

# NIGHTFALL

BY

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Prologue:

I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones.

—Albert Einstein.

## CHAPTER 1

1990

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Although it was Friday night, somehow it felt different.

The house where I lived with my mother had a huge living room, three bathrooms, and a two-car garage—a perfect home for a small family of two. It was just a couple of minutes' walk away from the Strip down on 5th Street in Downtown City of Angels, and Wilson High, my new school.

Behind the property of my house, there were businesses, and one of the buildings had been for lease for the longest time. I noticed three Harley Davidsons in front of it. I caught eyes on the chromed front blade wheels of those fancy motorcycles. Since I had never seen these types of high caliber quality motorcycles around my neighborhood, it raised a flag. That was the first thing I noticed.

Who were they? I thought. Let me go scope things out.

As I turned into the alley in the night, a soft wind blew a few dry leaves on the parking lot asphalt pavement. I walked slower as curiosity got the better of me, realizing I was in front of a billiard bar. So, I went in.

I noticed it was dark, extremely dark. The smell of mildew and cigarettes was overwhelming, which added to the polluted environment, when a tune, "Hotel California" by the Eagles, began to play softly in the background from a jukebox nearby. Its tempo and rhythm made my head nod to the beat. The artificial fog began to roll. In the main bar, no rays of light seeped into any windows or doors. Gloominess was the second thing I noticed.

As I looked up above the bar at a large chalkboard sign with expensive drinks written on it, I overlooked the price of beer. But still, I left a ten-dollar bill at the bar. I didn't mind a beer. Underage drinking wasn't a concern now that I had moved from the valley to the city, where my new friends were getting me into new things. I only drank on the weekends, and it was okay with me to start already.

I sat on the stool closest to the bar and smiled—an eloquent smile that drove girls wild, or so they tell me. I'm six-foot-one with short jet-black hair, eighteen, and I acted as if I was twenty-one years old—or older even. They say that when the sunlight hits my eyes, they changed color—from hazel to a bright green.

“Can I have an MGD please,” I said, hoping someone had listened, or seen that ten-dollar bill I had left on the bar.

I stopped thinking about myself and began wondering: When is the bartender going to be here? Desolation was the third thing I noticed.

I hoped like crazy they wouldn't card me. If the bartender did, I had a fake ID neatly tucked inside my wallet and ready to prove I was legal to drink. Since I had wanted to slide into the 21 & over nightclubs scene along the Strip, I had gotten one down by Macarthur Park, on 7th and Alvarado, where I had to use some of my high school Spanish to communicate with some of the thugs there.

There at the billiard bar, the music wasn't as ear-splitting as it was in the nightclubs at the Strip. For the first time in my young life, I liked the music to be only loud enough to know what was playing and who was talking. I cracked a restless knuckle, and then I startled when someone tapped a bottle of Miller Genuine Draft on the bar.

I took the beer with one long sip that left my palate cold but with a warm finish. As my eyes began to adjust to the poor lighting, I could have sworn I saw a man sitting hunched over. Perhaps, he could be the bartender who had given me the beer. Although I wasn't too sure, I gave him a full-smile and raised my hand in a wave. But he didn't wave back at me because there was no one there. Perhaps it was only a silly pipe dream. Delusion was the fourth thing I noticed.

The beer hit me quickly, given the fact that I haven't eaten yet.

I gave a few steps away from the bar, looking around, feeling comfortable enough to nod my head in good cheer to the right music playing on the jukebox.

I sipped more of my beer and came to a halt at a distance safe to a creepy doorway, where I had heard footsteps and voices that might belong to a few young men. I held my breath, listening clearly to their voices when the room cracked with the clack of billiard balls. I loved the sound billiard balls made when they hit one another.

Then, they bumped into the light above the pool table. The shafts of light hit different angles, and I noticed the stranger's face was calm and collected although very pale. Somehow the illumination seemed brighter, and I could see Jon's small beaklike nose, arched nostrils, and blue colored eyes. His head was moving around slowly as if he was dizzy. A ruby earring dangled from his left ear like a church bell clapper. He stuffed his mouth with a fresh cigarette, and he was still able to manage a straight bright smile.

What a rebel, I thought. But what are these fellows doing here in my neighborhood so suspiciously? I mean this billiard bar was vacant last night... and all of a sudden, they're here?

The leader of the crew was Jon Blackburn, the quietest of the barflies, but he was also the toughest one when it came down to brawl. Many of the people in his small circle had learned the hard way not to read into his calm, quiet demeanor. Very strictly, Jon was secretive, and hardly anyone joined his social circle unless he was trusted. Unless it was for sex, no woman ever joined him.

“Hi there,” Jon said, still hiding in the smoke of dry-ice that had invaded the place. The scenery reminded me of a picture I had once seen of Satan appearing within the cemetery of Dracula, lifting his arms to raise him once again. Could it be possible? Three bodies staggered briefly, and I smelled danger as the small group huddled in the shadows across a pool table. As visibility cleared out, three good-looking men—one at the front—giggled as they came into view. It seemed as if they were going to jump me.

“Who’s he?” Someone among the group said.

“Don’t worry about him,” Jon said. “He means no harm.”

“You sure about that Jon?”

“Totally!”

They walked a little closer to me, where more light hit their faces. The aroma of mildew with bitter stench struck me forcefully, hearing more whispers among them.

As Jon paced closer to me, I couldn't make out what the individuals were saying, and then they each picked up cue chalk and began to brush the cue tips. I realized they were the only ones in the entire bar. They were maybe in their early twenties. Each wore tight black skinny jeans and tight black tank tops that didn't stand out in the dark. The color they wore was the fifth thing I noticed.

They were scrawny and stooped, each holding a cue stick, awaiting their turn. My pants didn't fit me that tight. They were a little baggy compared to their tight jeans. They also wore shoes that I'd never seen before. They seemed to me like fancy running shoes that really would make them run faster. But their face was still too hard to distinguish in the poor light. Do they come from what planet?

I took a deep breath to calm down, casually watching them play pool. The young men seemed to be enjoying their game as they cracked old jokes and traded high-fives with one another. After every shot, they would eye me again to see what I was doing. The toxic cigarette smells reeked the worse. I could not take the smell in my lungs and throat that I had to pinch my nose at times with my fingers. Then, I heard the alley door blast open as if with a kick, but there was no one around to have kicked it. The little air had rushed right through. I stood alert.

One of the others cackled loudly, realizing I had shown a little bit of fear.

And then footsteps came closer to me.

Jon took a drag of his cigarette, closing his eyes a bit, which sort of gave him a hollow feeling of ease. He was thinking about something as if he had something vital to tell me. “Let’s get back to shootin’ 8-ball,” Jon said, smiling. There was something about Jon's voice which brought fear to anyone as if he could squash me like a bug or bring me to my knees.

I could see that each of the young men looked to be drinking heavy liquor. A variety of glasses, including Bloody Marys that looked as if they were drinking blood, perched on the nearest table. The blood in the glass was the sixth thing I noticed, and probably the cue that they might be vampires or at least one of them.

I took one more sip of my beer as one of the two barflies—the one with long hair which accompanied Jon—stepped forward, not seeming at all surprised that I was a newcomer. I looked more horrified than surprised to see him. He disliked newcomers passionately, I could tell just by him going around me with great curiosity, the way a dog sniffs around something new and strange.

With a mean look on his face, he asked: “So who are you punk?”

Act as you’re going to fight him, I thought. That way you could still have your dignity. But Yashas and West, my best friends, weren't there to get my back.

Then came another loud “clack” as billiard balls were struck and scrambled around the table. The break had been right—three solids had gone in the center pocket.

Wow, three in a roll. I couldn't do that shot! Never in a million years, I thought.

A sly smile surfaced on Jon’s face as he offered me a pool stick. “Your turn Migs, let’s see what you got.” How does he know my name? “We’re not going to harm you.”

Jon, who was, in fact, the best 8-ball player of anyone around, watched me take a turn timidly. I just bent over with an eye on the cue ball, measuring the shot with the tip, giving it a flick with not much force or interest.

There was a pause.

“Not bad,” Jon said.

And then, Jon wiped his mouth with his forearm as he finished biting a red apple from the tray at the bar, washing it down with a gulp of a new beer.

So I wouldn't look scared, I tapped my foot on the floor to the rhythm of trance, which was now playing on the jukebox.

I could tell by now that in Jon's book he switched from friend to enemy rather quickly. It seemed as if ‘the three amigos’ would give everybody a chance, oh yeah, and they hoped no one didn't take it for granted. Then, Jon bent over the pool table, nodding his head to the music. He gauged his shot and struck the ball so hard that the cue ball continued its quick roll, tipping the 8-ball, and sending them both—short and sharp—into the corner pocket.

“Awwww, Jon,” one of the barflies said, sipping his bottled beer, and banging it on the table. “Let me tell you something. You’re a goddamn excellent 8-ball player, but you suck when it comes to ending a game.”

There was no answer at first.

“Light me up another cigarette would ya?” Jon said, smiling. “And shut your mouth, punk!”

Someone pulled a lighter close to Jon, who took a long drag and winked at me as he glanced over. On second thought, the lighter was different than the lighters I had seen. This one

was very colorful, a cyber futuristic lighter with a plasma beam lighting up the tip of the cigarette.

Are these guys from out of space or something?

“Everything okay there...Migsy-boy?” He blew the smoke out from his nose with a serious face. The room was getting cloudier.

“Stop calling me like that,” I said, nodding, not knowing what else to do or say.

Why was I doing there, to begin?

They even had cell phones with a camera. I could swear Jon took a picture of me. I didn't realize until later that cell phones with cameras first appeared in Japan in the year 2000. What were they doing with such smartphones in 1990?

I wished to go, immediately. I would tell Yashas and West about this place and what I had discovered right away. I would feel more comfortable if all three of us came together.

Jon with his half-tooth smile snatched a new bottled beer perched on the pool table, popped it open by flicking his thumb—the cap went flying far—and offered it to me.

“Don't get scared Migs.” Jon's smile had wiped off his face, and his wrinkles vanished.

Without hesitation, I took it. Jon received his beer too, winked, and downed it all in one long gulp.

After a couple of beers, their laughter echoed in the empty pool hall, and Jon's buddies introduced themselves by name—Ben and Felere.

They popped fists with one another engaging in a talk about Harley Davidsons and speed motorcycles. We came to call motorcycles ‘bikes.’

When it was my turn to talk, I talked about loving the nightclub life down at the Strip and owning a Harley Davidson like the ones parked right outside, except without the blade rim



wheels and all the chrome. My Harley was all stock impossible to match theirs. But their Harleys—I could quickly tell—were all hooked up, all American made priced roughly at \$100,000 each.

A pitcher of beer came flying up at us. They had convinced me something was up. They passed it around, everyone filled their glass, and when it got to me, who at first was hesitant to oblige, I decided to take one.

More omens had invaded my mind today than any other day in my life. I never let it get to me though, oh no, mainly when I was around my friends West and Yashas who would think I was incredibly crazy if I'd tell them vampires were living around the corner from my house? Insane wasn't it!

In my mind, I tried to interpret the many recent warnings and gaining no more understanding whatsoever about it, which had given me a massive headache. What makes you think they are vampires?

As the young men continued to play another game of 8-ball, arguing about the rules of potting the 8-ball, I took one step back and used the opportunity to flee.

Their bodies were fading away from my sight. Their voices became only echoes like in dreams as I exited the doors of the billiards.

That was how I met Jon, Ben, and Felere.

Since my mother and I have moved into this new two-floor house in Loma Vista Street, everything has turned sour, at least for me.

Since I had realized that vampires might exist, I was mostly on edge. As I rushed to my house, now that I was a little drunk, I smiled more comfortable, smirking at anyone who had a smile on their face. I had never paid much attention to my surroundings. Not until now did I take stock of the beautiful houses around my neighborhood. I noticed my neighbors were getting their evening exercise, walking their dogs, and running errands. I loved the aroma of freshly cut grass in the evening as a few sprinklers were spraying water on the lawns. But as soon as I rounded the corner on Loma Vista Street, I again noticed a few other weird changes to the environment. The sky looked obscured—darker and grayer than usual, as an eerie cloud had formed right above the tip of my house's roof. I stopped momentarily to look at it. It was dense, like a piece of black charcoal. It seemed to be just above my house—and nowhere else—hovering like a flying saucer.

Would it rain soon? I doubted it.

I chuckled, not quite understanding. I had never been superstitious whatsoever, but ever since I met Jon and his barflies, this realization made me feel uneasy. Convinced it was a trick of some sort, maybe vampire's black magic, I got scared.

A stronger wind than usual blew my hair so suddenly. And as I continued to pace, I took it as an indication that I might be dealing with evil forces at hand.

For the first time in my life, I was so interested in the supernatural. The unblessed beings around the corner were making me squint. Why? As of now, I didn't quite know if he was a vampire or not. I needed to do some test on him first to pronounce he was a creature of the night. But how?

I had once read that somewhere in England there had been a demented, murderous man who took his victims and hung them alive onto a large hook until their limbs trashed around in

the air like Leatherface in "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre." And then at some desired moment, he drank the blood of his victims. This particular man wasn't Dracula, of course, but this man had been the version of what I considered a bloodsucker. And that was as much vampire history I knew.

I wasn't much of a horror fan either. I haven't seen the best fifteen vampire movies of all time to come up with the conclusion that one lived just around the corner from my house. I knew there was holy water involved—I think everybody knew that—maybe even garlic, crosses, and how vampires react to the entire spectrum of sunlight negatively... meaning, they only come out at night. Then, why Jon and his buddies were in such a dark place as the billiard room?

So what?

I shrugged and kept walking.

I was also thinking about Susan, my ex-girlfriend, and how I might still have feelings for her.

I missed her. I hoped she could stop by tonight as she had done other times on Halloween night. I think about her all the time.

It was getting late. And in a way, I hated to be home right now.

After I had visited the billiards, where I had encountered Jon and his buddies, I went to the high school Friday night football game. And then after that, I went to West's Pub on the Strip to grab me something to eat and have a drink or two with him. And although I was still

under twenty-one, West allowed me to drink although in moderation. He was the youthful owner of the establishment, and it was right next to Divas nightclub, another of the best attractions.

During October—on Halloween—the Strip got wilder. The Strip was an excellent place to hang out, mainly to ride on my Harley Davidson. I wasn't licensed to ride one yet, but I didn't let that stop me. While I rode on the Strip, I loved to hear the phrases of beautiful girls filling the air as I passed by near the nightclubs that always seemed to have long lines. What I liked the most about it was the pulsing reverberating sound of trance music as it still bumped throughout the nightclub ambiance. It had a dreamy and melodic sound with pulsing synths that created the feeling of energy in both mind and heart.

West always showed off and rode around on his Blue-and-White, but this time, I didn't see his motorcycle outside on 5th Street when I first had arrived.

West Galbert was older than me, twenty-five to be exact, and he has always been around when I need him. His specialty was motorcycles, the racing type. He had one hell of a motorcycle collection, and he owned plenty Harley Davidsons too, some stolen (but as long as he changed the engine casings and the aluminum frame, everything worked fine). A Harley Davidsons was a motorcycle a high schooler couldn't afford, yet West helped me built one. We assembled it from scratch and for a reasonable price too. West had constructed a Suzuki GSXR from scratch piece by piece, calling it the fastest Blue-and-White racing motorcycle around. He loved speed and maneuvering it dangerously.

"Is West Galbert around?" I said. But none of the bouncers seemed to pay attention to my question. It was a little loud at West's Pub. "CAN YOU CALL WEST FOR ME?" I asked the massive bouncer at the entrance, but before I could say another word—

“C’mon, guy, there’s no need to wait in line!” the bouncer said, hollering from his post. I walked in, looking around as if I had never been to a pub. An older crowd lingered closer to the bar, yet that fact didn't bother me. But I couldn't wait to tell West and Yashas about what I saw at the billiard bar earlier today.

The bouncer motioned to me to occupy the stool facing him.

“West will be here soon,” the bartender said. “He instructed me to take good care of you while he was out...”

“Thank you,” I said, nodding my head.

My eyes began to adjust to the dark as I looked around the pub, where a large plasma TV hung on the upper wall: ESPN pro football highlights were on. The mix of people was all over the place. And everyone got along well even after a fair amount of drinking. I recognized a few faces that were just off work from the business next door. They sat drinking next to more punks with earrings in their faces, fat bellies, and full-bearded. The younger crowd were clean shaved, of course—they would be here a little later since they loved to dance. I spotted a bar at the far corner, where two men sat hunched over and facing away from the room. I could see that each of the men looked to be drinking heavy liquor at such a late age.

Everything seemed right. Everyone was having a wonderful time. A variety of ice melting glasses perched on the bar and scattered around the tables when I suddenly heard a Boooooom! And then another motorcycle engine echo outside, roaring aloud. Its engine sounded furious as it drew near. It seemed as if it was going to go out of control and crash right into the structure.

But I stood alert.

A puff of dust blew through the door like an eerie mist, followed by another thunderous blast.

Upon hearing the terrible noise, no one inside the pub so much as turned their heads toward the doorway, except me, who said: "I think someone just crashed—"

"No one crashed," the bouncer said, smiling. "That's West, playing around with his motorcycle."

That was right. I should have known better. That was when West showed up behind the bar.

"MIGS!" He headed for the end of the bar, lifting the flip-up door and motioned me to follow him. "Come on over here, guy," West Galbert said with a smile on his face. And I followed him, shaking his hand correctly. First the bump, and then the bro hug to typically signify close friendship.

There was always a couple of tables at the corner in the area that was vacant. "What do you want to drink?" He didn't wait for me to answer, and he gestured instructions to the passing waiter. "Bring me a full bottle of Jose Cuervo, two shot glasses, salt shaker, and a tray of lemons, please!"

"Nice ambiance," I said.

We both looked at one another with a smile on our faces. "Happy to see you Migs." He paused, deeply looking at me. "Man! Long time no see, my friend."

The waiter headed for the bar and relayed West's instructions, which the bartender immediately obeyed.

"West, nice to see you too," I said.

A thousand emotions twirled in my mind as fall colored leaves blew in the wind with delight.

“So where have you been Migs? Wait, let me guess, the football game, right?” West said. “The game between the Wilson Dolphins and the Santa Ana Goblins. Took place in Orange County, home of the Goblins 1st division City league.”

“That’s the one,” I said.

“And the kick-off had been scheduled at 7:00 p.m.”

I nodded.

“Correct.”

As the bartender served the drinks fast, West made a gesture and threw his hands up with glee. “See, I’m up to date. I heard a couple of customers earlier today that the Dolphins were gonna have an important game.” He winked at me and continued. “What was the final score?”

“Thirty-one to fourteen in favor of the Dolphins!”

“Sweet!”

“That McKenna is a great running back. I heard he’s going pro.”

“He’s damn good!” West said. “Well, that McKenna is always the one who saves the game. A toast to the Dolphins’ victory. Cheers!”

The glasses clinked, and we poured the liquor down our throats. The first shot always burned your throat a little, but then I was okay.

“Time to party,” West said eagerly. “You want another shot?” I nodded. “Another shot right here!” There was a moment of silence. “I say we hit up Divas nightclub after this, my treat.”

“Let’s go! I said. “But just let me go change clothes first, and I’ll meet you there.”

“You look fine like that,” West said.

“I want to look sharp,” I said. “You know me.” And I winked. He smiled. A crooked smile that always made me feel comfortable.

“Yashas Rune will be there too. We’ll roll together.”

“Sounds like a plan to me. See you guys there.”

I took one more shot before I left West’s Pub. An unsettling sour feeling struck my stomach again, and I decided I’d tell West and Yashas about what I saw at the billiards then.

But on second thought, I just wanted to go home, have some iced coffee, and take a nap.

Take a nap? Not a chance. It’s getting late.

In the hours that followed, I would meet Yashas and West at Divas nightclub. I would ride on my motorcycle to keep up with the rush of the city's nightlife, where the shining bright lights beautified the heart of the town.

I had known that things would change just as soon as my mother and I moved into the city. And I was right. They were changing dramatically.

I lived at 999 Loma Vista Street, where my two-story house was situated, and the view from my room's window on the second-floor was a glorious one. From there I could see the City of Angels which was known for its towering high-rise architecture and the monolithic towers which stood tall at about three-thousand-foot-high, and of course, I was at a walking distance from the Strip.



Later that night, from the window of my second-floor room, I paused and noticed something different. The cables that lined the street were not swinging like they usually did on a windy night, even though there was a pleasant breeze. Instead, the wires were humming with electricity when everything else was so quiet. Neither were the crows that always stood on the cords present. Their caws usually sounded back and forth, but silence reigned.

What's happening?

The moon had slid behind another bank of clouds.

I turned my attention to the eerie twin gargoyle statues my mother so adored, which she had proudly placed on either side of the iron gate, spanning the driveway.

Then, I shifted my gaze over to the neighbor's dog, which seemed a little uneasy, and it paced back and forth by the Smith's fenced yard. The Labrador suddenly stopped its pacing and howled twice, and then jumped over the five-foot-high fence that separated the property from the street.

Wow, that dog jumps like a sonofabitch.

I swallowed something dry in my throat, and I was a bit worried.

At the sound of a big jangling fence, I turned to the right to the other neighbor's yard, and I was amazed to find the Rottweiler, Pluto, crawling its way up the property's chain-link fence. The dog scaled the tall wall, and then jumped off it, landing with a roll on the soft grass by the sidewalk. The dog rose to its feet and ran off in the same direction as the Labrador had gone.

Um, ok, why are both these dogs so anxious to leave right now? And what they feed these dogs that have got them climbing fences?

From all around the neighborhood came more strange sounds. It was not just dogs, but I even saw some squirrels emerging from the trees, a skunk in the bushes, and two raccoons from

the storm drain, and they all ran up the street in the same direction. Now there's something very fishy going on around here.

Even down in the grass, I could make out a high mass of crickets beginning to stir loudly, and then suddenly the sound faded away as they disappeared.

How weird.

I took one more look at the two statues beside my fence. To me, they had always seemed horrifying, or maybe it was just a bad taste in home décor. Or perhaps I was exaggerating. More recently, the gargoyles had brought on much more sinister notion and a cold unsettling feeling all over my body.

And that was when I began to think harder about the situation. About Jon and his buddies from the billiards. What was up with them?

Far off across the fields beyond the neighborhood, the moon shone more brightly on a single tree than anywhere else. In the days following the awful dreams, I had developed sharp ears that I could pick up every unique sound around me. Its leaves were rapidly falling away from its branches, swirling in the wind and then falling to the earth.

Impossible as it may seem, I was sure I could hear everything very clearly as if Jon Blackburn possessed supernatural powers and somehow he had passed it on to me. Each leaf dropped with a strange crunch, more like pebbles clattering off stone than leaves on the grass. There's no way I could be hearing this. It's madness!

Still, the distant leaves swirled and clattered, louder now than before. They were riding the breeze closer and closer to my house. I indeed wished all of it were a dream. I rubbed my eyes with one hand, hardly aware that I needed to get moving. I had to meet West and Yashas at Divas nightclub right about now.

I looked back at the window. That was when I saw the face in the swirling cyclone of bright, flashing leaves. It was a sad, sneering face that flickered as though illuminated by some unseen projector. It was growling. The look was vague, continually changing, growing larger and drawing nearer. And then it turned so suddenly as the face had formed with fangs.

It dimmed and then disappeared.

The leaves stopped blowing, and all was still again.

It was then that I heard the first sound from within the house.

The danger was fast approaching, coming like a thief in the night, but to steal what?

But that was when I also noticed my lamp's light bulb flickering, threatening to leave me in darkness.

I looked at my lamp and caught a glimpse of my mirror instead. Through the reflection, I couldn't see anything. Maybe because Jon Blackburn was a creature of the night, all of this was going on. Someone was right outside by my window. Maybe that was Jon outside with his tight jeans and a tight black tank top.

I felt dizzy, a feeling out-of-the-body experience—an overall sense of needing to avoid this day. If I didn't escape, I would go crazy.

As I did so, the tree right outside the window began to rustle and shake. I stuck my head out. It was the only bedroom up here, and no one ever entered via the window.

I startled and gave a muffled cry of surprise when someone—a sexy figure—filled the window frame one second after the light bulb went off.

And then, everything went dark.

The last thing I recalled was a whisper: “Migs, it’s me!”

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“Susan what are you doing here? I said. “You scared the crap out of me for Christ’s sake!”

Susan, my on-again, off-again girlfriend came into the room with a strange smile on her face. Susan was wearing a vampire costume, complete with the little hat and mini skirt.

“It’s late October, right?” Susan said with a high pitch voice, pacing so sexy toward me and looking at my face. “Halloween, your favorite holiday. Migs you knew I was going to pay you a great visit today, I always do.”

Taken by surprise, I could not help but notice how well the outfit worked for Susan's full chest, small waist, and long legs. The shock was replaced immediately away by a tactile sensation as she lowered herself onto my lap. Her buttocks rested so warmly on my legs that I began to feel the blood rushing inside me.

“Susan,” I said, stopping her for a moment, looking into her eyes. “You want to do it?”

Lust glowed on her beautiful face.

“Hell yeah, I do.”

“How did you get in here? It’s damn dangerous climbing up that tree to crawl in through my window like that. You could have fallen and broken your neck. You’re crazy!”

“Maybe, I’ve always fantasized about being loved in a vampire’s outfit, climbing up a tree into my lover’s window. So, I thought, ‘Hell with it, I’m doing it!’ How do you like the outfit I’m wearing for you?”

"Sexy. Come here."

She tossed her purse aside as if she meant business, and then held my neck to kiss me. Staring at each other, we came closer, very slowly until our breaths clashed and lips touched. I pulled on her lips until they hurt a bit. My eyebrows went up, and I shrugged to the sweet kisses as her tongue went inside my mouth.

“Now, rip this goddamn costume off me! Please?” Susan said. “And rip my panties off my hips too.”

I smiled, but the smile fell from my face the second I noticed that my desk lamp started to flicker, threatening to go off. Perhaps an epiphany, I thought. Maybe the epiphany! It always happens every time something is too good to be true.

As we kept warming up together with kisses all over our bodies in the chilly night, I continued massaging her breast. I thought of the darkness for a moment. Then, came the touch of her nipples so softly. And as the force of my mouth pressed hard enough to make them hard, her breath became a shuddery passionate moan. We knew, at least at that moment, we liked each other more than just lust.

I looked askance at the lamp—the light bulb turned on and then turned off, and everything went dark again. For some reason, I felt as if something evil was right around the corner ...or even outside the window for that matter, trying to steal our shared moment. Just don't ruin it with your paranoia. Go with the flow and let Susan do her thing—

Susan felt me tense up and tried to draw me back into the foreplay. She kept kissing my bare muscular chest, touching the cage of my abs with her fingertips—even with her lips when she got the chance. And just as soon as the light went back on again, I found her mouth so close to my erection.

I'm the vampire's naughty victim tonight, I thought. Go on with it.

Despite the pleasure I was having, I kept my eyes open.

Somehow time had stopped, and I only wished this pleasure would never end...perhaps I was on the verge of climax ...

I began to slide my fingers into her hair, just as I realized I was about to orgasm—

"Wait," she whispered, her eyes fluttering open. Her voice was smooth, sexy, and alluring. "It's been so long. Let's take it slow. Let's enjoy one another..."

"You want some wine?" I said. My passionate facial gestures still reflected on my face. "I snuck a bottle of Pinot Noir up here a few days ago."

"Sure," she smiled, taking off her costume. She was now topless, wearing panties only.

I got a bottle out of my dresser drawer and twisted the cork from its neck with a cheap wine opener—the cork popped loudly, amusing us. The wine was deep red in the soft light. I poured the wine into two thin crystal glasses, looking back at her with a wink to let her know I had been expecting her all along.

I handed her a glass, and we cheered and drank.

I poured myself another glass of wine, watching the moon slide behind another bank of clouds. I took another gulp of my wine without offering Susan any. Susan had turned her attention to her camera to take a selfie of herself also slipping out of our shared moment. It wasn't a smartphone camera like the once Jon had. It was a camera with a roll of film the one you still have to develop in a darkroom. I loved the kissing gesture she was making. Her breast shined roundly in spite of the dim light, so soft and young.

"Migs, come to bed," Susan said, putting her camera down. "Let's make love."

I happened to spot Susan's open Louis Vuitton purse atop the bed. A few loose sticks of gum jutted. A Bud Light keychain spilled out on the bedspread. And a miniature crucifix stood out amongst the visible items.

I took a deep breath as the foreplay was feeling way better than it had ever felt, making my fear go away.

As I turned around to go to Susan, the moonlight returned. I stopped in my tracks to watch the light splash into the room, which brought on much more evil thoughts and cold unsettling feelings. I took another look outside. I wondered if Susan believed in vampires.

The glass of wine rushed into my brain faster than I would have imagined, and all I wanted was the perfect spot on that bed to be with her. Now that I had taken off my shorts, and I was thoroughly nude, I drank the rest of my wine in one last gulp. My erection had returned. It was the hardest I had ever seen it.

She ran her tongue over her lips—no more foreplay. I want you now... her eyes seemed to say.

“Yes! I’m coming,” I said, turning away from the window.

I jumped into bed, which bounced and squeaked as I began to kiss her.

And not wasting any time, Susan got on top of me. The bed rocked in all its noisy springs as she used her skillful hips to ride me. Her breast bounced up and down, but I held them steady. One nipple deliciously slid into my mouth, and I bit it as I went along caressing her.

Susan moaned and said naughty things loudly into the night, releasing all her day’s tension in a rush of joy.

It was getting late, but I wished I could sink into the pillow laying on my bed to take a little nap. It had been all those shots of tequila and Susan's hot intimate moment that was making me very sleepy. Susan had hardly even noticed my brief fugue, and by the time she had left, I no longer wanted to sleep. Instead, I went to brew some coffee.

It had been a short spell. I wanted to get it all out of my system for once and for all: the plural pots of coffee, the sleeping pills, the strange new foods I found myself craving and devouring. I realized I was starting to eat more and rarer steak, the kind that left blood dripping on the plate. I poured a heaping spoonful of sugar into my cup and a little half-&-half creamer. Then I flew back up the stairs and locked myself in my room.

My heart was beating fast in my chest.

I glanced out the window quickly and then looked away. I nodded my head, trying to reassure myself and keep the worrying at bay. There had been too many bad dreams too many mood swings too many veritable temper tantrums, brought on by fatigue and fear and confusion.

I looked through the window once again. A gust of wind rushed softly, blowing my hair that I closed my eyes with pleasure. There is nobody there, so stop looking.

Staring helplessly into the semi-dark room, I paused and sat down on my desk chair. I yawned and looked at the crucifix on the wall above my bed, which at the moment stirred nothing in me. I had put it there just for protection against the evil dreams I had been having. Why did I suddenly have all this vampire paranoia? If vampires came out at night, maybe I should keep the crucifix in the pocket of my jeans instead of on the wall. Perhaps I didn't have faith, not yet anyway.

A few days ago, my mom had reported a few unusual things around the house. She had heard steps on the kitchen's tile floor. The footsteps had thundered upon the wooden floor of the



corridor, coming forth with the great force that she had sworn it was something unnatural. And then, she had seen a shadow moving along the walls that made her run as fast as she could into her room.

Much later, she had admitted to hiding under the covers of her bed for hours (the last time she had done that was when she was eight-years-old). I had asked her, 'what was it you saw?' But she couldn't answer that, not yet anyway. She had spent two days locked up in there on her days off because she was too afraid to leave its safety.

I turned my warm coffee to a large cup of iced-coffee instead—all I had to do was to put it into a container full of ice. I pushed the premonition away and took three deep breaths. I took a shower and relaxed. My buzz of alcohol was beginning to fade. My head was nodding, feeling sleepy.

Okay, that's it. I got to go.

I walked across the room towards the open window and looked across Loma Vista Street. I could see the flames of candles in one of the bedrooms upstairs across the street, arousing my curiosity. The blinds were wide open too. Was it just the silhouette of a lovely woman? Woman or something supernatural?

While crunching an ice cube between my teeth, I turned the lights off. I had heard that caffeine could make someone sober up quickly, but the iced-coffee wasn't doing the trick fast enough. Another strong gust of wind rushed through my window, knocking everything around. Suddenly, there was a stomp on the stairway. Fourteen carpeted risers made the stairway leading to my room. And one of the stairs creaked, probably a loose nail that sounded like a crushed mouse underfoot. Intruders steps thumped their way upon the stairs—louder than normal ones. Now it wasn't just a trick of the wind, but something was coming up to visit me!

I picked up a stake from my bedside table (I had sharpened a broken table leg earlier today) and grabbed the big carpenter hammer and waited to see who was coming up. I wasn't going to take any chances. I had known that if I drove a stake through a vampire's heart, I would kill it instantly.

"C'mon motherfucker... get close to me, and you'll get yours."

I took hold of the crucifix too just in case something did happen.

A bead of sweat made it into my left eye, making it sting a bit.

There was a moment of silence.

Then another cranky crow caw through my window. A mirage of violet greenish blue wings glimmered as it went in and then out into the night again.

I squeezed the stake and the hammer, holding them ready. The intruder's steps now thumped its way up the stairs with something louder than footsteps. A bang. Something crashed throughout the upstate, and my body jerked in shock.

The hammer escaped my grasp and fell to the wooden floor with a clatter.

But then the next loud thump signified that the presence had stopped at the head of the stairway, and the thought of it being a dream was slowly taking root.

I stiffened when someone touched the doorknob, rattling it roughly. The sound that followed was not the doorknob, but slightly tremors that shook the whole house to its foundation. It loosened a couple of picture frames in the corridor, knocking plates from the kitchen cabinets, which exploded into countless shards on the ground. The address placard on the front door slipped off one of its nails and swung upside down.

Finally, the door opened fully with a squeak as Jon Blackburn popped in, smiling that usual smile of his, going many directions at once. Slowly he turned to look around the room. Out of fear my stomach turned to liquid—I pushed back a few steps.

"What are you doing here?" I said, walking backward, running out of space. "Who invited you?"

Hands in his pockets, Jon looked straight into my eyes whose eyelashes were flickering like the wings of some feeble insect. His eyes were bright red and foreboding with an unexplained sense of power. Oh my god. He is a vampire!

Jon was slowly walking toward me. As he was passing by, I noticed that Jon didn't cast his reflection in my vanity mirror. Then he jumped out of the window like nothing, flying like a bat.

Proving his suspicion my hands started to sweat and stiffened with cramps.

That's when I woke up from a nap, but there was no doubt anymore that he was a vampire.

The skyscraper of City of Angels stood like silent sentinels in the night. I was on my way to Divas nightclub to meet West and Yashas for the night, and my Harley Davidson surged down the street.

Scores of strange skyscrapers framed the city. I increased my speed to 60 mph to the point where I could still see my reflection on the glass panels, zooming along past them. Some mirrors had gentle curves—either concave or convex—which made me appear less

comprehensive: tall, short, wide, or distorted like mirrors in a funhouse. Somehow the streets themselves were smoother to ride on, abandoned entirely and free of traffic.

The thunderous rumble of my Harley Davidson's engine echoed off the sheer walls, and that was when a blur of headlights was approaching fast. I heard more rumbling of other motorcycle engines.

“Aww damn! They are coming behind me.”

Looking back, I saw Jon, Ben, and Felere. They rode wildly with no regard for proper hand signals or anything like that, approaching at top speed to catch up. I wanted to lose them more than I wanted to worry about safe riding. I kept my eyes focused on the street ahead to avoid a crash, although strange lights reflected now on many sections of glass, flashing bright enough to blind me temporarily.

I spotted what looked to be an on-ramp from a nearby highway. I rode into it, making my motorcycle jump a bit. There was no visibility of the road ahead of me—only strange clouds embalming into a ghost of fog.

Through my left side mirror, I saw Jon taking the obscene on-ramp, and with a rumble, all three motorcycles just made it through.

I passed a bump on the roads that I didn't see, and the Harley Davidson's front fender struck the highway railing, sending up a shower of bright yellow sparks. Then I felt it rattle and fishtail and for a moment I thought I was going to fall or spin out. Luckily between the motorcycle's superb suspension and my firm grip, I was able to straighten out again.

Close by, a peal of laughter echoed. As I looked around, I saw Jon flying right beside me. The vampire smiled, his fangs flashed, and I waved in turn as I shook my head in disbelief.

I closed my eyes tightly, reassuring that all this was just an optical illusion: yes, an optical illusion—no more, no less. I checked my rearview, turning to see if the vampire had disappeared. I took several deep breaths to release some anxiety. Oh man, that was close.

I steered my motorcycle towards Exposition Boulevard with a roar, heading to Divas nightclub.

7

Divas nightclub was one of the best attractions on 5th Street.

"ONE LINE ONLY PEOPLE," shouted the tall bouncer as he checked ID's, letting people into the nightclub.

Trance music blasted out of everywhere. The giant Samoan guarded the entryway only letting those appropriately dressed into the celebrating crowd. It was Halloween. Many attendees who donned their exotic costumes, made the event colorful and exciting. Zombies, firefighters, sexy bunnies, hot waitresses, and male and female pirates jumped around on the dancefloor, dancing to the beat of the music. Everyone seemed to be swigging drinks while talking and gossiping nonstop, cramming themselves into other areas of the venue.

In the bars, the many crystal glasses and rare top-shelf bottles of liquor reflected the crowd like a haunting mirror. In the dancefloor, the trance music was beautiful and uplifting. A lot of dancers were swaying back and forth, lifting their arms to the beat of the bass drum oscillator. Above the dance floor, a glass dome made the skies look dreamlike with bright shades of color that fancied the imagination.

West Galbert walked around the nightclub, looking for us, smoking a cigarette when he saw the bar room, where he could meditate in private for a bit. Somehow, before long, West found himself playing table poker, taking shot after shot of whiskey.

Waiting for an excellent card to come by, he was sitting on a stool. He had been smoking cigarette after cigarette, lighting one with another, and after half a pack, the smoke enclosed the room like a steam room. Through the whiskey haze, he dealt the cards. "How many cards?" West said, reaching toward the deck.

"Two cards," the young drunk said.

"I'll have four," West Galbert said. "Clean sweep. I got a high pair." West got up and tossed the cards on the table. "Keep the money. All bets are off."

West needed to find his friends.

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Yashas and I sat in a reserved section near a private bar at Divas nightclub (thanks to West having called ahead for them to earn VIP—very important person—passes). Then, West Galbert leaped out of the darkness and slammed his closed fist onto the table and said: "What's up guys!"

We startled in surprise and then broke into rolling waves of laughter at the loud greeting.

"For West," I said, lifting my drink to cheer.

"Did you guys get carded?" West said, sarcastically. "I know you didn't since I made that call earlier."

Yashas was an attentive host, nodding his head. He was looking at his biceps, fixing the tight sleeve of his dress shirt. Just before he got there, he had busted a two-hour workout—chest and back—went home to shower, changed, and came straight here.

“I know the owner of this club,” West said. “But here put this on, guys, just to make sure.” He handed each a neon blue vinyl wristband, which proved 21 & over ID verification to drink all night.

West finished drinking a Corona in one single gulp, thinking about his wheels—his motorcycle. He wanted no one messing with his Blue-and-White GXSR-1100 engine Suzuki bike with newly installed jetted carbs. He parked at an angle to the club's curb. That way it would allow to be quickly pulled into traffic.

He was suspiciously scoping tonight's crown when he recognized one of two faces whom he had some beef. He lit a cigarette and stepped away, beginning to chat with a few girls who were standing nearby. A girl with the auburn hair proffered him a drink, having noticed him pull up outside near the curb.

“Take me for a spin on your ride lover,” she said.

“Not until the club time is over baby!” West said, winking.

West was eyeing more girls, most of whom fancied Yashas for his much better physique.

“Did you guys ride or drive here?” West said.

“I rode my Harley,” I said.

“You did?” West said, with a high-five. Then, he sipped another beer quickly.

“I was going to go with Yashas,” I said. “But I changed my mind. I rode the bike instead. Needed to catch some fresh air.”

“West,” Yashas said with a deep-toned voice. “I need a motorcycle. As soon as possible.”

“I’ll work on it,” West said. “Can you ride?”

Yashas winked, laughed, and flexed his chest, making his pecs bounce. “Of course, I do.”

The waitress arrived with a new roll of Corona bottles, setting them on the roundtable. Yashas slid back into his seat, whispering something into West's ear: "Hey, West. What's wrong with Migs, man?"

“What is it?” West said, half-listening, looking at a pair of sexy legs under a short skirt—best legs he’d ever seen so far.

“He’s been acting kind of strange.”

"You're right. I've noticed the guy tripping lately," West said, directing his eyes toward me. Lost in thought, I ignored it. "Leave Migs alone. He's fine. Yashas, have a little fun here, will you?"

Yashas smiled and said: “Well, that shouldn’t be a problem. In fact, let’s go find some girls.”

“Here’s another drink—bottoms up!”

I didn’t care what my friends thought of me. They would know about the vampires soon enough.

As a few couples were making out, leaning against the side walls, I knew right away I wasn't in the mood for girls, for trance music yes, but not for girls. Instead, I made myself forget about it and sipped another drink, ignoring my friends completely. The vampire and his friends Ben and Felere had chased me all through town, and I knew they were around here somewhere close.



In my head, I went over the ways to kill a vampire. A silver bullet—wait, that's for werewolves. Would a beheading do the job? No, that's for demons. A wooden stake through the heart would probably be my best bet. I paused and cracked a restless knuckle as a new song began to bump through the gigantic speakers. I thought about spraying holy water too—perhaps to slow the vampire down by causing his skin to blister into painful clusters of damaged skin. Crosses and garlic were known to offer some protection against the creatures of the night, too.

Whatever. I took a long gulp of my drink and nodded my head to the song.

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After West went dancing with some girl who asked him if he would take her for a ride on his motorcycle, West couldn't find Yashas or me. Instead, he exited Divas nightclub. Outside 5th Street, West got on his Blue-and-White and rammed the throttle loudly. A guttural loud racket, crackling at times, swallowed everything in the universe. West was a ferociously skilled rider. At times his phenomenal bike riding stunts enchanted everyone. Heads turned in the direction of the sound.

Although West was a bit drunk, he put the bike in first gear and rode slowly out until he had a clear view of the street ahead. As soon as he balanced the motorcycle, he sported a wheelie long enough to thrill and raise a round of applause from the small crowd lining the sidewalk.

He circled Divas nightclub twice when another girl from the club jumped on the back of the Blue-and-White and held tightly to his waist. "Hold on tight." West throttled the bike fast forward down 5th Street, going up and down, and side by side, ditching obstructions like an expert. Even at speeds up to 80 mph, he kept total control of his Blue-and-White.

West kissed her and told her she needed to get off the bike because he had some serious business to take care of. They exchanged phone numbers, and she went her way.

West had an idea that I was up to something. He thought that I might be involved in some trouble and might need a little help from him.

He guessed right.

8

West's motorcycle roared as it went through the scenic, curved Loma Vista Street. He went back and forth, back and forth, until he popped another nice wheelie, then, he parked it next to my house. West knew that my mom and I lived here on 999 Loma Vista Street in this vast two-floor Cape Cod house he was staring at (but he had never been inside).

He got off of the bike, pulled down the kickstand, and leaned it to one side. He was aware of the surface he was parking on because loose gravel, hot asphalt, sand, and grass might cause the bike to sink on the kickstand.

Yikes, what the hell is that?

West took one look at the gargoyle statues in the front yard, but in spite of how scary they looked, he proceeded with his agenda. The front door of the house creaked and opened wide, like in a stereotypical haunted mansion, and that alone gave him the creeps.

And suddenly Jon Blackburn, his longtime best friend, appeared to stand at the door.

And to have seen Jon was incredible. He should have been dead fifteen years ago since he had passed away in a motorcycle accident. What's he doing here?

Maybe, it had been just a hallucination. Jon can't be alive, he thought.

Jon looked just as he did when he last played football at Wilson high school and rode his motorcycle, and now he didn't look like an old man. When police had arrived at the scene of the accident that afternoon, they had seen the mangled bits-and-pieces scattered motorcycle over a wide area of the pavement. And Jon's body was nowhere to be found on the boulevard.

The key word was 'vanished.' His body had vanished from the scene of the accident. And no one saw him the following years.

That means they never found the body, West thought. Oh, damn! A mystery.

There was a whistle that snapped West awake.

"West?" Someone called his name in an eerie tone. The sound came from the direction of the gargoyles in the front yard. West looked back at the sculptures and gave them a wink.

"Hey, Jon! what's up?" West said. "Is that you, hiding?"

Jon waved a hello, smiled, and slid back from the entryway. He left the door open for West to come in.

"Jon wait!"

West was now convinced that something odd was going on. No wonder why Migs was in such a dazed state of mind, he thought. But how could he be sure it was Jon and not some impostor? After all, everyone had a lookalike.

Go to the graveyard and find out for yourself, West thought. Jon had been buried close by, and he knew where. Compton Cemetery.

Jon had been the best player of Wilson High School back in 1985. He had been the first-round draft running back for the Wilson Dolphins. He had broken a hell of a lot of Wilson High records, rushing for nearly 1,700 yards, averaged approximately fifteen yards per carrying, and had scored forty-six touchdowns in his senior year. Hell, that was pretty damn good. He did

remember all that. Yes! His father, who followed all the games closely, had graduated from Wilson High School too. Had it not been for the motorcycle accident, Jon could have gone professional with the San Francisco 49ers NFL draft pick.

There was another whistle as West took a few steps and went into my house.

“I am not afraid of you Jon,” West said. He heard a second voice. “Could that be Migs mom in the room upstairs?”

He wondered. The light fell on the stairway like something out of a horror movie. Then, West lulled into confusion by running through the corridor and rushing up the stairs. Scared, his legs felt heavy. And his lungs ached every time he gasped for oxygen. The door shut behind him with a crash that made him jump.

“I am here to help you, ma’am—”

West moved forward, one cautious step at a time into the room.

Mrs. van Bergen closed in on West. Since he saw the fangs on my mom's face, he thrust the stake right into her. She blocked it.

“Stop there, Spawn of Satan!” West said, pulling a crucifix from his shirt.

West was a devout Catholic who always carried a crucifix with him, and to this day it would serve a useful purpose. Then, she dared to glare at him with bulging eyes colored like shining red lanterns and lips peeled back to show cannibal's teeth.

"Vampires?" West said. "Jon is a vampire, and he already bit her. Oh, crap, this is serious business. I could see the teeth marks on her neck."

West rushed outside to grab something resembling a sharp pointy stake with which he would forcefully plunge it into her heart so that it wouldn't beat anymore. That's how you kill a vampire: It was in all the horror vampire movies.

There was a split rake handle on the ground. That would do. And as he went back into the house, he bumped into a wall of picture frames, which came crashing down the floor.

Then, he surged up the stairs in a panic.

The vampire Mrs. van Bergen lay on the bed now, cackling savagely at him. He approached her—hands behind his back—and then lunged at her, arms lifted above his head, and plunged the stake clean through her chest and into her heart. Later, Mrs. van Bergen howled savagely, collapsing down to the floor with the stake through the heart. The stake went more profound as she hit the ground.

Before West left the house, he removed the wooden stake from her heart, thinking that if he took out the stake, vampires would heal quickly, and the wound marks would disappear in a few seconds. She'd be alright by the time we came back to rescue her in the morning. That was if we killed the master vampire—Jon—before dawn.

Now, West completely understood. He would go and pick up garlic bundles, break into the town's Catholic Churches to steal the holy water, carry stakes and hammers, and keep his speed bike gassed up and ready for action.

West disappeared with his Blue-and-White, leaving a trace of white smoke behind, hurling through the streets and into the black night.

I was at Divas nightclub, forcing myself to relax and enjoy the loud trance music in my ears while I drank a frosty bottle of beer. An all-too-popular dance song played through the enormous speakers, and its beat vibrated through my very brains.

Since I had asked Susan to meet me here, I was worried about her and wasn't going to let her encounter the vampire alone. Besides, we would be safe around people—the more, the merrier.

I caught the scent of her perfume, recognizing the aroma. Turning my head, I noticed a girl dancing. Susan, I thought.

My eyes lowered to her swaying hips, loving the way she dressed scantily, wearing stiletto heels to nightclubs. Her honey-colored hair framed her face so perfectly. I could easily get lost in the depth of those green eyes that looked out from under thick lashes. Hadn't she been wearing a vampire costume a little while ago? She must have changed her outfit.

“Where have you been,” I asked Susan. “I've been waiting for you—”

Disappearing for a brief moment, she had slithered into the crowd of dancers. “Susan, wait.” I cast my eyes over my girlfriend's body, and she gave me the biggest pleasure of my life.

I followed her at a slight distance making my way through the dance floor's crowd. I tried not to make it evident that I was trailing her, forcing a poker face to mask my worries. Unblinking I stared at her legs. Her garters were attached tightly to the sides of her thighs. Her stiletto heels clacked echoey as she continued forward.

I stayed behind her observing closely.

Someone bumped into me. "Watch where you're going punk!" I said, pushing him to the ground with mighty strength. Right now, I wasn't in a mood for crap.

Susan stopped then continued, playing cat and mouse, disappearing into a group of dancers. Her hips swayed seductively with the music's beat.

I cut through the crowd trying to intersect her, feeling slight bumping as I moved forward. I stopped, cracking a restless knuckle. I turned around and there she was.

“Hey Susan,” I said, smiling.

I moved behind her, placing my hand lightly on the contour of her shoulder. And just before I brushed my lips on her ear's lobe, muttering a quick hello, Jon Blackburn appeared like a phantom. He stared at me with stone cold eyes. There was that smirk on the vampire's face, and he winked at me.

My head flung to the right. The muscles of my neck tightened as I felt a cracking jolt of surprise. I felt my innards churn.

Suddenly Yashas appeared beside me.

“Migs!” Yashas shouted. I turned around, but the vampire was gone.

"Follow me Yash!" I said, running. "Follow me, please! Let's try to get away."

Escaping to hide from Jon Blackburn, who had been chasing us around, Yashas and I jumped over the fence of Wilson High, just a couple of minutes' walk away from Divas nightclub. We ran part way around the campus to scale another gate and got back to the school grounds. I didn't want the vampire, who might be wandering around the off-limits area in the school, to catch up with us.

Trespassing a public school was a small charge even though we were both seniors there. As far as punishment went, there were a lot of variables to consider. It was a citable offense, at worst a misdemeanor. We needed to avoid detention or suspension from school, as they were thinking of going to prom. Most likely they'd face a fine—worst case scenario, a few days in jail.

Lost in thoughts, I led the way.

"Hurry, just hop over the school's fence," I said. "We'll hide inside."

"Where did you go?" Yashas said. "I couldn't find you guys at the nightclub."

"I don't know. Just stay alert, please."

"And what the hell are we doing here?" Yashas said. "Who are we running away from?"

"You'll find out," I said.

"Don't tell me someone tried to punk you guys and you're scared," Yashas said, cracking his knuckles as he usually did before a fight. I could tell Yashas was ready to fight someone. "Man, let's just go head to head like real men with those fools, not like some little pussies, running away."

"Are you listening to anything I'm saying," I said. "And where did West go?"

By the time we made it into the school building through a side door with a faulty lock, I had looked at my watch and noticed it was late. My echoing voice had taken on a harsh, deep sound. Perhaps it was the last stage before entering adulthood that made it sound that way, or because I had been shouting since the beginning of the evening and my throat was raw.

Although the lights were dim, we took light steps down the semi-dark hallway as quietly as possible. The marbled floor shined like glass.

"Let's go through here," I said, pulling Yashas shirt.

"Stop pulling my shirt!" Yashas said. "You're wrinkling my clothes. And what are we doing here anyway? Is this your idea to hide here like a pussy?"

"This way Yash," I said, pulling my friend's shirt roughly.

"How many times do I have to tell you not to pull my—" There was a pause as we heard eerie sounds coming from the hall. "Wait, what is that foul smell?"



Steps were heard nearby, tapping on the floor. I knew that Jon, Ben, and Felere had shown up and they were already inside the school. I wouldn't have to tell Yashas who was about to find out on his own about the vampire.

I raised my voice: "BRO, LET'S SCRAM!"

Yashas whose face contorted with surprise was sucking for breath.

Suddenly, the two barflies appeared out of the shadows. Jon came up from behind a stack of mats—his ruby earring, glistening in the semidarkness.

"GET THEM BOTH!" Jon snarled, fangs flashing furiously.

"Let's beat it!" I yelled.

I was taller and faster than Yashas who sprinted past the hallways. If we got caught, we'd be beaten defenseless. Then, Jon would have executed the wound of passion on our necks. His bite is vile poisonous blood—

"This door's open. Through here Yash," I said. Both of us young men had developed bad stitches in our sides. "Run faster. C'mon!"

"I can't," Yashas said, grasping at his side and breathing like a winded greyhound. "I can't. My side is on fire."

"Dig deep, Yash! I feel a lot better now that you know about the creature of the night," I said. They stopped and looked each other in the eye: "Now it counts. Now you know why I've been acting weird. You saw the teeth...sharp and white. The eyes...the pale skin. The foul aroma..."

"Wait a minute," Yashas said, stopping short. "You're saying that fool back there chasing us is a vampire?"

"You heard me right," I said. "Yes, I know Jon is a vampire. Now let's get out of here and go to West's Pub to confront him together. West will be there waiting for us."

"Wait, let's fight them here," Yashas said. "Why wait until later?"

"Fighting them here is suicide," I said, panting as we went. "You can't fight a vampire who is more powerful than humans. It's much better risking it with stakes and hammers, holy water, garlic, natural light, better chance with that stuff since we don't know what immortals are capable of nowadays."

"Immortals?" Yashas said. "You mean they don't die?"

"With a stake through the heart, yes."

Yashas's shoelaces became untied and dragged behind his shoes as we ran once again. That was when a door crashed open behind us so violently it probably disturbed the dead. Pieces of the wooden door splintered into the air. The sound of scratching metal filled the hallway as Jon's vampiric claws raked across the lockers.

I ran out toward the chain-link fence and around the school and jumped it while Yashas took another way out.

A clap of thunder exploded in the dark sky.

Coming through the street, I fainted left but jumped over a brick wall to the right, and then when I looked back, I didn't see Yashas. What I did notice, was Jon Blackburn jumping over the fence just as quickly. He was also chanting unclear phrases under his breath.

Did you ever stop to think how it'd feel to get bitten by a vampire?

"Pain," I answered to no one. "Like an annoying toothache... in fact, two razor blades ripping through my skin very slowly."

After that, the pain would inevitably have faded into nothingness. It would take seconds to make an opening for the suction to begin. I saw it done in my dreams, which I dreamed about it way too often. And when there is no blood left to pump, I'll feel nothing. No more pain, no joy, just a wisp of sorrow. Then it will be all silence.

I stopped momentarily to catch my breath. The vampire was right behind me. The sound of traffic was deafening as the busy speeding cars were coming and going. I felt the warmth of sweat breaking on my forehead in spite of the chilly night. My heart was racing—pounding even—knowing that I was going to be powerless to stop what was going to take place.

In my field of vision, West's Pub was only a couple of blocks away, but it had never felt so far away. I took a narrow alley to get there faster. I could hear the loud trance music from various nightclubs, feeling so uplifting to my ears, at least.

Although I couldn't see Jon anymore, I was able to hear the tapping of his shoes wondering around. The sense of his presence being there or anywhere was vibrant. But just as I got to one end of the alley, Jon appeared right in front of me like a ghost. I stopped and ran the other way.

And then Jon did the same vampire magic, appearing on the other side like an apparition. Back and forth, back and forth. The vampire had a smirk on his face, darting his thumbs in the pockets of his jeans.

"GIB NICHT," Jon chanted with a deep and powerful voice, sounding like a German phrase. A command, a powerful chant that made a flash with lightning and a thundering roar. The rain poured in the dark sky, pounding the streets and the roofs of downtown City of Angels.

Another lightning bolt struck the hard-reinforced concrete, leaving a few live wires dangling near the ground. Bluish sparks spat from one dangling power cord like a Fourth of July firework display.

Jon just walked right through the live wire as if it didn't exist.

I faked a forward lunge toward the vampire, then wheeled and tried to open the back door of West's Pub. Damn! It was locked.

I managed to pull open the window beside it, jumping right in. And the party music was an eclectic mix of old school acid and trance favorites.

Jon flitted a fast sprint at the speed of light, attempting to catch me, but he barely missed.

I ran onto the dance floor, where people were everywhere in multitudes, and for that, I was very grateful.

Okay, now the vampire is angry, and he'll come to the pub and rip us apart.

West halted his motorcycle in the middle of Olympic Boulevard to a complete stop. Opposite him, he was able to distinguish an oncoming headlight in the linear distance. Also, the steady rumble of a racing exhaust (or a racing pipe as we called it) began to reach his hearing range.

When he squinted, he noticed a strange dark figure in the center divider. The shadowy figure, none other than Jon Blackburn, appeared to be walking toward him. As the rider's upcoming motorcycle attempted to drive past Jon, West noticed something was going to happen.

Jon Blackburn reached out taking hold of the handlebar. The bike stopped so abruptly that the motorcycle rider flew entirely out of view into darkness. Just after, Jon mounted the motorcycle and rode towards West.

“C'mon let's ride motherfucker,” he shouted out to West! “Show me how fast you are!”

West felt the fear and did it anyway. He chose to act by popping a wheelie in first gear with exceeding momentum. He proceeded to speed up turning on Alameda Street, soaring up and onto down hills, weaving side to side and dodging vehicles that were going too slow. His expert maneuverability never allowed structural walls or road signs to be scratched nor broken.

Jon wasn't a sloppy rider either. He took a different way, flanking West. They raced down parallel streets neck and neck. They shattered the City of Angels' speed limit of 45 mph, quickly reaching 100 mph on straightaways as well as on turns.

West was a Grand Prix motorcycle racer, and he knew full well that in the city, where many obstructions existed, riding that fast would be suicidal. But if anyone dared to challenge him to race, he was game.

"Oh man! A sharp edge is coming up," West said, into the whipping wind.

Ahead, Alameda Street came to an end, but West kept going around a dangerous curve. His knee seemed to make contact with the street to manage the tilt.

Once and for all, Jon was impeccable at maneuvering the dangerous curve, hoping West would fall off his motorcycle to end the race early (or his life too for that matter). West couldn't possibly push it farther than 110 mph. If he did, inevitably, he would wreck and die.

But neither West nor Jon would fall. Both were damn good riders.

Out of the corner of his eye, West saw Jon now closing in on him with engines howling, surpassing the 110 mph mark several times. And damn, Jon was beyond good, forcing West to

go faster and faster. They were too close together that West could smell the burning rubber of the tires and unleaded gasoline of hot engine. Should the front wheel of Jon's motorcycle touch the back wheel of the Blue-and-White, it would inevitably cause West to lose control—maybe killing him instantly. Instead, Jon swerved left, and West almost overcorrected as he steered away.

"He's crazy!" West said, utterly amazed.

Jon busted a sudden wheelie at top speed. Taking things up another notch and using his supernatural powers, Jon Blackburn stood on the bike's gas tank like a surfer on a surfboard. That was risky. Perhaps he was bidding West attempt to do the same. Surely Jon was luring West to commit suicide.

West was motorcycle crazy, but not more insane than a shit-house rat?

West had done his research too. He knew Speed would not kill a vampire, but fire might. If Jon wanted to ram into West's motorcycle, he could do so. Then West would jump and take hold of the creature of the night, hoping both bikes and racers explode as the gas tanks struck some solid surface so that they could die in a fiery death.

"Give it up West," Jon cried out.

"I am not giving up," West said, swerving left quickly.

Jon went with it never more than a few feet from him. In spite of West's hands feeling numb and tired, he gave a little-crooked smile. Jon smiled too—the smile of a menace to the City of Angels.

As the engines were screaming with power, West glanced at his speedometer...130 mph. Damn, it was wearing him out that he felt he was going to drop from the race.

West couldn't even feel his hands on the handlebars anymore. He dropped his knee down to the street to take a sharp turn, leaving Jon to go ahead alone. But before that, Jon tapped the back wheel of West's motorcycle, which now made West's bike lose control.

"Goodbye, West" Jon said, laughing devilishly.

West didn't let go of the handlebars and thank God he didn't spin out.

One way or another West needed to slow down to regain control of his motorcycle. And he couldn't do it too fast. If he did, his bike would go up in the air in flames and twirled around like an uncontrollable helicopter.

West Galbert was an expert. Now it was time to use all his motor racing skills he had long learned at the Buttonwillow Raceway Park. He slightly pressed the brake pedal from 130 mph to 120 mph, and then to 115 mph. West dodged a metal pole, missing it by an inch. His arm had gotten cramped up with tension, so he held the bike single-handedly. He tapped on the foot break several times to slow it down some more. He didn't dare to downshift, or the engine would explode.

Once the vampire was gone and he took control of the Blue-and-White once again, he held onto the handlebars tightly and guided the motorcycle through 6th Street Viaduct, where the mist coated the overpass. It made it appear phantom-like, but that was the least of the problems. He knew this route better than any other rider in the city.

West Galbert disappeared into the mist and onto the overpass, heading back to 5th Street to meet us.

By three-thirty a.m. early Saturday, there were approximately 250 souls—full capacity—at West’s Pub. I knew it was going to be a very long and busy night. There was no closing time—West kept it open until every soul left the pub.

As he was passing by, the bouncer didn't notice me come in through the window, only acknowledged my presence with a nod.

From where I was standing, I could see the bartender opening new bottles of liquor: Savvy Vodka, Presidente, Casadores, Jack Daniel’s, Malibu, and Baileys Irish Cream, as if it would be the last night to drink.

Multiple boxes of imported beer were removed from their casing and placed into the back of the refrigerated bar cooler, displayed through glass doors. Close by, the beer keg's stainless steel shone with the nightclub lighting.

At the far end of the bar, the chicken breasts on the grill looked and smelled delicious, where a gang of hungry shabby hippy-types gathered around the kitchen.

I was amazed to see how many beautiful older girls were present tonight.

I headed towards the bar, ordered two shots, and downed them back to back, slamming the glass down on the table. I’ll die here tonight if I have to, I thought.

I enjoyed the spacious dance floor in West’s Pub. West had designed it to be a pub club sort of establishment. At the center of the bar, atop a dancing platform, was a slim girl wearing lace and exotic jewelry, dancing gorgeously to the beat of trance music. Bystanders on the corner tables were whistling and applauding at her erotic dancing moves.

“Those are great dance moves,” I said in a haze of liquor. “Great legs!”

She winked at me as she flipped her hair and moved her legs in rhythm. I could smell her sweet perfume all over her body.



Suddenly, my smile faded as I looked to my left into the pool room.

The existence of vampires was nothing new. City of Angels was real alright, but it struck me ludicrous that humans shared the world with creatures of the night that had only existed in my wildest dreams.

Now it was no movie: it was all real.

I paused and cracked a restless knuckle.

From this point on, no matter what I did every night, I would have to deal with them. They might be able to catch me slippin tonight and try to bite me, or one of my friends for that matter, but I would fight them at any cost.

The hot dancer started off by dancing very slowly—slow trance music of course—making 'bad girl' gestures. She was modeling her body, a little bit, running her hands all over her body, making everyone wait for her next move. Occasionally, sort of dancing, strip teasing, she turned around to see me looking at her again. She moved into removing her clothes slowly, stitch by stitch, making me hurt to look at the goods.

She drew back as she saw someone approaching me, calling out my name.

“MIGS!” I turned my head left and then right. “Where have you been?” Yashas said. “I’ve been looking all over for you.”

“Yash!” I said, heading towards him to hug him. “What are we going to do with the vampire?”

I motioned to the bartender for two more shots of tequila, which arrived instantly.

We downed a shot each. I looked back at the dancer who wanted to set me off. If I had been closer to her, she would have tried the whole 'legs over my shoulders' thing so the goods would be right on my face, and I could look up and see her whole body.

“I ran through an alley,” Yashas said. “But I lost you somewhere—Migs you look distracted.”

I stood quietly, my throat suddenly dry. I swallowed in an attempt to moisten my lips. The dancer was just too hot not to see. Suddenly, I heard a clack of billiard balls, and I listened to the voice of a man having a good time. The sound seemed familiar. I heard footsteps too—the same steps I had associated with the vampire back at the billiards.

I held my breath to be able to listen clearly, but when I couldn't hear anything anymore because of the loud music, I proceeded with Yashas to the back of the bar, where the pool tables were.

It reminded me of where the vampire had first confronted me.

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Closely, Yashas followed as I saw a pool table at the far end...and three vague silhouettes of three young men. Jon, Ben, and Felere stood behind the pool table. The billiard balls moved about on the surface of the pool table, and murmurs of disbelief escaped from their mouths as all the spheres scrambled around and made it into the pockets with the first hit.

“Sweeeet!” Ben said.

Yashas and I made our way into the pool room.

The vampire sensed me right away without laying an eye on me.

"Hola, Señor Migs," Jon said. "What's wrong, buddy? It looks like you've seen a—"

“You can't kill us here,” I said to the vampire.

“I don’t want to kill you Migsy-boy,” Jon said with a serious look on his face. “I thought you might want to play a game of 8-ball with us tonight before you come to conclusions. We can even pair up. You and Yashas. And me and Ben.”

Ben nodded his head once and regained composure while Yashas’s lip twitched in a sudden involuntary contraction of madness.

Jon paced around the pool table, his shoes tapping the floor, and then he sat at the edge. He waited for me to get a little closer.

“He’s going to play with us tonight,” Jon told the others, now bending over to gauge the shot. “Can we get a round of beers? And drinking beer is better with some good tunes rocking. Right, Yashas? What kind of music you like?”

Yashas simply stood quietly. He couldn't even look at him in the eyes. He pursed his lips then poured himself a shot of tequila and shot it with a wedge of lemon.

My eyes moved from Ben to Felere, finally stopping on Jon again. "What are you getting at Jon?" I said. "What do you want from us?" Without a word, I bit my lower lip unblinkingly. "What are you doing here in the City of Angels?"

There was silence as the vampire swallowed something dry in his throat and then just smiled.

"We'll get to that later Migs, but for now...let's play pool, can we?" he said. "Try to relax Migs. You look uptight."

Jon took the chalk cube and brushed the tip of the cue stick, and then he put it down on the edge of the pool table, looking at Yashas who looked down too often because if he looked at him straight in the eye, he would have punched him right on the face.

"I'm offering you an alternative, Migs," Jon said. A great semblance of evil surfaced on the vampire's face. A face I had never seen before. His eyes change color. A gold tone.

"What kind of alternative?"

"Very simple Migs..." The vampire paced around the pool table. The smile completely wiped off his face. He sat at the opposite edge of the pool table, holding the stick with both hands and squeezing the hell out of it. "See it as one last game of pool, Migs." He paused, staring down at everyone. "If you beat me at this pool game, you're free to go." He paused again, and he stared the other way—toward Ben and Felere. He stood up and preceded. "Beat me, and you're free to go and pretend you never saw me. It's that simple. I'll withdraw my presence from the City of Angels and free you from your nightmares. Your normal life will come back to you as if nothing has happened. As if I didn't exist."

I looked askance to his offer and turned to Yashas who seemed extremely baffled as if the vampire had cast a charm and he was just not there but out of it.

"What if I lose the game?" I said.

Taking it in his hand, Jon twirled the 8-ball several times and banged it on the pool table, getting it ready for the break. "What if you lose the game, huh?" Jon looked at the others, who began to laugh in long cackles as if they knew something was up.

"Don't we use the cue ball to break the game?" I asked.

"Yes, usually," Jon said. "But today we're using the 8-ball to break the game. How's that for a change?"

Yashas stood quiet and a little confused. Chuckles proceeded, and knuckles were heard cracking.

"So, if I lose," I said. "That means you stay here and harass my friends and me like you've been doing all this time?"

"Just stop the bull shit and be straight out," Yashas said, getting close to the vampire.

"Wait, Yash!" I said, holding Yashas's shoulder. "Wait. Let me handle it. Let me play this one game."

A barfly whispered into Jon's ear. Then, they all smiled. "They're going to get it on," Ben said. "This is going to get sick. C'mon, Jon school this guy for crying out loud."

Waiting for me to shoot the billiard ball first, the vampire stepped aside to where several glasses of whiskey on the rocks sat half finished. He retired a few in a single gulp.

And then I took the first shot, breaking the balls in a fast and effective strike, unfortunately, not getting any into a pocket.

"C'mon Jon," Felere said. He pointed his finger at the edge of the pool table. "Show him who you are. Hit this solid here into this pocket. Strike it hard and it'll be most likely to jump right back into to these other two—"

"I know how to play pool, can you just relax," Jon said, picking up a Bloody Mary and taking a long sip. A streak of tomato juice dripped from the side of his mouth, which looked like blood. Yashas and I stared at each other in disbelief. Then, he banged the glass on the table, splattering the rest of it into the air, where it lingered as if in slow motion.

Jon pointed at the orange ball. "Number thirteen-stripe..." And he hit it. The ball went faster than a speeding bullet, making two in one shot.

"Killing two birds with one stone there," Ben said, wiping a drip of splattered tomato juice from his cheek. "Good shot Jon-EEE!"

"My name is not Johnny," he said. "It's Jon...for Jonathan. And I don't like to be called any alternate forms of the name Jon."

I paused, tightening on the pool stick, wishing it was the heft of a knife or a stake for that matter, and burying it into the vampire's heart.

Jon gauged his next shot. Number fourteen-stripe was closest to a corner pocket, and with no hesitation he hit it, making it in with a loud "clacking" blast. The 8-ball spun uncontrollably and went in with force, grazing the cue-ball, causing gasps among the young men. There was a long pause, and then Jon meditated on what could have been the most crucial shot of his life. It would have been much easier to make the 10-ball rather than the 11-ball, which was closest to a corner pocket.

"Alright. One last shot and we win it, Jon," Felere said. "LET'S DO IT!"

Ben and Felere knew that Jon might pot the cue-ball and I could win. He often did just that when they practiced among themselves at the billiards.

But it was the other way around.

Jon missed his shot intentionally. When it was my turn, I hit the 8-ball way too hard, it struck the cue-ball with too much force, rolling too close to one another, beating one corner and then going the other way until both balls disappeared into a corner pocket.

There was a moment of cold silence. It was game over indeed.

In 8-ball pool the rule said, if you pocket the white ball after the black, you have lost. We were playing 8-ball pool by international regulations. Then it meant that I failed.

DAMMIT!" I cried out, looking up into the ceiling in despair. "What have I done?"

"You suck," Yashas said.

“Yep, I messed up,” I sighed. “However...” I reached beneath my shirt and pulled out my crucifix necklace in case the vampire got obstreperous and brandished it to Jon. “Stop spawn of Satan, don’t come near us or you’ll die, here and now!”

Yashas stepped closer to the vampire with his left arm ready to punch him.

I flashed the crucifix closer to his eyes—it’s silver glinted as I brought it up face high. This time Jon went a few steps back, and his face changed. His eyes flashed red, and his sharp fangs flourished large and pointy like an African Leopard.

Yashas and I ran out of the pool room and into the dancing room in disbelief.

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The music’s rhythm kept changing, and the dance floor took on a different vibe, as more and more glasses of liquor were being purchased and consumed. In the dancing room crowds of people kept arriving in groups to drink and dance. Smiling faces multiplied and shouts and profane phrases increased with imprudence—but the sound of trance music drowned out most of it.

Everyone in the bar was drunk, almost hypnotized.

And out of nowhere, a billiard ball came flying through the crowd. It made a loud spinning whizz, which was high-pitched and earsplitting. Someone had thrown the sphere with such a force that it curved this way and that, ripping through a few bottles of liquor. Someone threw another billiard ball, and it dropped hard, bouncing upwards and falling again.

Jon Blackburn had thrown the balls as he and his two barflies Ben and Felere had just arrived into the dancing room. Ben threw a few other billiard balls as if asking for trouble, and

one struck me as it swung by near my face. I tried to roll my head with the blow as another one flew by, but it got part of my lip—it bled a little. A drop of blood flickered in the air. The vampire walked with slow, deliberate steps, looking up at the blood drop with mesmerizing eyes.

A shabby hippy type man tried hopelessly to get out the way, but I saw how he was struck by the billiard ball, knocking him senseless. Another billiard ball passed by someone's ear and nearly took it right off. Someone was throwing them so hard as if with a supernatural force that one struck a nearby jukebox, making the glass shatter on impact.

One last ball rolled to a dead stop as the slim figure of Jon Blackburn, who wore dark jeans and dark tank-top, bend over to pick it up. His eyes were normal now—his eyebrows furrowed.

Although the vampire had arrived in a gruesome fashion, the clientele hadn't noticed anything supernatural—not yet anyway.

The nightlife inside the pub resumed. The crowd was so intoxicated that they didn't seem to realize what had just occurred. Nothing but a couple of billiard balls flying around, what the heck. Party kept on going.

Jon paced nonchalantly toward the bar and popped open a bottled beer and drank it. The bartender knew best not to ask him to pay for it.

A sound of a motorcycle engine was approaching at a fast speed. I had recognized that particular resonance as it got near.

“I think we have company,” I said.

“MOVE!” Yashas shouted, pushing me out of the way of the motorcycle that was about to come smashing through the window.



The Blue-and-White broke through the glass scattering countless shards. People dove aside, hiding behind tables to see what would happen next.

When Jon finished his beer, he threw the bottle, breaking it against the wall. West showed up riding the trusty Blue-and-White. He made it spin for a moment, knocking around a few tables and causing a commotion. The exhaust pipe was deafening inside the place.

“About time you showed up, punk!” I said.

“Better late than never,” West said. “We have a vampire to take care of.” They crashed fists and offered West a beer. West took it and gulped it down as fast as he could. “Here, I’ve got a little something for you guys.” He handed us each an enormous crucifix. West headed toward his motorcycle, which stood on its kickstand. He dug into a bag to find a few sharpened wooden stakes like the tips of pencils. He also produced three right size carpenter hammers with sturdy wood handles: “This is all I found to kill the sonofabitch.”

“What a fancy way of showing up,” I said. “Breaking the window.”

“It’s growing on me,” West said. “Now, let’s get rid of this creature of the night.”

West tossed the stakes and hammers: one to me, one to Yashas. “I think, I’ll beat the shit out of this vampire with my fist,” Yashas said.

“A stake through the heart might do the best job, I think,” West said.

A young drunk slumped over the bar next to Jon who wouldn't wait any longer to feast. The vampire's face transformed with piranha-like teeth and bulging wide eyes. With his cannibalistic teeth, he seized and pierced his victim's neck to feed. After the drunkard had been blood-drained, he fell with a thump to the ground.

There were screams throughout the pub from girls and men, trying to escape.

“Are Ben and Felere vampires like him?” I said. “Or are they human?”

“Let’s find out,” West said.

West pulled out a gun from under his belt and shot at Ben and Felere. Ben fell to the floor with a red bullet hole mark on his forehead. Felere hesitated a little, blinked, and fell to the ground with a smile still on his countenance.

A few more drunkards ran for the exit doors as they noticed sharp pointy teeth on the creature of the night without a single speck of color on his face. Just pale. The vampire flung himself angrily onto West's shoulders and threw him across the bar. Then he grabbed him again and tossed him across the other side of the bar, back and forth, back and forth, like a kid throwing a doll. West laid on the floor for a while and when he tried to get up, Jon flew on him immediately.

Yashas pushed Jon as hard as he could, but he didn’t even move him an inch.

“See, I told you that a stake through the heart might work better,” I said.

Jon was keen, laughing with steady cackles. His terrible piranha fangs flashed in front of me, and his long sharp claws stood ready. I stepped back, pulled out a silver cross, which was stinging from all four edges like a giant ninja star, and threw it at the vampire as hard as I could. It curved a bit in midair, the way a knuckleball bends with a drop, and it stuck onto Jon's leg. Jon looked at his leg slowly, and for such a little wound to slow him down, he began to laugh out loud.

“I am way past silver crap,” Jon said, pulling it out. Then, he threw it with greater force into the crowd.

It cut not two, but three drunkards’ throats before getting stuck in the back of the bartender’s head.

Blood squirted all over the place. Yashas grabbed an empty bottle of beer, and out of desperation threw it at the vampire. The bottle crashed on the roof without hitting anything significant.

Realizing that silver wasn't doing anything to the vampire, I doused a couple of silver crosses with holy water. "Ok well, we'll see how you take holy water." He threw the silver cross at Jon, who tried to get away and succeeded by running at the speed of light toward me and sent me flying across the room against the wall.

"Too slow, Migsy-boy," he said, smiling.

Most of the drunkards had vacated the area, but some could not resist witnessing a good fight.

Yashas came running, tackling Jon, but the vampire jumped high in the air and landed above one of the exposed rafters on the roof. Jon laughed with evil laughter. The minute the bloodsucker came down the beam, Yashas threw a few hard punches at his face but missed.

I brandished a full bottle of Miller Light and cracked it on Jon's head, not that it did much damage. The vampire smiled instead, holding my neck with his clutches. He was getting ready to bite me when West came up from behind and pressed the tip of a stake directly above the vampire's heart, ready to slam his hammer down on it.

If he had done so, it would have undoubtedly changed everyone's fate.

Even though many of the lights went out, Jon's fangs flashed and glowed in the dark.

"Do it West! Do it now!" I shouted, "Just kill that sonofabitch right now and get it over with."

Over his ragged breath, I could hear Jon chanting something with a deep and powerful voice. It sounded like a foreign language: "GIB NICHT AUF UNS!"

West quickly let go of Jon, as the two barflies, Ben and Felere, who were supposed to be deceased, rose from the dead. Now, they had similar fangs and devilish red eyes as Jon.

West took the gun from under his belt in case something of that nature happened and put a single bullet in each one of them as they came close to him. "Two bullets for two humans," West said. But they were no longer humans. He shot some more, only succeeded in filling part of the room with smoking gunpowder which hung in the air. But this time the two barflies didn't go down—they stood alert, now full-fledged vampires just like their master.

The lights at West's Pub flickered in a ghostly fashion, on and off randomly, and the crowd that had stayed to watch the confrontation plunged into complete darkness. I heard voice murmurs in my ears. And then people were yelling, trying to get out through the main doors, but now we were trapped.

The electrical system gained maximum power again and brightened the place up. A new trance song blasted through the speakers. Now, it was only the vampires and us young men and some drunkards left at the pub.

Yashas took out a crucifix and pressed it right onto Jon's face not knowing if his faith would endure enough even to make him flinch. "Back up child of Satan," Yashas said.

Jon blistered right away as the cross touched his face. The vampire's eyes changed to a mad color, and then he chanted something softly at first as if casting another vampire spell, then harsh and loud: "AT-AF-AF-LA-SHOL—"

The sound horrified us. They had never heard that likeness of language before, except for me who had listened to the gargoyles speak in tongues right outside the window of my home before or after a nightmare. It was all part of the vampire charm.

"I beseech you to take my hand Migs," the vampire said.

A bolt of lightning struck beside West's Pub. There was a substantial sonic boom, and out of the corner of my eye, I saw a lightning bolt shoot down into the structure, ripping part of West's Pub's roof off.

Somehow it felt like someone punched me in the face as part of the lightning bolt struck me. The shock seemed to travel through my body. My muscles seemed to petrify. I fell to the ground. I got right back up as the music stopped entirely, and the sound of dripping rain echoed from the rooftop.

Jon stretched his arm, his long fingers were like sharp eagle claws, and he offered to shake my hand. I looked at West and then at Jon but didn't say a word.

The vampire's deep voice spoke: "I beseech you to take my hand Migs." I looked at West, who nodded in agreement.

Then, slowly, I lifted my hand, and we shook. Jon's eyes changed a new color again, and his fangs disappeared.

A bottle shattered on the far end of the bar, sounding like a bomb. There was a shuddering clap of thunder that roared across the heavens and caused the rain to drop harder as the vampires lifted their arms and rose a few inches above the floor. Jon smiled, but then rapidly his smile wiped off his face.

A groan escaped Jon's mouth before he departed into the dark early morning. Jon and his two now vampire buddies, Ben and Felere, flitted with lightning quickness out the doors.

"See you soon Migs," Jon Blackburn said in a malevolent tone of voice, echoing in the distance.

The first rays of the day splashed on the street, and my friends and I couldn't see the vampires anymore. I couldn't persuade them to appear, except maybe in bad dreams—tonight.

Right after West's Pub, after I had shaken my hand with the vampire, instead of going home, West and Yashas headed toward the beach for a ride on the motorcycles. They took two of West's stock motorcycles, and they rode south on the 110 Freeway towards San Pedro, doing never-ending wheelies along the way.

The freeway ended on Gaffey Street, where they rode for about five minutes more and made a right on Cabrillo Avenue, a small street that went down the hill, and toward the beach.

A lost seagull flew lazily above them, desperately seeking attention. The wind was starting to pick up, swaying the line of palm trees beside the walkway on the sand. In the shoreline, the wind was blasting, ruffling the guys' short hair. A bonfire was blazing when a knot exploded as loud as dynamite.

“What the hell was that?” Yashas said.

The surroundings were getting way out of control as the wind blew with rapid power. It was so close to the ocean that we could hear the waves forever beating against the shore. When the water got all the way up touching their feet where they were at, they were laying on the sand. They got up in a hurry. Another gust of wind stumbled Yashas to his ass. West laughed—he couldn't help it. But he helped him get up to his feet again.

“Hold on to the palm trees,” West said. “The water is rising.”

And that was when they saw the vampires' faces in the break of dawn above the dark waters: Jon, Ben, and Felere. Evil laughter echoed in the wind. Their bright red beaming eyes stared right at them. Their fangs were sharp and glistened in the almost vanished moonlight.

“You hear that?” West said.

Yashas got up from the ground taking a deep breath. The vampires’ faces were still flying in the heavens like kites, mocking them.

“Let’s get the hell out of here,” West said. “We’re doomed.”

Another wave crashed ashore, creating the most horrible sound like a monstrous growl, and then the vampire hallucinations were gone.

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I could only think of three words: disastrous, fierce, and, scary. The Harley Davidsons and most of West's motorcycles at West's Pub had been destroyed, except for four-speed bikes at the far corner of the establishment. West and Yashas had borrowed two. I disliked speed bikes, so instead, I walked through the streets to get home.

If it’s not my Harley Davidson, I ride nothing else, I thought. Nothing is quite over yet.

I continued having the premonition: something big was going to happen. Something ugly was still coming our way. Perhaps, a high-speed rotation of air. A cyclone, yes, or a hurricane was coming our way, or so it seemed. Power outages can occur due to strong winds. Pipes could freeze, and regular fuel sources may be cut off. Destruction, in other words, as if the vampires were trying to take over the city.

After the deal I had struck with the vampires—the handshake—I had only two things in mind: my mother and the future of the City of Angels, where more bloodsucking spirits now dwelled.

The vampires were probably sleeping the sleep of the undead in coffins down at the billiards, or somewhere else in the city for that matter, or at the very top of the Wilshire Grand Center skyscraper.

Now it was time to see if my mother was okay.

Walking along the street, I used the time to reflect on many things and what had happened on Friday, the night of Halloween.

I took a moment to wipe the sweat off my face with the palm of my hand. My imagination couldn't quite picture what it would be like if the vampires showed up again tonight—

Then, I heard a whisper— “Miiiiigs.” It echoed in the void, startling me. I ran a little more, hoping I could escape my new fate and be myself again soon. I was tired of being the target of the creatures of the night.

I looked at my reflection on the skyscrapers' glass when I noticed something coming from the sky. I hurried to look back at it, but at first, there was nothing there.

Looking back at the pane, I could see a ghastly image, a reflection of Jon, who had sharp piranha teeth and eyes so red they were like spheres of blood. The sight startled me out of the doze I had been slipping into, realizing it was nothing more than a trick of the eye.

An optical illusion, yes, an optical illusion, no more no less.

I ran home until my feet hurt—I was tired.

Then just around the block before getting to my two-floor house, I stopped to take a deep breath. I didn't even want to glance at the billiards place anymore, where I had first encountered the vampires.



I was scared because City of Angels was getting plagued with more vampires, at least that was the prophetic vision I kept feeling ever since I had shaken Jon's hand as if he had removed the blindfold off my eyes with some supernatural power and now I could see the future. First, there was only one vampire. Now there were three vampires. Tomorrow a whole city of them.

I frowned, passing by my front yard. The gargoyles, which continued to terrify me, spoke to me in tongues, but I didn't want to listen. I closed my eyes for a moment, thinking only of breakfast. But in my mind's eye, the giant gargoyle came to life. Their wings were gliding through the air that I had to blink repeatedly and hold my eyes shut for it to stiffen back to dark-stone.

Oh my god what's going on with me?

I took a few steps up the porch stairs and realized that today would be another sleepless night.

I covered my ears as I entered my house, and I sped up a bit more, wanting to pop a few Advil into my mouth. I swallowed something dry in my throat when I heard footfalls coming down the stairway.

“Mom, is that you?”

One step at a time, I listened carefully and realized that it was my mother's three-inch heels, now walking along the corridor. She stood silent. I held my breath and tried to remain calm as I stepped inside and looked around. Was my mother a vampire? I wasn't going to take any chances, so I held my crucifix in the pocket of my jeans.

But what if she is. Then what am I going to do?

“Mom, I am here, it's me Migs. Your son.”

At first, nothing seemed to be there, and then my mother came out of the shadows, startling me.

She did look okay after all. Just as I had suspected, I looked into her eyes: they were normal. I looked at her teeth: they were natural teeth—no fangs at all. I realized my mother was human. I went into her room perhaps to see if everything was okay.

“Good morning mom,” I said,

“Good morning son,” she said, resting a hand on my shoulder. “Were you okay last night?” I looked up and could see my face’s reflection on her bifocals, as she ran her fingers through my hair, styling it a bit. She went on, saying: “I thought you were having nightmares, but I couldn’t go into your room, your door was locked—”

“C'mon mom, I am fine, and I'm glad you're okay too,” I said, turning his attention to some of the mail on the kitchen table. I didn't have a nightmare mom. Deep inside my mind, I couldn't deny that West, Yash, and I were fighting real vampires. “By the way good steak mom...”

“You’re welcome,” she said. “Almost blue rare just how you like it for breakfast.” She hurried to grab her keys from the counter and latched her purse onto her bony shoulder. “Listen...I have to leave for work now, running late. And do me a favor, when you finish eating, please at least put the dish in the sink, would you? And rinse the plate for me, please. That left-over blood attracts flies.”

“Okay, mom. Don’t you worry.”

The door shut with a slam. I was in a hurry getting ready to meet Yashas Rune and West Galbert. I had everything—cell phone, wristwatch, and, of course, wallet. Just then, my cell phone rang. It was Yashas, my best friend from school.

“Hey, Yash! Yes, everything is back to normal.

How’s it going?” I said.

“Where are you?” Yashas said, munching a sausage breakfast burrito at Jim’s Burgers.

“Are you still at home?”

“Yes, I’m at home,” I said. “Trying to finish the last of my breakfast—”

“Let me guess, bloody steak again?”

“You got it.”

Yashas’s laughter echoed through the cell phone’s speaker.

“You’re nasty, Migs. I like my steak well cooked.”

“Well too bad, I like mine blue rare,” I said. “I’m on my way to Jim’s Burgers. Would you guys wait for me?”

“Hurry! I’m here, finishing off a good finger licking breakfast burrito that you’re missing out... I saved one for you and one for West, but if you guys don’t get here fast, I’m scarfing them down. West should be on his way.”

“I thought West was with you?”

“He was, but he went for a quick roll by your house to make sure you and your mom were alright.”

There was a moment of silence as I went through my doorway. But then I heard the rumble of a motorcycle. Three. A group. And for some vague reason, I had an idea who they were—the vampires. Maybe the vamps weren’t scared of daylight after all, and they were back on their motorcycle rides to give me a hard time—

Or perhaps it was one of my funky dreams again: Dreaming of a motorcycle would mean that you have a fear of going against Jon. Dreaming of someone chasing you on the bike signifies that you're getting away from your duties.

(Shut up Migs, and relax)

I stepped outside onto the porch, seeing the gate open. Then, from down Loma Vista Street, a motorcycle racing exhaust soared along the curvy street. Someone was popping a wheelie. A Honda CBR made an earsplitting noise as it went into the driveway. Its engine was typically cut off about twenty feet from where I was standing.

“West, where’s your Blue-and-White motorcycle?” I said, smiling. I knew where it was.

“The vampire trashed it last night, don’t you remember?” West said.

I sighed a long sigh, an exhalation of burden.

“I will be rebuilding another one soon,” West said.

“We’re going to need three super good motorcycles again, fast ones,” I said. “The vampire trashed my bike too.”

“Is your mother okay?”

“Yes, she’s fine. Just a little disoriented.”

In the full light of day and the drizzle, we shook hands and hugged.

I promised Yashas to be at Jim’s Burgers in a bit.

I walked back inside my house, saying the stanzas of a poem I had made up in my head not too long ago:

Fangs as sharp as points of wires,

Penetrate the deepest of my desires.

No poltergeist nor can witches compare,

To the passion and hysteria of the undead.

The blood flowing in their veins,

Blood of 400 thousand years.

Crosses and holy water aren't eternal,

But the light of the immortal lives forever.

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#### Epilogue:

It was a typical Monday at Wilson High School. Like all the rest of the seniors, Yashas and I were healthy and bright and on top of the world, at least in our minds. We were seniors and proud of it.

Still too young to have much perspective, the majority of the students considered themselves ascendant and ready for anything. They stood steadfast against adversity. They recognized open doors, seized the opportunities, and accepted the responsibility of new risks.

When the first-period bell rang, the students filled the passages. Many were shouting across the hallway about how the Wilson Dolphins would miss the championship at El Camino College if they lost the next playoffs game to the Polytechnic Jackrabbits. It would be the end of the football season for us. If they were to fail, it would be a tragedy for a school that mainly revolved around our football team.

Many were shouting across everywhere about why was the school so empty today. Were the students getting sick or something? I started to wonder since I had known what was up, but I didn't say anything.

I arrived at the cafeteria, which happened to be just across the attendance office, and I saw Yashas and Landon waiting for me. Landon was another of our close friends: he had been out of town this past weekend.

I saw the dean, the psychologist, and the counselor entering the faculty room walking altogether like cadets in an ROTC drill. I could overhear them engrossed in a discussion about whether TV production should be kept as an elective, or completely deleted from the school's curriculum.

We exchanged high-fives, then fell silent as we saw the football coach passing by, holding a clipboard in his hand. They nodded at me and smiled. The coach waved and nodded his head in acknowledgment. It was clear that all three of us young men had grown into men's bodies, and strong ones at that. In the coach's mind, that meant one thing: football players. In fact, he had been eyeing us to try out for the last few Dolphins' games.

"Migs!" the coach asked. "And Yashas Rune! Why did you guys decide not to join my team this year, huh? And you too Landon Russell, don't think I haven't seen you."

The three of us looked at one another. We were smiling at the coach as he was getting near us. We stopped upon seeing him face-to-face and elbowed each other to quit playing around.

"Well, I hope you give it some thought, guys. We need a stronger defense, and I could sure use help from the three of you. Never too late to suit up again."

The coach finished the conversation with us by winking before turning around and heading for the gymnasium.

"Do you guys think the Dolphins will win next week?" I asked as we walked along the hallway together. Landon Russell and Yashas Rune were just as muscular as me, but Landon carried a good deal of extra fat on top of his muscles. Yashas was cut and big. I was the most athletic.

"I don't think so," Landon said. "In fact, with our new quarterback, that Luis Parra, not a chance. Plus, the Polytechnic Jackrabbits are the best team in the league this year."

"How about you Yashas?" I said. "What do you think?"

"Well, how about we go buy football tickets for next week's game. Big old' Friday showdown, right? Dolphins vs. Jackrabbits! We can watch our team kick some ass or look like a bunch of idiots. That simple."

"Yeah, that'd be great. Let's do this!" Landon said.

"I'll pass," I said.

There was a moment of silence as if someone had said something wrong.

"What?" Landon said, slapping my shoulder. "You're kidding me, right?"

"You're going to the game, period," Yashas said, to me. "And let's hit Jim's Burgers after. A cheeseburger special with root beer, especially if we get something to spike the root beer with, always hits the spot. And damn right I will have some tequila to spike that root beer up! So Migs, try to relax, would you?"

I thought momentarily and then said: "Deal, let's do it."

"What's wrong with this guy," Landon said to Yashas, as they walked away from him.

"Does he still want to hang out with us or what?"

A sudden hint of perfume filled the hallway, and then someone beautiful stepped around a distant corner and slowly approached me.

"Hey, guys have you seen this chick?" I said, hitting my fist. But my friends were gone. "Damn! She's hot!"

The tardy bell rang, and everyone scrambled into the classroom doors, except me.

The new girl on campus was an absolute head-turner. Her perfectly shaped figure ignited the desire of any male who came across her way, especially the newly post-pubescent. She was the type of girl any man loved to look at, and what's more, would like to have out on a date. Mostly everyone was hooked by her beauty and then captivated by her charm (and she seemed to have known it). From the campus security officer at the front gate to the male faculty to every young man in Wilson High was looking at her.

She passed near me while I was opening my locker. I caught the scent of her perfume, turning my head towards her, eyes lowering to her swaying hips.

She wore a short dress above stiletto heels. She even had on stockings, hooked with garters, which captured my attention completely as she walked along the hallway.

"Oh, she will be told to go back home and change," someone said in disbelief.

Her hips swayed seductively with each step, which I couldn't resist. Her honey-colored hair framed her face, and one could get in the depths of those blue eyes that lay under thick lashes. Her mouth was luscious, irresistible to kiss. And she knew it.

She smiled at me. The sound of her voice was angelic to my ears as at least as her lips brushed my ear. She had not mince words, not wasted time. She placed her hand lightly on his shoulder, feeling the contour of my traps muscle, saying: "I'm Destiny."



Her gaze shifted from my eyes to my bulging chest, and then from my chest down lower. A grin spread across my shaved face. I knew that instant that we had something going on. And I knew I was going to see if she felt something too.

Wait a minute, but was she human? I started thinking about the vampires.

And that was how dangerously I began my Monday, the first day of the week at Wilson High.

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