Yes, sir." He'd long ago told the other man about his ring, and what it was for. Jones left the office, closing the door behind him.

Isadore looked out the room's tall windows, hands clasped in front of him. He trembled, his cold, empty feeling overwhelmed by grief. *Katy's dead. Oh, Corellon, my little girl is dead.* He closed his eyes against the tears threatening to escape. *How did they find her? Where did they find her? Did they hurt her before they killed her? What did they do? If the police found her, they know she's zot. That's why the special agents are here. My Katy...* Somehow, he

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managed to suppress his tears and the bellow of anguish threatening to burst from him. He would not break down, he would not. Especially not in front of them.

Jones knocked on the door again. He didn't turn. "Come," he said, trying to keep the rasp out of his voice. He heard the door open.

"Special agents and the police to see you, sir," Jones said.

Isadore heard the four's soft footsteps on the thick carpet as they entered his office, and sensed their stares. After finally composing his face into an expressionless mask, he turned and addressed them. "I'm Isadore Drummond. How may I help you gentlemen?"

The men, all white, visibly started. Though he was wealthy and well-known in Seattle, Isadore kept himself out of the limelight. He made no public appearances, refused all invitations. He wasn't interested in associating with humans, yet that wasn't the only reason. It was for protection. Being a public figure would make it ridiculously easy for someone to find out he was zot.

Watching their faces, he could barely resist a sneer. *What's the matter? You've never seen a rich nigger before?*

The four men recovered in seconds. "Mr. Drummond," one of the policemen said. "I regret to inform you—"

"My daughter is dead. I know."

The policeman frowned. "How—"

"Why else would you be here?" He paused. "How did she die?"

"The Slayer got her, sir."

He stared at the desktop. *Murdered. By the Slayer. Corellon, why like that? Why?* Grief and anger threatened his self-control.

One of the men cleared his throat. He looked up. The dark-haired man wearing a brown suit regarded him through narrowed eyes. "Special Agent Carmichael. Mr. Drummond, did you know your daughter was zot? A morran, to be precise."

This was what he'd been waiting for. *Here we go—have to convince him I'm human.* His face screwed in anger, not altogether feigned. "My daughter is not zot," he said through clenched teeth.

"Mr. Drummond, we ran the genetic screening test on what little blood was left in her. She was zot." The agent's eyes narrowed further. "Tell me what you know about that."

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“Nothing. Katy is human. I adopted her when she was a toddler. Would you like to see a copy of her adoption papers?”

Carmichael’s stare didn’t waver. “Yes, we would.”

“Indeed.” Isadore crossed his mahogany-paneled office and ran his hand along the far wall, discreetly hitting the release that swung open to reveal a hidden compartment. Pausing to give the agents and officers a distrustful look, he shifted so his body was between them and the safe inside. After punching in the safe’s code, he pulled out a red folder and tucked it under his arm. He took his time relocking the safe and closing the compartment.

He handed the folder to Carmichael and returned to stand behind his desk, calmly watching the man scrutinize its contents. The papers were a perfect forgery. Jasmine, one of his own tribe, worked in the court’s domestic section and had created the certificate and matching computer records that proved Katy was human. State law mandated that all children had to undergo the GST before they could be placed in the state’s child services agency. If they weren’t human, the children disappeared.

Pursing his lips, Carmichael closed and returned the file to Isadore. “These seem to be in order, but we’ll be checking them against the court’s records.”

“Please do.” Isadore returned the folder to the hidden safe and turned to the four men. “Is there anything else I can do for you?”

“Yes, sir,” the second policeman said. “I’m sorry, but we need you to come down and identify your daughter’s body.”

Those words, the almost compassionate tone, sent a tremor through Isadore’s body. He couldn’t keep from twisting his face, squeezing his eyes shut against the pit sinking in his belly. *Oh, Corellon...my Katy in a drawer...* He forced his eyes open to see how much his posture had revealed.

The two policemen looked apologetic, but Carmichael and the other agent gave him identical hard stares, obviously gauging the authenticity of his response. A flash of anger ripped through him. *Fuck you both.* He made himself breathe, and then sighed. “All right. When would you like for me to come down?”

“We can go now, sir,” the second policeman said.

Isadore closed his eyes again, steeling himself. He opened them. “Yes,” he said, his voice sounding tired. “Let me get my car keys and I’ll follow you.”

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“We’ll be outside, sir.”

He nodded and the four men filed out of his office.

Isadore slowly drew the ring off his finger and returned it to the desk’s hidden drawer. Staring at it on its black velvet cushion, he knew he might not yet be done with it. Whether the agents determined Katy’s adoption papers had been forged or not, they still might come back for him. That he’d been harboring a zot in his house, even if unwittingly, would be reason enough to force him to take the GST.

I’ll cross that bridge if it comes to it. He looked at the ring a moment longer, then closed the drawer.

“Sir.”

He looked up. Jones stood in the doorway, grief etched on his pale face. “Yes, Jones?”

“Sir, I...I know Katy’s...” He couldn’t seem to bring himself to say the words.

Isadore nodded.

“D-did they tell you how...” Jones stammered.

“The Slayer.”

Jones’s eyes turned shiny. A moment later, tears spilled down his cheeks. “My...my... That poor...I-I’m sorry, sir.” His shoulders shook and he bowed his head.

Isadore stepped out from behind his desk. Reaching Jones in three long strides, he wrapped his arms around the other man, hugging him tight. Jones had taken care of Katy while he was at work, playing her childish games, bandaging her skinned knee, and so much more. One evening—Isadore felt his own tears at the memory—Jones had not been at the door to greet him. Katy’s voice had floated down the stairs from her bedroom to the foyer, and he’d followed the sound. Face lit up with a big grin, Jones had been sitting on the floor, having tea with Katy, her teddy bear, and one of her dolls. Instead of disturbing them, Isadore had tip-toed to his bedroom.

Jones straightened and Isadore let his arms fall. “I’m sorry, sir,” he said. “I should be comforting you.”

“Nonsense. We both loved her.”

Jones nodded. “What happens now, sir?”

“I have to go to the morgue and identify her body.” Isadore gave him a wan smile.

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“Do you...want me to go with you?”

“No, that’s all right.” He paused. “I think it’d be safer for you to stay here.”

“Yes, sir.”

Isadore sighed. “I’d better go. They’re waiting for me.”

“I’ll get your car keys.”

When Jones met him at the back door with the keys, Isadore said, “I don’t know how long I’ll be gone. If I’m not back in three hours, you know what to do.”

Jones’s expression turned solemn. “Yes, sir,” he whispered.

Isadore entered the garage and sat in his car, staring through the windshield. *Everything will be all right. Just don’t let them see how nervous you are. Be the grieving father and nothing more.* Taking a deep breath, he backed out and headed to the street. Rounding the driveway’s bend, he saw a police car and a plain, dark blue sedan parked at the curb in front of his mansion. Carmichael stood beside the sedan, climbing in as Isadore approached. *Are they coming, too? Corellon, I hope not.*

The police car pulled off first, then Carmichael. Isadore followed.

As he drove to the medical examiner’s office, it occurred to him that although he dealt with death every day, he’d never been to the morgue. There’d never been a reason for him to go. Unclaimed bodies were transported by the city to one of his facilities for cremation. The families of claimed bodies made their own arrangements.

His throat tightened. *Katy...I have to decide...should I hold a service for her? A memorial service...the old gods are long gone. Nothing fancy, though. She wouldn’t like that. And then...should I bury her? Cremate her?* He shook his head. He didn’t need to think about that now. What he needed now was to get through this and go home. He grimaced. *Unless Carmichael and his friend have other plans for me.*

At the King County Medical Examiner’s complex, which also housed the city morgue, the small caravan turned into the parking lot. Watching the dark blue sedan’s rear dashed his hopes that the special agents wouldn’t join the police and him. *Why? Why can’t they just leave me alone?* But he knew. They wanted to see his reaction when he saw her.

Over the eighty-odd years since the Special Branch had been created, they’d built up a detailed profile of the chief behavioral characteristics

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for each zot race. They knew Katy had been a morran, and according to their profile, morrans were known for their volatility. He'd need his years of practicing self-discipline more than ever.

Walking to the morgue's entrance, Isadore was acutely aware of their scrutiny, watching for any sign of morran-like behavior. *Corellon, please help me keep it together.*

"This way." A policeman held open the door to the morgue. Harsh fluorescent lighting emphasized the bleak hallway led to a place of death. After a long march, they stopped before a pair of two-way double doors. The policemen opened them and they entered the morgue. A doctor and two burly attendants were inside, waiting. Eyeing the two big men, he figured Carmichael must have called ahead to let them know what they might expect.

"Mr. Drummond, I'm Dr. Slazar." Her gaze and tone were stony. "I'm sorry. I know this will be difficult for you."

Isadore nodded once. "Doctor. And thank you." *Katy's zot. Is that why you don't look sorry?*

"Follow me, please." Cradling her electronic clipboard, she turned and started walking along the rows of body drawers.

He heard the morgue attendants' footsteps close behind him. Any closer and they'd be breathing down his neck. *Bet they wouldn't do this to a human.* Anger swirled deep in his gut. *No. Do. Not.*

Dr. Slazar stopped at a drawer with a short series of green-lit numbers near its top. She curled her fingers around the handle and looked at him. "Are you ready?"

No! his mind screamed. He took a deep breath and held it, then nodded.

Dr. Slazar pulled out the drawer. An attendant zipped open the white bag covering Katy's body.

Isadore's breath whooshed out. His jaw dropped and his eyes felt as if they'd popped from his head. He stared down at the horror that had been his daughter, his Katy.

From her neck to her ankles gaped holes, so many holes. Some large, some small, it looked for all the world as if someone had cored her like an apple.

A dark cloud descended over his consciousness. His sight dimmed.

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His mind went blank. He started to sweat, and then a volcano of unholy rage erupted through him. Who would dare do this to her? One of his own? His *daughter*? Hands twitching at his sides, he was seconds away from ripping the morgue apart, tearing the metal drawers off their slides, out of their frames, smashing the humans, tearing down the walls. . .

STOP, a voice boomed inside his head. *They're waiting for this. Stop!* Clapping his hands to his face, Isadore shook as he worked to beat his rage into submission. Minutes passed. He let out a tiny hiss. He'd finally muscled his rage back into its cage, but kept his hands glued where they were.

"Mr. Drummond," Dr. Slazar said.

He didn't answer.

"Mr. Drummond," she said, louder.

He took a deep breath, dropped his hands, and opened his eyes. Dr. Slazar's stare was still hard but he sensed her fear, as if she'd known what he'd been about to do. The morgue attendants glared at him with faces like cement. Carmichael and the other special agent watched him intently, like a bug under a microscope.

Isadore took another breath. "Yes, that's her. That's my daughter." He looked down, and then up. "Was she raped?"

Dr. Slazar didn't reply at first. Standing closest to him, she shot the other humans a nervous glance, then pursed her lips. "Yes. Vaginally, anally, and her urethra had been penetrated, too."

He closed his eyes again. *One, two, hold it down, three, four, five, hold. . .* It took him almost a minute to beat back his rage. Finally, he opened his eyes.

"There's one more thing you should see." Shooting the attendants another glance, Dr. Slazar nodded. They gently turned Katy's body over.

Isadore tensed. *One, two. . .*

He blinked. Instead of rage, a deep fog settled over his mind and he felt strangely empty, as if his body had become a shell. His shoulders slumped. The killer had carved a message into her back—"thou shall not suffer a witch to live." His eyes welled with tears. *My baby. . .*

"Do you know what that means, Mr. Drummond?" Carmichael said, his voice sounding far away.

He looked up and opened his mouth, but no words came. He shook his head.

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“Are you sure?”

He nodded. A single tear tracked along his cheek. He wiped it away.

Carmichael continued to study him. “All right. We’ll be going, now. And we’ll be in touch.” The two special agents left the morgue.

“What do you want us to do, Mr. Drummond?” Dr. Slazar said.

Isadore turned. Her expression was almost sympathetic. “I’ll have her picked up later this afternoon,” he said, his voice cracking.

“Okay. I just need you to sign the release form and then you can go. Come with me.” She headed to the door where they’d come in.

He didn’t feel the floor under his feet. He couldn’t even feel his legs moving. As if he’d been dropped into a bubble, some invisible force pushed him along. He signed the release form and returned to his car. Sitting behind the steering wheel, he stared through the windshield, not seeing the parking lot. Then he was sitting behind the wheel in his garage. Getting out of his car, he floated to the house.

Jones met him at the door. “Sir!” The alarmed look on his face accentuated his red-rimmed eyes.

The full impact of where he’d been and why hit Isadore like a sledgehammer. Tears rolled down his cheeks. “She...she’s gone, Jones,” his voice cracked. “Katy’s really gone. I...”

Jones took his arm. “Come to the study, sir. I’ll get you a drink.”

He shook his head. “I need to call Stan. I’ll be in the office...”

“All right.” Jones dropped his arm and left him.

The mansion was quiet. Like a tomb. Isadore choked back a sob. He’d never hear her voice, her laughter, within these walls again. Taking slow, deliberate steps, he reached his office, headed for the desk, and almost fell into his chair. He stared at the opposite wall for a moment, then slowly spun the chair around and looked out the window. *Should I sell the house? Could he bear to continue living here? So many reminders...*

A vision of Alma’s beautiful, burnt-sienna hued face bloomed in his mind’s eye. His lips stretched into a sad little smile. *She would’ve hated this place. I can hear her now—“It’s too big, Izzy. What do we need all this room for?”* His smile died. *I wish we could’ve had children. It wasn’t like we couldn’t. I was just too busy building the damned business. A tear rolled down his cheek. Then the pogrom came...*

“Sir,” Jones’s voice sounded behind him.

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He smeared away his tear and spun around.

Jones approached with a scotch-and-soda highball balanced on a silver tray. He set the glass on his desk. “Can I—?”

Lips twitching into a tiny smile, he shook his head. Jones was hurting too, but if he’d learned anything about the man, it was that caring for someone else was what he needed to do. “Just...could you turn down the bed? I...” he said, struggling to get the words out.

“Of course, sir.” Jones gave him a small nod and headed for the door.

Taking a long swallow of his drink, Isadore speed-dialed Facility No. 3.

“Izzy,” Stan said. “What’s up?”

Hearing Stan’s friendly, cheerful voice tapped into a reserve of energy Isadore didn’t know he had. “I need you to send a coach to the morgue as soon as possible,” he said, his voice steady. “And I need you to keep quiet about it.”

A long silence. “Izzy, what’s happened?”

“Katy’s dead.”

“Oh, God-Khensa,” Stan said in a low voice. “How?”

“The Slayer.”

“No...no...” The line went silent for a moment. “Are you all right?”

Isadore almost wanted to laugh. “To be honest, Stan? I want to die. But I’m going to sleep, instead. Can...can you just take care of things for me?”

“Of course. I’ll get that coach rolling right away, even if I have to drive the thing myself.”

“Thanks.” Pushing the word out exhausted him, and his eyelids grew heavy.

“No problem. And Izzy?” Stan said, his voice sounding faint.

“Yes?”

“Take care of yourself. Please.”

He didn’t answer at first. *I don’t want to. I want to go to bed and never wake up.* “I will, Stan. I will,” he finally said.

CHAPTER 7

At two in the afternoon the following day, Isadore sat slumped in his wingchair, gazing at his lap. Dressed in pajamas, he hadn't taken them off since yesterday.

Alma, Katy...the two people I loved most in this world, and they're both gone...ripped away...what am I—

A soft knock on the door interrupted his thoughts.

He ignored it. *My girls...gone...*

The knock came again.

"Leave me alone," he shouted.

The door opened, and Jones stepped inside. "Sir, I think you need to see this," he said, proffering a black envelope with gleaming gold trim.

Isadore stared at it for a second, then closed his eyes. He knew who it was from. *Master Kurt. And I doubt he's sending his condolences.* Opening them, he took the envelope and tore it open. Scanning the gold cursive writing, the note was worded like an invitation, but he knew better. "The Master's called a meeting tonight," he said in a low voice. "At the KM Entertainment building. Eleven-thirty p.m."

"Does it say what it's about?"

"The Slayer." He took a deep breath, and slowly let it out.

"Can you message him you won't be there? Surely he knows about..."

Isadore let out something that passed for a bark of laughter. "That's no excuse as far as Master Kurt is concerned."

Neither man spoke for a long while. "Can I get you some lunch, sir?" Jones finally said.

"I'm not hungry."

"Sir, you haven't eaten for almost two days. You need to eat something."

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Isadore raised his brow. “Mothering me, are you?”

“Yes, sir.”

Isadore nodded. “Okay. Whatever you fix.”

“Very well, sir.” Jones turned to leave.

Isadore hesitated. “Jones?”

The other man turned.

“I’m sorry for snapping at you,” Isadore said, his voice soft. “I—”

Jones gave him a small smile. “It’s all right, sir. I understand.” He left the study.

Jones’s gentle response made Isadore feel even worse. He threw the vampire’s summons on the table, then sank into his chair and waited for Jones to bring him his meal.

CHAPTER 8

Walking to the KM Entertainment building that night, Isadore wondered what Master Kurt had to say about the Slayer. The Master rarely called meetings of all the zot leaders in the city. *Must be something big. Maybe he's figured out who the Slayer is?* It was possible. Zots knew far more about what went on in Seattle than humans ever would. They had to. It was the key to their survival.

He thought about Katy, and his heart grew heavy. Her death hadn't been reported in the news, but that wasn't surprising. His lips tightened. *Humans love to pretend we don't exist, except when it comes to pogroms.*

Isadore entered the building, rode the elevator to the top floor, and walked into the party room. It was just past eleven, and the room was already crowded. But that was to be expected. No one dared to be late for one of Master Kurt's meetings. If they were, no excuse in the world would let them escape his harsh punishment.

He spotted an empty space on one end of a loveseat near the room's center. Walking over to it, he gave the zot he'd be sitting next to a short nod and sat. She nodded in return. He didn't know her name, but he recognized her face. He knew the same was true for her, and was true for most of the other zots in the room tonight.

Waiting for the meeting to begin, a fog settled into his brain. The soft murmurs from the other zots muted, and he stared at the intricate design on the Persian carpet without seeing it.

"My friends, thank you for coming on such short notice. We have some unfortunate..." Still gazing at the carpet, Isadore hadn't heard Master Kurt enter the room. As the vampire spoke, his velvety tones washed over him like a gentle wave, then drifted away.

"...one more murder since then. This time, the victim was zot."

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At the word “zot,” Isadore’s head snapped up. His rage burst forth, and he jumped to his feet. “It was my daughter,” he bellowed. “My daughter, Katy. And I want to know what’s going to be done about it!” His head swiveled left and right, his wild stare finally settling on the Master.

The vampire held up his hand. “Isadore, Isadore,” he said, his tone soft and soothing. Mesmerized, Isadore stared into his blue eyes. “That’s why we’re here. To figure out what we can do.”

Master Kurt’s gaze and soothing voice penetrated him, lulling his fury into sleep. He knew the Master was working his vampire mojo on him. Resentment stoked his rage. The way he was being manipulated was insulting, especially when he had every right to be upset. He fought against the sense of calm smothering his fury, but it was no use. His breathing slowed, and his heart’s hammering, the tightness in his chest, eased. He sat, and the brain-fog wrapped him in its embrace again.

Isadore leaned back and stared at the ceiling. The Master’s voice was replaced by a woman’s warm contralto, almost as soothing as the Master’s had been. He closed his eyes.

They snapped open at the mention of Katy’s name. The fog evaporated. Isadore sat up.

The woman began to describe Katy’s injuries. His chest tightened, and his breathing quickened. *No. I can’t hear that again!* He braced for his rage to erupt, but a Novocaine-like numbness pervaded him instead. It was surprising, but Isadore welcomed it. Studying the woman, he frowned a little. Something about her seemed familiar. Who was she? How did she know about Katy’s wounds in such detail? Then he remembered. *Mandy Stewart. She’s in Parker Berenson’s wolfpack. That werewolf hunt last year...we cremated her brother and his son.* Then he remembered something else. *She’s Mayor Russell’s chief of staff. That’s how she knows.*

Mandy turned to a photo of a dead man propped on an easel, and began pointing out the details of what the killer had done to him. Others spoke up, asking questions. Rekindled rage stirred in his gut again. His hands started twitching, and his chest tightened. *What’s so important about him?* He leapt from his seat. “This is an outrage,” he bellowed. “Who cares about some dead human? What about my Katy? Why aren’t we talking about *her?*”

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“Isadore,” the Master’s sharp voice cracked through his brain. “Sit down and be quiet!”

He spun around, fists balled at his sides. There was much in this room he could tear apart, starting with the loveseat behind him. But the vampire’s glare held him in an iron grip. His mind churned in rebellion for a minute before his fury vanished and the now-familiar fog enveloped him.

Another mojo... Feeling spent, Isadore fell back into his seat and dropped his head into his hands. Voices swirled around him, but they were muffled and he could barely make out the words. It didn’t matter. He wasn’t trying to listen, anyway. Even a report like a rifle shot didn’t make him flinch.

“This meeting is over,” the Master’s faint voice penetrated through his fog. He kept talking, but Isadore caught only bits and pieces of the vampire’s words. “...we can do...get out on the streets...find out what we can...”

The sound of shuffling feet finally got him to raise his head. People were leaving. He rose from the loveseat. Still surrounded by his numb bubble, he floated out the door and down to the street.

After wandering a few blocks, he found his car and got in. Instead of starting it, he stared through the windshield.

The Master’s words came back to him. “Get out on the streets... find out what we can...get out on the streets...”

His mind fog cleared. He nodded. That was exactly what he’d do. Get out on the streets and look for Katy’s killer. Master Kurt had ordered they were to relay whatever information they found to Mandy. He would do no such thing. If he found the killers first, he’d dispose of them the way they’d disposed of Katy.

Armed with new purpose, he drove home.



Two days later, Isadore met with staff from his four facilities and announced he was taking sabbatical.

“It’ll be fairly short,” he assured them. “Maybe a month or two. I just need some time. While I’m away, Stan Fazel”—he’d gestured to Stan sitting next to him—“will take the reins.”

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After the meeting, his staff crowded around him, giving their condolences and wishing him well. He was patient with them, nodding and giving tight-lipped smiles, when all he wanted was to get out of there. He was ready for the hunt, and he was ready to kill.

On his way home, Isadore bought a large paper map of the city. It had surprised him how hard it had been to find. *Guess no one wants paper maps anymore, now that everyone has GPS.* Plastering the map on his office wall, he read every news story back to April when the murders had started. He marked the map with the dates and locations where the bodies had been found. Studying it, he saw the murders had taken place roughly a week apart, but that was the only pattern he found. The crime scenes spanned the entire city, with seemingly no rhyme or reason.

Undaunted, Isadore took to the streets. Wanting to see where the bodies had been found, he dressed accordingly. Two had been unearthed at the edge of touristy neighborhoods, so he'd dressed like a tourist, complete with camera bag slung over his shoulder. One had been discovered in a rail yard, so he wore a bright, yellow-green vest with reflective trim and a hard hat. On all his forays, he'd glamourised to appear as a white man because he knew his presence was less likely to be questioned.

In the time it had taken to visit all the murder sites, it had not been lost on him that no more bodies had been discovered. Had the killers had left Seattle? He hoped not. He didn't want anyone else to die but he wanted to see the killers brought to justice. *His justice.*

Every night, he picked a secluded spot like those where the killer had struck, drove there in an old beater he'd bought from some college kid, and waited. Though he glamourised into invisibility while driving, he couldn't keep it up while parked and out walking, because his ability's reach was limited. To remedy that, he'd removed the license plates and had used steel wool to erase the vehicle identification number. If someone stumbled upon it, he didn't want to make it easy to trace the car back to him.

Two weeks after he'd started his stakeouts, Carmichael and his partner paid him a visit late one morning. When Jones alerted him they were at the house, he took down his map and stowed all evidence the agents might find suspicious. After spreading some accounting statements across his desk, he popped open the desk's hidden compartment and slipped on his heavy silver ring.

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Jones led the agents inside, and they stood a few feet from the door with identical, pitiless stares. Isadore suppressed the urge to curl his lip. *Stop, fools. I'm not afraid of you.* Rising from behind his desk, he looked from one to the other. "What can I do for you gentlemen?"

"We checked the court house records, Mr. Drummond," Carmichael said. "It appears your daughter's adoption was legitimate."

He raised his brow. "Appears?" His kept his tone pleasant, but cool.

Carmichael's stare didn't waver. "Yes, *appears*. We compared Judge Mickelson's signature on other adoption papers to yours and found a few discrepancies."

"What kind of discrepancies?"

"Our handwriting expert says some of the letters in Mickelson's signature might have been done by another hand." His eyes narrowed. "And since he's dead, we can't get a fresh specimen."

"Ah. *Might*." Isadore cocked his head. "Agent Carmichael, is your expert aware that no one signs their name exactly the same way each time?"

"Of course," Carmichael snapped. "He's one of the top experts in his field."

No one said anything for a moment or two. Isadore's lips stretched into a mirthless smile. "So now that it *appears* I legitimately adopted Katy, what happens next?"

Carmichael's lips tightened. "Our investigation into your daughter's adoption is closed."

"Mm. The investigation is closed." Isadore knew he should leave it at that, but he couldn't help himself. His smile died, and a small frown appeared on his brow. "I see. But what about your *other* investigation?"

"Excuse me?" Carmichael peered at him, looking suspicious.

He was skating on thin ice, questioning the agents like this. But bitter anger at all the years he'd spent hiding his true nature, living in terror of disappearing, and losing Alma to the humans' mindless bigotry, pushed him to continue. "You haven't found the one—or ones—who so brutally murdered my Katy and all those other people, have you? Surely that investigation isn't closed, too. In fact, what exactly *is* being done to keep this monster from killing again?"

Carmichael's expression turned cold. "I can't give any details on

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that. But rest assured, Mr. Drummond, we're doing everything in our power to stop them."

Isadore gave a sagacious nod. "I see." He smiled. "Then we have nothing more to discuss. I bid you good day, gentlemen. Jones will show you to the door."

Jones stepped into the office. The other man must have been listening, because his timing had been perfect.

Carmichael's jaw worked. "Mr. Drummond, the investigation is closed but I think there's a lot more to this case than it seems. I'd be very interested to find out how your daughter got into the child welfare system."

"What do you mean?"

"Miss Drummond was zot. But according to the GST report, she was human."

Isadore spread his hands but said nothing. *And according to me, you can shove that GST report right up your ass.*

Carmichael's eyes narrowed to slits, and the two men left his office.

He smiled again. He knew the investigation had been closed because Jim Russell, Seattle's mayor, had ordered it to be closed. His sizeable donation to Russell's campaign had helped propel him into office last November. He'd made the donation because what no human and very few zots knew was that Russell was a zymp—zot sympathizer. He'd also learned not long after Master Kurt's meeting that Russell had given Mandy Stewart the green light to feed every scrap of information the police unearthed about the Slayer to the Master, and in turn, to the rest of them. Although Russell could do only so much to help the city's zots without giving himself away, his mayoral election still meant that zots could rest a little easier. Isadore had given Russell a call, explained his situation, and the investigation had been shut down—just like that.

His smile widened into a grin. *Sometimes being a rich nigger ain't so bad.*

CHAPTER 9

At a quarter to ten the night of June twenty-fifth, Isadore sat in his study, nursing his scotch-and-soda. The day had been clear and about an hour ago, he'd dragged the wingchair over to the window to watch the sunset. Now the moon was out, bathing his view in its ethereal glow.

I should go hunting...

He was still dithering over whether to go out tonight, but right now he was tired and discouraged, and just wanted to rest. Neither he nor the police were any closer to finding Katy's murderers than they were three weeks ago, when her body had been discovered. In that time, the tension over the city had grown so strong it fairly hummed. Many of the tribes—as well as other zot races—were preparing for the worst.

Isadore stared into his drink. Nighttime was when he missed Katy the most. *Why is that? Why do we always miss—*

BOOM! The windows rattled. Startled, he dropped his glass.

BOOM! BOOM!

He leapt to his feet. "Jones," he shouted, and ran for the door. "Jo—"
BOOM!

The house rocked, and he fell against the fireplace mantel. His study went black. The battery-powered emergency lights kicked on, giving him a little more than just enough light to see by. Then the house lights came up, the power supplied by a generator. Blinking against the sudden brightness, he stabbed a button next to the mantel and heard the whir from the metal window blinds sliding into place. Bolting from the study, he ran through the mansion. "Jones," he shouted. "Secure the house!"

Jones met him in the foyer. "Done, sir," he said, sounding breathless. "What—"

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“Get Brucilla’s keys and meet me at the back door.” Isadore barreled up the stairs, ran to his bedroom’s wall safe, and punched in the code. He reached in and grabbed his Ruger-57 and stuffed three magazines into his pockets. Zots didn’t normally carry weapons, but whatever was going on out there wasn’t normal. Reaching in again, he took out a Glock. He inspected it and saw it was fully loaded. *That should be enough.* He hesitated a second, then grabbed an extra magazine, anyway. On his way out, he swiped his cell phone off the dresser and then ran downstairs.

At the back door, Jones handed him the keys. “Thanks. Now listen. If anyone comes to the door, you’ve got enough glamour to tell who’s zot and who’s not. If they’re zot, let them in. If they’re not, feel free to use this.” He handed Jones the Glock and the extra magazine. “I don’t think you’ll need it, but just in case. And I may not be back tonight. I’m sure all the phone lines are down, and probably the cell relays, too. I’ll hole up in one of the facilities if I have to.”

“Yes, sir.”

He was reaching for the doorknob when Jones grabbed his arm. He looked over his shoulder. The other man’s face was grave. “Izzy—be careful.”

Stunned by the sound of his nickname from Jones’s lips, Isadore just nodded at first. Then he smiled. “I will. But don’t worry too much. Morrans are tough. It’s not easy to take one of us down.”

Outside, the moon was bright enough, so he didn’t bother with his phone’s flashlight. He ran to the garage and sped inside. Emergency battery-powered automatic lights flickered. Opening the door to the garage’s middle bay, the lights flickered on, illuminating an enormous, gleaming, black 1960 Cadillac. The car looked like it had just rolled off the showroom floor.

But Brucilla was no ordinary car. He’d had the car built a decade after the last pogrom thirty years ago. Its body of medium-weight steel armor plate sat atop a fortified chassis. Bulletproof, ALON windows protected the occupants and shielded the headlights. Its one-of-a-kind engine could haul the vehicle with little effort, and a breathable, bulletproof fabric stretched behind the grill to protect it. The undercarriage had been sealed. Its bulletproof tires, specially made to support the car’s weight, were also impervious to punctures and slashes, and could be driven for a hundred miles without air.

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Meticulously maintained, he kept the gas tanks full and the car ready to go at a moment's notice. Isadore drove Brucilla only in emergencies, and in the years since he'd owned the car, he'd had to use it twice.

Isadore slid inside and slipped his gun into a holster attached to the back of the visor. He twisted the key in the ignition. A small green light appeared on the dashboard, letting him know the near-silent engine was running. After backing out, he turned around and headed for the street, glamouring the car into invisibility when he reached the curb.

The city's emergency sirens blared, deafeningly loud even with the car's windows closed. Pogroms were unpredictable, so Isadore didn't have a real plan about where he'd go first. *Strange that the city's been blacked out, though. Maybe the humans are trying something new. Murder's always easier in the dark.*

He headed to the central business district to see what was happening and where. Then he could rescue any zots he found and take them to Underground or to one of his facilities. Brucilla was big enough to cram nine people inside, excluding him, if they didn't mind sitting on top of one another.

As he neared the central business district, his brow creased into a frown and deepened with each block he passed. He'd expected to see fires, but not here. Yet the orange glow lighting up the buildings was too intense to be just one or two blazes. *What's happening?*

Turning a corner into the commercial enclave, he slammed on the brakes. His jaw dropped. The street was an inferno. Fountains of flames shot from the windows of low rise buildings and lower floors of the high rises. Shock waves from more explosions made Brucilla shiver.

This wasn't a pogrom—the city was under attack.

With a squeal of tires, he whipped Brucilla around and raced toward Pioneer Square. Was it burning, too? How would zots get into Underground?

Barreling along the avenue, he saw fire trucks heading in the opposite direction, sirens wailing. More sirens sounded in the distance. And more explosions. The police were out in force. Skirting them as best he could, he reached Pioneer Square.

A few of the streets looked to be on fire, but most were not. He breathed a sigh of relief. That meant enough of Underground's entrances would be clear.

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Now round up zots and bring them to safety. Ten blocks out of Pioneer Square, he spotted a group of people huddled against a building. He sent out a wave of glamour. They didn't sparkle. He drove past without slowing down. *Humans. Let them find their own way out of this mess.*

A few blocks later, he sent his glamour toward another group. They sparkled. He dissolved glamour surrounding the car, pulled up close and rolled down the passenger side window. "Come on," he shouted. "I'll take you to Underground!"

The eight zots, most of them women, startled at his sudden appearance. One of the men, wearing a black shirt, stepped forward. "Who're you?" he shouted, his tone suspicious and menacing.

"We don't have time! Get in!"

After a moment's hesitation, the eight piled inside. He glamourous Brucilla and headed for Pioneer Square again.

"Okay, mister," black shirt said. "Who're you?"

"Name's Isadore Drummond."

"The guy with the funeral homes?" he said, sounding incredulous.

"That's me."

"Oh, wow... What're you doing out here?"

He smiled. "Picking up zots like you and getting them to safety."

"How'd you know we were zot?" the woman wearing a pink tank top said.

"I glamourous you."

"You're an elf? But..."

"When we glamour someone, zots sparkle. Humans don't."

Silence fell. "Why are you doing this?" pink tank top said.

"Well, the different races may not get along but in the end, we're all zots. No matter what we are, we're in this together and we need to look out for each other." He snorted. "Not a popular opinion, I know."

Arriving at Pioneer Square, Isadore avoided the streets with burning buildings and pulled up next to a dark alley. "Here we are. You're safe, now."

"Mr. Drummond..." black shirt said. "We can't thank you enough. You take care."

"Don't worry—I will."

The eight ran down the alley. He had glamourous the car again and

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was about to pull off when someone shouted. “Mr. Drummond. Mr. Drummond. Wait!”

He dissolved the glamour. The eight zots were running out of the alley, looking frightened. He rolled down the window. “What’s wrong?”

“We can’t get in. The door’s locked or something!”

Isadore frowned. “Okay, come on.” He drove them to another alley. “Let’s try this one. I’ll wait for you.”

The eight got out of the car and were back in thirty seconds. The woman with a green headband said, “This one’s locked, too.”

He nodded once and let them back in. “Let’s move.”

They climbed inside. “I’ll take you to one of my funeral homes. You’ll be safe there.” As they left Pioneer Square, he glanced in the rear view window. “Pretty strange. Why would Underground’s doors be locked? What happened?”

“That’s just it,” a woman in blue said. “Nothing. We pushed the brick to unlock the door. We heard it click, but when we tried to open it, we couldn’t. The door wouldn’t budge.”

He shook his head. “When the Master hears about this, you can bet he’s not going to be happy.” He paused. “I just hope he doesn’t take it out on us.” *Like he did to the tribes when Betty Lang from Shira tricked one of his vampires out of a blood meal. Corellon, she was just a kid playing a stupid prank!*

They were silent as Isadore turned into the driveway of Facility No. 1 and drove around to the back. Without electricity powering the perimeter’s floodlights, the area almost pitch. Even Brucilla’s powerful headlights, visible only to car’s occupants, seemed feeble.

Grabbing his phone out of the dash holder, he turned on its flashlight. Cutting the headlights and engine, he told the others, “Stay here. I’ll be back.”

“Okay. Okay. Not going anywhere,” several voices chorused.

Isadore got out. He wasn’t worried about anyone seeing phone’s light. His glamour range stretched twenty feet in every direction. Anyone who might be on the property wouldn’t see a thing. He jogged to a metal railing guarding a short flight of stairs, and descended. Now he stood before a black steel door with a dimly lit numeric keypad set into the wall to his right. He punched in the code, and heard a faint pop.

He returned to the car and opened the rear door on the driver’s side. “Okay, let’s go.”

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The eight surrounded him, and they started walking. Reaching the door, Isadore pushed it open and stepped inside, followed by the others. After a few seconds of darkness, a bright light flickered on. Before them lay two flights of steep concrete stairs. Holding on the railing, he descended and punched his code into the steel door at the bottom to let them in.

The lights came on and a low humming sound filled the forty-by-forty foot square room. Upholstered benches lined three of the walls. Two stacks of folding padded chairs leaned against the far wall, along with a cluster of small tables. Against the wall without padded benches was a large refrigerator and a long counter with cabinets above and below, and a sink.

“Wh-where are we?” blue woman said as the group took everything in.

Isadore smiled. “Beneath one of my funeral homes. Facility No. 1, to be exact. There are bunkers like this one beneath the other three, too.” He pointed to the kitchen wall. “There’s canned food in the upper cabinets, water and juice in the lower ones. Can’t cook anything, but you’ll at least have something cold to drink. There’s enough food to last twenty or so people about three days, four if you stretch it. See that black box next to the refrigerator? That’s a crank radio. If you want to find out whether the stations are broadcasting, you won’t get a signal in here, but you will if you stand next to the door where we came in. And one last thing.” He pointed to a door set into the far wall between the padded benches and chairs. “That’s the toilet.” He looked at each of them. “You’ll be safe here. Think of it as a mini-Underground.”

“How long have you had this place?” black shirt said.

“Years. They were constructed when the facilities were built.”

“Have you ever used them before?”

Isadore nodded. “Twice.” He swept his arm about the room. “Make yourselves comfortable. I’ll be back.”

Green headband looked alarmed. “Where are you going?”

“To rescue more of us. As many as I can find.” He chuckled. “Don’t worry. Brucilla and I are old hands at this.”

She frowned. “Brucilla?”

He grinned. “My car.” He turned to leave.

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“Mr. Drummond. Wait,” a voice sounded behind him.

Isadore looked over his shoulder. The speaker was the second man in the group, who’d been quiet since he’d picked them up. The Asian man licked his lips. “I...thank you. For saving our lives.”

Isadore smiled. “You’d have done the same for me.”



Isadore glanced at the gas gauges. The gauge for the primary tank read empty, and the needle for the smaller, secondary tank lay just below the last quarter line. *Just enough for one more run.* That was the only downside to Brucilla. He’d had the car built to be as gas-efficient as possible, but given its weight, there had been only so much the designers could do.

He cruised along a dark street a few blocks below the central business district. Knowing zots would be headed for Underground, he’d kept his circuits relatively close to Pioneer Square. After dropping off a carload of passengers at Facility No. 4, he’d driven farther to see what else was happening. To his surprise, even more fires raged in the mostly residential neighborhoods.

How many of us made it to Underground? He worried not just for the troops in his own tribe, but all of them. He’d lost count of how many carloads he’d dropped off at his facilities. All four bunkers were pretty full. He chuckled. *I know if there’s anyone who isn’t in Underground, it’s Elon Alverin.* In all the confusion, Alverin would be in his element, glamourizing humans into shooting each other or creating some other kind of mayhem. *I wish I could do what Elon does, but I’m not that vicious.*

As Isadore turned another corner, moonlight fell on a small knot of people huddled against a building located in the middle of the block. Rolling closer, he sent out a cloud of glamour. The group didn’t sparkle. *Humans.*

Three blocks later, he came to an intersection at one of Seattle’s busier avenues. He braked as he neared, watching for other cars. Of the few he’d seen, the drivers were ignoring the traffic rules. He’d come across several crashes, and wasn’t inclined to see another, especially if it involved him.

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He crossed the intersection. His thoughts drifted, settling on the pogrom thirty years ago. He and Alma had been just a few blocks from an Underground entrance. A human had jumped out from nowhere and shot Alma in the chest. Almost point blank range. Isadore had grabbed the human's rifle before he could fire another shot and beaten him into a gory mass of pulp.

A knot of people on a corner drew his attention. He sent out a cloud of glamour. They sparkled. *Zots*.

"Get in," he shouted out the open window as he dissolved the glamour. "Hurry!"

"Who're you?" Same questions. Every time. Almost always one of the men in the group.

"We don't have time. Come on!"

Seven zots piled into the car, none of them much more than children. One girl, who looked about fourteen, sobbed quietly. He pressed the gas pedal and they pulled off.

One of the older teens, the young man who'd spoken, leaned forward. "Mister, you'd better be a zot, or you're dead."

Isadore laughed. "And just how many humans do *you* know who can make themselves invisible?" He chuckled. "I'm an elf—a morran. I glamour'd you, so that's how I knew you were zots. Otherwise I wouldn't have picked you up." He paused. "Why are you in this part of town?"

"We were headed for Underground," the older teen said. "But we got caught in some crossfire, and then there were explosions, so we decided to go the long way around." Silence reigned in the car for a few seconds. "So who are you, mister?"

"Name's Isadore Drummond. I—"

"The funeral dude," the teen said. He paused. "I'm real sorry about your daughter."

Isadore dipped his head. "Thank you."

"I'm Joshua," the young man said. "The rest of us are Maria, Kirk, Jennifer, Sally, Misha, and Rudy."

"Pleased to meet all of you." He glanced at Joshua in the rearview mirror. "So what kind of zot are you?"

"I'm a lion," Joshua said.

"All lions, huh?"

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“Uh-uh. Maria’s an eagle, Kirk’s a rat, Jennifer’s a snake, Misha’s a raven, Sally’s a tiger, and Rudy’s a shark.”

A small smile played on Isadore’s lips. “Your parents know you hang out together?”

Joshua laughed. “Yeah, and they hate it. We’re supposed to be with our own kind, they keep telling us. But dude, we’ve all been friends since we were little kids. Parents need to get over this bull”—he caught himself—“uh, stuff. We’re all zots, and that’s the only thing that matters.”

“Glad to hear you feel that way. I think it’s bullshit, too.” They all laughed. He drove two more blocks, turned the corner, and headed uptown.

“Hey, we’re going the wrong way,” Joshua said, sounding alarmed.

“No. I’ve been down to Underground tonight. There’s a problem with the doors not opening. I’m taking you to one of my facilities. You’ll be safe there.”

“Oh. Okay.”

Isadore turned another corner and hit the brakes. By the light from several burning houses, a ragged ring of humans—all adults—had cornered a little boy who looked about ten. They were throwing rocks, pointing guns, and laughing at him. The child kept trying to run, but was caught each time and hauled back into the middle of the street.

A volcanic blast of red rage consumed Isadore. He didn’t need glamour to know the child was zot. He was sick of this, sick of humans and their hatred, sick of them calling zots monsters when they were the real monsters.

And they were tormenting a *child*, for Corellon’s sake. He bared his teeth. He would *not* let them get away with this.

“Joshua,” he said, his voice quiet. “We’re going after that little boy. When I say now, I want you to open the door and get him inside. You’ll have to be quick, because I won’t be able to stop. Got that?”

“Yes, Mr. Drummond.”

“Okay. Here we go.” He unglamorized the car. Flipping the headlights to their brightest setting, he floored the gas pedal. Tires squealed and the car leapt forward. They reached the ring of humans, but he didn’t stop. Plowing into the crowd, he saw bodies catapult left and right. He slewed the car around and glanced through the rear passenger side

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window. The boy stood frozen, his mouth wide and his eyes popping in fright. He was close enough to Brucilla for Isadore's plan to work.

"NOW," he shouted.

The door flew open. He heard a thump, and then the door's slam.

On the driver's side, the humans had regrouped into a dense knot. Those with guns fired repeatedly. He headed straight for them.

"What are you doing?" Joshua shouted. "We gotta get out of here. They'll kill us!"

Isadore's lips stretched into a grim smile. "Not in this car, son." He jerked the steering wheel to the left. Tires squealing, Brucilla spun its long rear quarter panel through the crowd. The car shuddered as it slammed into humans unfortunate enough to be in its path. More shots rang out. The bullets pinged uselessly against the armor.

Isadore whirled the car in a three hundred sixty degree turn. As he stomped the brake pedal, Brucilla halted and rocked on its tires. They faced the throng again. Dwindling numbers didn't stop the humans. A hail of bullets clinked against the car, though by now they had to know their weapons were useless.

Throwing the gear into reverse, Isadore sent Brucilla flying backward about forty feet. Screeching to a stop, he shoved the gear into drive and floored the gas pedal. Brucilla rammed into the crowd. More bodies flew. One or two went under the car, and he rolled over them like speed bumps.

As he sped from the carnage, the car's interior erupted into cheers. "Way to go, Mr. Drummond," Sally yelled.

"How's our newest passenger?" Isadore shouted over the racket.

"He seems to be okay," Joshua shouted, shushing the other teens. "But he's awfully quiet."

Isadore glanced in the rearview mirror. "Is his skin cold? Clammy? Does he have rapid pulse?"

"No, and no."

"Good. He hasn't gone into shock. What's your name, son?"

The boy didn't answer at first. "C-cameron," he finally said, his voice hiccupping. Then he burst into tears.

Isadore looked in the rearview mirror again. "Hold him, Joshua."

The young man encircled the boy in his arms and held him tight.

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Turning his attention back to the street, he smiled. “Well, don’t worry, Cameron. You’re safe, now.” His head bobbed in a shallow nod. “We’re all safe, now.” He glamoured them into invisibility again and headed to Facility No. 4.

Except for Cameron’s quiet sobbing, the car was silent. Light from the fires dimmed until all lay in darkness. But the streets weren’t empty. They passed knots of people carrying flashlights and camp lanterns. Isadore skirted them as best he could. Stores had been looted, and at one, enterprising thieves had hooked up an industrial-sized lantern to a car’s battery and were hauling out merchandise through the broken glass. The police were nowhere to be seen.

Arriving at Facility No. 4, he turned into the driveway and drove around to the back. He opened the bunker’s door and saw that with the addition of the teens and Cameron, it was over capacity. *Well, hopefully no one will be here for too long.*

Cameron had stopped crying but that didn’t mean it was a good sign. He entered the bunker head down, shuffling like a zombie. Isadore watched him for a moment. *Maybe a drink will perk him up.* He looked at the woman closest to the refrigerator. “Would you get this boy a bottle of juice?”

She got Cameron a bottle of orange juice. He didn’t take it, nor did he look up. He stood as if rooted, head hanging and arms at his sides.

Sorrow and compassion pierced Isadore’s heart. *Katy... Katy* had looked just like that when she’d been found. Taking the juice bottle, he draped his arm around Cameron’s shoulders. “Come on, son. Let’s sit over here.” He led Cameron to a just-vacated spot on the padded bench.

They sat, Isadore’s arm still around the boy’s shoulders. Cameron stared into his lap. “Would you like some juice? I bet you’re thirsty.”

Cameron nodded.

“Okay, let me open it for you.” Isadore twisted off the cap and handed him the bottle.

Cameron lifted his head and sipped at his drink. Then he threw back his head and guzzled it.

“Feel a bit better, now?” He moved to hold the boy again.

“Yes,” he said in a small voice, leaning against Isadore’s side.

“Would you like something to eat?”

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“No.”

They sat that way for a long while, silent. Isadore had begun to doze when Cameron whispered, “I’m sorry.”

Isadore frowned. “For what?” he whispered back.

“I-I couldn’t save them.”

Isadore’s frown deepened. “Who?”

“Mommy and Daddy.”

Isadore hugged the boy tighter. “What happened, son?”

“They...they broke into our house. Daddy tried to fight, but they shot him. Then they went after Mommy. I tried to help, but she told me to run. She kept screaming for me to run while they dragged her out the back door.”

Oh, Corellon.

“I got out through the side window and started running through the yards, but one of them caught me and pulled me into the street.” Cameron fell silent for a moment. “They started playing with me, telling me to run and when I did, they came after me and dragged me back. Then you came.” He said nothing more.

Rage flared back up in Isadore’s gut but he squelched it. Now was not the time. After about ten minutes of silence, Isadore decided to try the crank radio. He took his arm from around Cameron’s shoulders and started to stand.

“No,” Cameron screamed. He clutched at him, pulling his shirt. Terror distorted his small brown face while tears streamed down his cheeks. “Don’t go. They’ll kill you!”

“I’m—”

“No. Stay. You have to stay!”

Isadore stared at the stricken boy. His heart felt heavy and tears welled in his eyes. He nodded. “All right, son. I’ll stay,” he said in a quiet voice. “I’ll stay right here. With you.”

Sobbing, Cameron buried his head in Isadore’s chest. Zots who’d been sitting nearby crowded around them, murmuring soothing words, while two others brought a blanket and a pillow.

Cameron finally quieted. The zots who had tried to soothe the boy returned to their seats. Isadore looked down to ask Cameron if he wanted more juice, but boy had fallen asleep. He gazed at the young face, now

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relaxed in his slumber. *Best thing for him right now.* Leaning back, he stared at the concrete ceiling and thought about Katy. *No child should have to go through what they did.* He let out a small sigh. *When I find out what he is, I'll get him back to his people. Someone will take him in.*

He closed his eyes. In moments, he'd fallen asleep, too.

CHAPTER 10

Isadore and the other zots hid in Facility No. 4's bunker for three days. On the fourth day, he took the radio, as he had for the past three, to the bunker's outside entrance. As many zots that could fit crowded in the stairwell.

"Maybe we'll get something this time," someone said.

Isadore cranked the handle. "Hope so." When the red light above the dial glowed bright and steady, he flipped the radio's switch.

"...is Dave Ross of KIRO-FM 97.3. This is the situation as we know it right now. The violence that shook the city three nights ago was a plot to overthrow the city government by a band of zot and human revolutionaries. They—"

Everyone began talking at once. "A what? What the hell? A fucking *revolution*?"

Isadore waved his hand. "Shh. Shh!"

"...defeated. The search for bodies continues, and many of the dead appear to have been victims of the Slayer, though at this time we don't know if the Slayer had any connection to the revolution. The police have placed the city under curfew, and any person on the streets after dark will be arrested..."

Isadore turned the radio off. He opened the door a crack and peeked through. "Okay, sun's shining. We can go now."

"Wait," a voice sounded behind him. He turned.

A man in a dark brown shirt had raised his hand. "There are twenty-four of us. If we all go out all at once, somebody might get curious."

"Really?" a woman wearing a white shirt said. "It's too soon. There can't be that many people on the street."

"Do you want to take that chance?" brown shirt said.

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Murmurs of agreement floated in the stairwell.

“Tell you what,” Isadore said. “We’ll go out in small groups. No more than four, one group every hour. “Starting”—he looked at his watch—“in a half-hour. Sound good?”

“Yeah. Okay. Fine,” several voices chorused. Others bobbed their heads.

Isadore and Cameron were the last to leave. The boy would talk to no one but Isadore, and had said very little about himself except that he was a werebear. Isadore didn’t know the sleuth’s leader, but wasn’t a problem. After the city had settled into some sense of normalcy, he’d get in touch with Master Kurt to find out more.

Outside the bunker, Cameron started trembling as if he were freezing. Eyes wide, his head swiveled left and right.

Isadore understood. The last time the boy had been out in the open, he’d been just minutes away from death. Isadore draped his arm around Cameron’s shoulders and gave him a little squeeze. “It’s all right, son. I won’t let anything happen to you.”

A moment later, the boy stopped shivering and looked up at him. “Where are we going?”

Isadore smiled. “My house.”

“Okay.”

They climbed into Brucilla. Isadore pulled his phone from his breast pocket and called home.

Jones picked up after the first ring. “Sir,” he shouted.

Isadore laughed. “Yes, Jones. I made it through. I’m on my way back now.” He glanced at Cameron. “I’m bringing a guest. We haven’t eaten today, so could you make something for us, please? Sandwiches will do fine.”

“Of course, sir. How long will it take for you to get here?”

“Well, we’re at Facility No. 4, and I doubt there’ll be much traffic, so...let’s say a half-hour?”

“Very good, sir. I’ll see you then.”

Dropping the phone into its holder, Isadore started the car and glamoured them invisible. He wasn’t expecting trouble—it was just a precaution. Brucilla’s age and size made the vehicle distinctive, and it hadn’t been glamoured when he’d rescued Cameron. Not all the tormenting humans

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had died that night. Though it was unlikely, by this time one or more of the survivors could have informed the police of what had happened.

From the corner of his eye, he saw Cameron look his way. “Who’s Jones?”

He smiled. “Jones runs my life. My business takes up a lot of my time, and while I’m concentrating on that, he takes care of most everything else.”

“What kind of business?”

“Funerals.” He paused. “That bunker we hid in? It’s underneath one of my funeral homes. There are three more just like it.”

Cameron said nothing after that, and they continued on their way in silence. Twenty-five minutes later, they turned onto the street where Isadore lived. Everything looked untouched. He pulled around to the back and stopped at the garage door. As it slowly rose, he saw Cameron staring it with wide eyes.

Inside, Isadore shut down the engine and turned. “Let’s go in and get something eat. I’m hungry. Are you?”

Cameron nodded.

“Come on, then.” He hesitated a moment, deciding he’d come back later for his gun. After what Cameron had been through, the boy didn’t need to see something like that.

“Are you rich?” Cameron said, following Isadore to the house.

He looked over his shoulder. “Well...yes.”

“Oh.”

Jones, wearing a big smile, opened the door just as they reached it. “Welcome back, sir.”

“Thanks, Jones. It’s really good to be back.” He turned to Cameron. “This is our guest, Cameron. Cameron, Jones.”

“Hello, Cameron. Welcome.”

“Hi,” the boy said, giving Jones a shy look.

They stepped inside. “So, Jones—what do you have for us?”

“Your favorite, sir. Reubens.” He looked at Cameron. “Is that all right with you? I can make something else.”

“That’s okay. I like Reubens.”

Jones turned to Isadore. “I assumed you’d want to eat in the study, so I set up the tables.”

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Isadore led Cameron to the study. “Your house is big,” the boy said as they crossed the foyer.

“Yes, it is.”

As they entered the study, Cameron looked around the room. “I like it in here.”

Isadore smiled. “Me, too.” He sat Cameron in one of the wing chairs before the fireplace, and Jones brought in their sandwiches and lemonade.

After their meal, Isadore looked at Cameron. “Now we have to find you someplace to sleep. Come on—I’ll give you the grand tour.” He showed him all the bedrooms except Katy’s. Her things were still there—the room had been left exactly as it had been the night she’d disappeared. It had barely been a month, and he wasn’t ready to face it.

After showing off the second and third floor bedrooms, Isadore gave him a questioning look. “So—which room do you want?”

The boy looked at the floor.

After fifteen seconds, Cameron still hadn’t spoken. He frowned. *Maybe he’s just trying to make up his mind.* He was about to ask again when the boy looked up, face uncertain and filled with fear.

“Can...can I stay in your room?” His voice held a pleading tone.

Compassion and anger flooded through him. His throat tightened. *Those damned humans. He’s afraid to be alone.* He gave Cameron’s shoulder a squeeze. “Of course, son. I’ll have Jones put a rollaway bed in there for you.”

Cameron smiled. It was the first time Isadore had seen him do that. He smiled back. “Let’s go downstairs. I’ll show you the game room.”

The boy’s eyes lit up. “Game room?”

He laughed. “No video games, I’m afraid. But I can teach you how to play pool.”

Cameron turned out to be a wizard. After a couple of hours, the boy was beating him regularly. By the time they left the game room for bed, Isadore was down thirty dollars.



“How nice to hear from you, Isadore,” Master Kurt said. “Please accept my apologies for not expressing my condolences for Katy in a more

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timely manner. The last month has been a bit busy for all of us.”

“Thank you, Master Kurt. I appreciate that.” He grimaced. *Like you even thought about it until just now.*

“Now—to what do I owe the pleasure of your call?”

“I need to update my tribal leaders on the status of the Slayer. I’m sure you have information?”

“Oh, yes. You don’t have to worry about that anymore. The Slayer has been slain.”

“How did it happen?”

A few moments of silence. “Let’s just say it was dispatched to wherever it came from.”

Isadore frowned. “It?”

“It. You do not need to know more.” His voice had taken on an ominous tone.

“Oh, of course,” Isadore said hastily. “Forgive me.” He held his breath for a moment, hoping he hadn’t annoyed the Master. For all he knew, Master Kurt could explode his head over the phone.

“Is that all?” the Master said.

“Ah, no.” *Thank you, Corellon.* “I rescued a werebear boy the night of the revolution. He’s been staying with me, and I’m trying to locate his sleuth. I want to get him back to his own.”

“Dear Isadore, I’m sorry to say there *is* no sleuth anymore. They were annihilated during the madness.”

Stunned, Isadore’s jaw dropped. Shaken to his core, he stared at the painting of Shaka Zulu hanging across from him without seeing it. Cameron was the last living werebear in Seattle.

Corellon, what am I going to tell him?

“Isadore? Are you still there?”

The sound of the Master’s voice jerked him back to reality. “Y-yes, Master Kurt. I...”

“Is there anything else?”

“No...no. That’s all I wanted to know. Thank you.”

“My pleasure, Isadore. Please give my regards to your tribal leaders. Good-bye.”

Isadore replaced the handset in its cradle and gazed at the desktop. He needed to find Cameron. *I have to tell him. I won’t keep it from him like I did Katy.*

ROXANNE BLAND

He found Cameron in the game room, practicing his pool skills. He watched as the boy sank ball after ball. *Maybe Katy's not knowing was why she rebelled. All her human friends. She knew how dangerous that was.*

When only the eight-ball was left, Cameron sunk it into the far corner pocket with a triple-bank shot that was nothing short of astounding. He jumped twice, pumping his fist. "Yesss!"

Isadore raised his brow. *Kid's a helluva pool shark.*

Cameron looked up and saw him standing in the doorway. He grinned. "Did you see that, Mr. Drummond? Wow!"

He smiled. "I sure did. And I'm not playing with you anymore. No wonder I owe you sixty dollars."

"Aww, Mr.—"

He laughed. "Just kidding." Then he sobered. "Come sit on the couch. There's something I have to tell you."

Cameron returned the cue to the rack, and joined Isadore on the couch, wearing a puzzled look.

He said nothing for a few moments, then took a deep breath. "I just talked to the Master and asked him where I could find your sleuth." He took the boy's hand and held it tight. "He said they're gone. None of them survived." He paused. "I...I'm sorry, son."

The boy said nothing for a few minutes, then wilted. He stared at Isadore, his brown eyes disbelieving. "No," he whispered. "No."

"Son—"

Cameron jumped to his feet and squeezed his eyes shut. "Noooo," he wailed. "Noooo!" Tears streamed down his cheeks. "Why? Why? It isn't fair!" A moment later, he collapsed onto the cushion.

Isadore gathered the sobbing child in his arms and held him tight. He didn't say anything. What was there for him to say? He closed his eyes. *The boy's been through so much...watching his parents die, and now none of his kind are left to help him...no child should have to bear this much sorrow. An image of Katy as a little girl appeared in his mind's eye. She lost her family but she wasn't alone. She had the rest of the tribe to take care of her. And we did. He looked down at Cameron's curly hair. I can't imagine what it would be like. To be alone. To have no one.*

A long while later, Cameron stopped his crying. He wriggled out of Isadore's arms and sat up. "What's gonna happen to me now, Mr. Drummond?" he said, his voice quiet.

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Isadore gazed at him. He'd lost Katy only a month ago. Did he want to take on another child? Could he? *He's almost in the same place Katy was when I adopted her. With him, maybe I can make up for all the mistakes I made with her. Maybe this is my second chance to get it right.*

He grinned. "You're gonna stay here with me, that's what." His shoulders twitched. "Unless you don't want to."

Cameron frowned. "But you're not a bear."

"And you're not a morran." Isadore raised his brows. "Is that a problem?"

The boy shook his head.

"Good. Now the first thing you have to do is decide what you're going to call me. You can call me Izzy or something else, but you're not going to call me Mr. Drummond. Deal?"

A small smile appeared on Cameron's lips. "Deal."

He smiled back, then slapped his thighs and stood. "Feel like some pool?"

Cameron hesitated, then nodded. "Sure."

"Come on, then. You have to teach me some of your moves. I can't let you take *all* my money, you know."

The boy giggled over remaining sniffles.

Following Cameron to the pool table, Isadore thought about Katy once more. *Yes, I'll do it right this time. I'll be here for him, the way I wasn't with Katy. I might even get married again. A boy does need a mother.* In the next moment, Alma's beautiful face materialized before him. This time, he felt no pain, only joy. *Darling, I love you. I will always love you. But it's time for me to let you go.* Her face slowly dimmed, and before she faded completely, he'd swear he'd seen her smile.

Isadore smiled, too. *When the courthouse re-opens, I'll call Jasmine and have her draw up a new set of adoption papers.*

His smile broadened. He knew Katy and Alma would approve.