

Scott Dokey

Dark Secrets

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by

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All characters and events in this story are purely fictional. Any resemblance to real persons or actual events is strictly coincidental and should be considered as such. While many legends throughout history point to the real possibility that vampires do indeed exist, each individual should decide for themselves what is real and what is not. The universe, after all, is filled with an endless supply of untold mysteries and dark secrets.

Dedicated to:

Chris, Nick, and Kaylee, my beautiful children,
and to Jennifer, my lovely wife.

For they are the purpose behind everything I do.

Chapter 1

Gabrielle could feel the first pulse of darkness breathing life into her being. Like a serpent, it wound its way through her veins, awakening the fire within. Anticipation burned through her, and wicked thoughts filled her head as she opened her eyes.

When darkness descends upon this world a transformation takes place. No longer does the sunlight protect you from the power of the hungry-those born to feed on the souls of the doomed. The moon is their god, filling them with an unquenchable thirst, like a thousand knives stabbing into their bodies. And the only way to subdue this feeling is to rip the flesh from those victims who happen by and devour their soul. But this fulfillment lasts only a short time then the hunger comes again. Tonight Gabrielle and the twins felt very hungry.

As the moon began its magnificent journey toward the heavens, the three of them rose from their slumber together: a family of darkness in all its glory.

Gabrielle was the powerful and protective mother, whose fiery red hair and emerald green eyes penetrated the depths of a man's soul. Her thirst for blood was unbridled. She delighted in the savage act of ripping her victims apart, limb from limb, hungrily devouring their flesh.

Then there were the twins, Angel and Jordyn. Although not identical, they were very similar in appearance-that was until Jordyn's alternative nature during her life as a mortal had changed that dramatically.

Tattoos and piercings covered her body, and her hair became a mixture of punk and techno, usually spiked and seldom her natural color. Her style of choice was black leather with dark lipstick and eye shadow adorning her face, giving her a deviant, menacing look, making her an outcast. She possessed a rebellious spirit, often taking things to the extreme without any concern for possible consequences.

Angel was the oldest, born five minutes before her sister, and was always the more normal of the two, preferring a soft and elegant style. Her choices usually consisted of something satin or silk, but always sexy. She was also the calm, cool, and collected one, waiting to size up a situation before taking action. And Angel's seductive stare and curvaceous body could mesmerize any man instantly. Together, the two of them were literally and figuratively, as leather and lace.

Gabrielle looked at the two of them standing in the moonlight, the shimmering light casting a magical glow behind them and creating a picture of extraordinary wonder; her precious daughters were like twin flames of destruction ready to spread fear upon those that get in their way. They were now a family as no other, and this brought a smile to her lips.

"Good morning my precious daughters," Gabrielle said. For, though darkness was creeping into the world, to them the day was just beginning. "I hope you slept well."

"Like the dead," came Jordyn's answer, with a slight bit of amusement in her voice.

"Excellent," Gabrielle responded. "I don't know about you, but I'm famished. How about if we go and find something to eat?"

"Sounds good mother," Angel replied. "Where do you want to go tonight?"

"Let's try someplace new. I'm tired of the usual hangouts," said Jordyn.

"Me too," Angel agreed.

"I know," Gabrielle answered patiently.

She thought about it for a moment. "How about the old quarry south of town? Maybe we'll find something interesting there."

Angel and Jordyn looked at each other. *Sure, what the hell.*

Because they were twins, they had gained a very special ability during their transformation into this world. If they concentrated hard enough, they

could read other's minds, or block the other from reading theirs, if they didn't want the intrusion. Even as mortals they had always had a special connection. Of course, neither of them could read mother's mind, and mother couldn't read theirs. Maybe it skips a generation, who knows?

The gift was different for each one. Some could fly, others could walk through walls. Some could turn into animals, others could become as vapor. Some could read people's minds, others could manipulate those minds. And, unlike a newborn child, who is born with a limited amount of understanding-knowing only to cry when hungry, and to feel comfort in the arms of its mother-a vampire is born with the knowledge of centuries passed on to them. It knows that the light of the morning sun burns the flesh from their bones. It knows that a cross is useless against them unless presented with undaunted faith, and that garlic is nothing but a foul smelling herb. It knows that a wooden stake through its heart obliterates it from all creation.

And it knows that the hunger consumes them all.

"Ok, enough chitchat," Jordyn said. "Let's go."

With that, they set out for their destination. The brilliance of the moon overhead filled the trio with power as they sped into the night. The midnight air was sweet with the smell of a light storm that was moving in. Sounds of night creatures filled the sky. Hungry owls screeched wickedly, bats squealed excitedly, and rats chattered nervously as they ran.

Their movements were much quicker than the human eye could see, and when they broke into a full run they were able to cover miles in a matter of minutes. Four and a half minutes later, they had reached their destination.

It was an old rock quarry some twenty miles south of town. Once used to extract limestone for building materials, now it was nothing more than a place for groups to come and party. And that's exactly what the vampire trio was hoping for.

Dust choked the air as the wind picked up a little in intensity. The vampires slowed their movements as they approached the jagged ridge. The deep chasm below gaped at them like a giant mouth opening wide for its next meal.

Sure enough, as they stood at the top of the ridge, they were pleased to see a group of victims howling and carrying on below. From the looks of it, they were probably jocks from the local college, dressed in their tank tops and muscle shirts, eager to show off their strong physiques. In all, there

were four guys and a girl.

A huge bonfire threw its fiery tentacles into the night sky. Metallica's "Enter the Sandman" bellowed strongly from the boom box in the back of a cherry red Ford Ranger.

The group danced about wildly, throwing empty bottles of booze at the fire, sending it crackling higher into the darkness above. Their slurred words tried to match the music blasting through the air, but the alcohol deterred their efforts.

At first glance the group appeared to be nothing more than kids partying, until you saw the smoldering body of the dog in the corner. The vampires knew then that these kids were nothing more than a group of bullies that picked on any creature that was weaker; cowards all of them!

The intensity of their hunger grew as they eagerly watched the pack below. They looked at each other in anticipation and threw themselves off the cliff, landing effortlessly like feathers on the ground some 120 feet below.

They swayed their hips teasingly as they walked up to the party.

"Hey boys," Angel said seductively.

"Mind if we join you?" Jordyn asked as she ran her hands over one of the groups' chest.

"Yes! This is a private party," the lone female replied firmly as she stepped in between Jordyn and her subject. She was a petite girl with short black hair and a thin waistline. Her lips twitched as she talked and her brown eyes glared in jealousy.

"Be quiet, Trinity," one of the guys said. He was the scrawniest of the four boys, a little thin but very tall. His red hair and freckles gave him a baby face and made it hard to guess his age. He spoke with a slight lisp, whether it was natural or from the alcohol was uncertain.

Gabrielle looked dejected. "But my girls just want to have a little fun," she said with mock innocence in her voice. "We heard your music down the road and thought we might have a good time together. It's been a long time since we've partied with strong men such as you."

"Sounds good to me," the skinny guy shot out quickly. "My name's Steve," he offered, eyeing Jordyn closely.

"Ok, Steve," Jordyn said. "How about you and I get a little better acquainted."

Quickly she walked toward him, grabbed his hand, and led him to the edge of the fire. As the music blasted in the background she began rocking to and fro. Steve was more than willing to join in, and together they danced eagerly to the heavy, pulsating beat.

Angel gave a stern look to Trinity and the one she was guarding, like a wild animal guards her young. He was a handsome young man, with thick blond hair and bright blue eyes. His arms rippled as they moved and his chest was the size of a tree trunk.

“And who are you?” she asked the cub.

“My name’s Matthew,” he replied. “But my friends call me Matt.” A brilliant, dazzling smile crossed his lips as he talked. He knew how to drive the ladies wild with his charm, and had every intention on using it to his advantage.

“Does that mean that I can call you Matt?” Angel asked.

“We’ll see how the night goes,” Matt replied, trying to play hard to get, ignoring the fact that Trinity was standing right next to him, forgetting that she was his girlfriend altogether.

Trinity shot Matt a hateful look and stomped away. In anger, she slammed the door to the truck. If anyone had looked, they would have seen her crying miserably. But at the moment, all eyes were fixed on the three vixens that had appeared out of no where.

“Very well,” Angel resigned, allowing Matt to enjoy his little game while he still had the chance.

That would change soon.

Turning to the other two, she gestured temptingly for them to follow her. One of them dropped a football to ground that he had been tossed casually in the air. They appeared to be brothers. One was obviously a little older than the other by a year or two. Their looks were very similar: same long pointy nose, same brown curly hair, and the same pot belly. The older one was also a couple of inches taller than the other. They looked like a couple of red-neck farm boys that ought to be cleaning the barn instead of playing football.

Seductively she made her way to the edge of the fire to join her sister. “And what can we call you two?” She asked.

“I’m Jacob,” the older one responded, “and this is Adam.”

Immediately something inside Angel changed. A fire burned hot in

her eyes. That name! Every time she heard it, she felt something stir deep inside her, even if she wasn't looking at the one who had created the conflict inside her. Was it possible that love was strong enough to cross the boundaries between normal life and the unholy life she had now? She didn't know. But what she did know was that she hated the torment that raged in her soul.

She shook her head slightly, focusing on the task before her. "How about if we have some fun and show you guys a really good time," she invited.

"Sounds good to me," Jacob agreed eagerly.

Soon everyone was dancing by the fire, filling the air with howls and cries induced as much by the alcohol as by the anticipation coursing through their beings. Of course the anticipation running through the boys was much different than what ran through the vampires dancing among them.

They danced eagerly for some time. Everyone that is, except for Adam. He decided he wasn't quite in the mood and shuffled off to sit on one of the rocky outcroppings.

Gabrielle had watched the whole episode in amusement. She loved watching her daughters play their games. And when she saw Adam walk away from the group, she decided it was time for her to join in on the fun.

"Hi, Adam. I'm Gabrielle," she stated as she sat down next to him. "Mind if I join you?"

"Sure, I guess," he answered softly, looking a little dejected. "But I don't think you'll find me very good company."

"Why don't you let me be the judge of that," Gabrielle replied sweetly. She kind of liked this one. He was more innocent than the rest of them. "How come you're not down there partying with the others?"

Adam was silent for a moment, "You wouldn't understand."

"Try me."

He shrugged his shoulders, "It's Trinity. Why does she have to be with him?"

He was silent for a moment.

"All he does is treat her like shit, yet she stays with him. She should be with someone that treats her nice, like she deserves."

Gabrielle knew what he was talking about. Adam was secretly in love with Trinity, or at least he thought he was, and Trinity didn't even know

Adam was alive. Poor fool. Love was ever the master over men's hearts.

Although Gabrielle didn't feel emotions anymore, at least not the way she did before, she understood what he was going through. If a vampire can feel sympathy, she felt it for him.

"I know exactly what you're going through Adam," she said empathetically. "I know what it's like to feel your heart ache."

"Thanks," he responded quietly. "Thanks for talking to me."

Slowly she reached over and caressed the side of his face. He lifted his chin and looked at her beautiful green eyes. "I can make you feel better," she said as she pressed her lips to his.

Meanwhile Angel and Jordyn had become fully engulfed in the heat and passion of the moment. The throng of the music vibrated through them, almost as if it were breathing life into their veins. Their hips swayed provocatively back and forth as they stomped to the heavy beat. They grabbed hold of each other by the hips as they danced, and began to grind into each other suggestively. A loud howl rose up from the guys.

"Yeah, do it baby," Matt cheered, urging them further.

Not wanting to disappoint their fans, they ripped their tops off savagely, revealing their perfect breasts. Passionately, they brought their lips together for a deep embrace. As their tongues explored each other's mouth wantonly, the yelling and whistling from the guys grew louder. Angel and Jordyn looked into each other's eyes and smiled. Ecstasy was just around the corner.

Adam responded to her passion eagerly, his mouth desperate to return Gabrielle's kiss. His hands clawed at her body ravenously, telling Gabrielle that Trinity's image had already disappeared from his mind.

Seems he wasn't all that distraught after all, she thought, and just when I had almost found a decent soul. But, oh well.

She proceeded to slide her hand down across his chest, stopping long enough to give his nipples a little twist. A slight moan of pleasure erupted

from Adam, showing Gabrielle his approval.

“Does this make you feel better?” she asked.

“God yes,” he replied quickly.

“How about if I continue?” There was a fake innocence in her voice. Her hand continued down to his crotch and patted him lightly. “Is this for me?” She asked as she unzipped his pants.

“Oh yeah,” he responded eagerly. His eyes rolled into the back of his head as Gabrielle began to snake her tongue over his stomach. A moan of pleasure escaped his lips.

His moan quickly turned to a stifled scream as he looked down. Blood was pouring down Gabrielle’s chin as she looked up at him.

“Oops, I’m sorry,” she said evilly. “Did that hurt?”

Adam’s face had lost all color as he lay there in a state of shock. Gabrielle spit the flesh from her mouth onto the ground next to them.

“I was almost going to let you live, you bastard. But, in the end, you turned out to be like all the rest.”

With that, she lunged forward and sank her teeth deeply into Adam’s neck. The blood flowed freely into her mouth as she hungrily drank the dark red liquid. A deep chill passed through Gabrielle’s body as she felt the life-force leave Adam’s body, only to be replaced quickly with a deep feeling of strength and vitality.

When she had finished, Gabrielle sat there admiring the twins while they played their own dark game. She reflected on the events that had changed all of their lives forever; how each incident had happened to propel them down their dark path for all eternity. She smiled silently to herself while the body of her latest victim lay dead in her lap. Lightly she stroked his dead hair.

“You know, it’s funny how things work out,” she said to the dead body. “If you stop to think about the threads that wind through the universe like an infinite web, and how each thread is connected to every other one somehow, you can begin to understand that life holds no coincidences. Everything happens for a reason, and if you change one little thing, the whole line following changes. Fate is forever keeping us guessing, asking

what if? But instead of asking a lifetime of profound questions to find our purpose in this universe, why not instead spend that time accepting our decisions and living with the consequences of our actions? Why not embrace the lives that we have chosen? That's what I have chosen to do, to revel in what I have become, to embrace the events that brought me to this very moment in time. Would you like to hear how it all started?"

Playfully, Gabrielle pushed the boys head up and down in a ghoulish nod. She grinned back at the blank eyes that stared at her and began her story.

Chapter 2

Quietly Gabrielle walked up the stairs to the entrance to Twister's. She loved this crowded little bar down the street. It had become her retreat, her place of surrender. She loved the smell of desperation that permeated throughout the building: a mixture of sex, sweat, and alcohol.

She knew practically everyone here by name. They were all regulars who came here often, searching for the same pathetic life: There's Frank, the rock star wannabe, with the long straggly hair. He pretty much kept to himself in the corner. But on one occasion Gabrielle had been able to talk to him. It seems that he used to be the lead vocalist in a local rock band, Cloudkill. They were on their way to making it big time, when a big argument erupted over the band's material. In the end, they gave Frank the boot. Now his only friend was the bottle of Jack on the table.

Then there was Tina, the divorced housewife, who caught her husband in bed cheating on her, and with her best friend, no less. The divorce had dragged on for almost two years, and had left her almost penniless. Now she was trying to find that someone special again, and here of all places.

Let's not forget John, the lonely and shy accountant, with the big ears and horn-rimmed glasses, who probably hasn't had sex in a very long while, if ever at all.

There's David, the pretty boy so-called 'actor', who thinks he's god's gift to the rest of the human race. A couple of local commercials had given him the cockiest attitude she had ever seen.

She could go on and on. There were so many others here like them, so many others like her; ones that have gone through tough times as well and were trying to find a way out.

But it was Gus, the big burly bartender, with the impish grin and receding hairline, who knew when someone needed that special something to get them through. And he knew better than anyone else how Gabrielle felt. He was always there for her, even when all that was needed was a shoulder to cry on.

"Hey Gus," she said as she climbed onto a stool at the counter.

"Hey Gabby," Gus replied.

Gabrielle shot him a quick look. He was the only one that could get away with calling her that. She hated it and he knew it. He constantly did it

to tease her, to get a rise out of her. Like the big brother who always picked on his little sister, but secretly loved her with all his heart.

“How about a screwdriver, Gus, and make it strong this time.”

“Feeling a little down are we today, Gabby?” Gus replied.

“What the hell do you care? As long as you get your tip, you’re happy.”

“That hurt Gabby. You know I love you like a sister. Hell, you might as well be my sister. So don’t come in here with that bad ass attitude, pouring that poor pitiful me crap all over everyone.” With that he slammed her drink down and walked to the other end of the counter.

Immediately she was sorry.

Gus had always been there for her. She had known him for almost 25 years. For a few years, while they were growing up, they had been next door neighbors. She didn’t really care for him much at first; he was kind of a chubby, nerdy sort of kid. But after a while, he grew on her and they became close friends. No matter what had happened in her life, he was there for her.

He was there when she first met Tom. It was at a big party after the football team had just won the regional title. She didn’t remember at whose house the party was, but she remembered seeing him across the room talking aimlessly to a couple of bimbos that happened to be there. Immediately their eyes met and she went over to him, and he actually started talking to her. After high school graduation, two years later, he became her husband, with Gus as the best man. Gus had even run the bar at their reception, making sure that no one got out of hand.

He was there twenty-one years ago when she had given birth to her twin girls. And he was there three years ago when Tom’s car had inexplicably run off the road into the river. Gus had even gone with her to the police station after the police couldn’t find the body and declared that her husband had died in that crash.

He was always there, any time she needed, ready to take all her pain away, ready for her to cry on that teddy bear shoulder of his.

Gabrielle would apologize later.

She stared into her drink. A whirlwind of memories came flooding back to her. She missed Tom desperately. Their love had been a miracle to her. He was everything to her- her prince, her savior, her reason for being.

He could melt her with his smile, and comfort her with the whisper of his voice. Love, to them, was an understanding. Something felt, not said. Their future was going to be marvelous.

Tom had been an investment banker for a local company, quickly working his way up to the top. His passion and energy made him the envy of everyone else at the firm, and his charm and good looks would make even the most conservative person in the world ready to spill all their hard-earned cash right into his lap. A wink from those soft brown eyes and a smile from those pearly whites made him delightfully charming. His smooth black hair and well-defined physique made him irresistible.

The world was theirs to command. So many times they would sit by the fire and talk about the trips they would take, or the dream house they would build. For hours they would completely decorate their new house in their heads from top to bottom: the finest china, the best silver, the most elaborate furniture, famous paintings adorning the walls, satin sheets on all the beds. Both of the girls were like fish out of water, so a swimming pool was a must. And Tom had to have his pool table; a fine antique Brunswick, with Italian slate surrounded by beautiful, rich Corinthian leather.

She remembered the many times she would go out with him to one of the local bars and watch him play. He was good, very good. He was the next Minnesota Fats, or so he thought.

She loved it when he played the role of the poor defenseless sap that could hardly hit the ball at first, only to watch him run the table on the next break. Of course the other players didn't think it was quite so funny. A couple of times he had nearly gotten into a lot of trouble.

Gabrielle took a long, hard drink and smiled bitterly to herself.

She remembered the plans that Tom had for a pool hall of his own. It was going to be incredible. A sea of green felt would greet you as you entered the building and looked at row upon row of the finest billiard tables around. Countless spectators would be present to ooh and aah over impressive shots made as they watched from the bar or any of the numerous dining tables that would be available. A loud roar would be heard from the corner, as sports fans gathered in front of the large screen tv's to watch any number of games being televised. Bells and whistles would be heard from the arcade, as quarter after quarter dropped into the machines. The menu would include the finest meals money could buy. It was going to be the

biggest attraction in town, or at least it would have been.

It was so hard to go on after that. To go on, day after day, with a piece of her life missing, knowing that piece would never come back. The tragedy of that day had left her bitter; bitter at those around her, bitter at herself, bitter at God for taking her Tom away. So, in her mind, she could do whatever she wanted and the rest of the world could go to hell!

With that she picked up her drink and downed the rest of it in one gulp. Her mouth puckered as she swallowed hard. Inside she felt the fiery warmth of the liquid going down. That made her feel good.

She turned her head to scan the crowd, looking for a companion to share some time with, or maybe just someone to share a bed with; at this point, it didn't really matter to her anymore.

It was a small place, filled with the same kind of desperate people: anyone looking for an escape, or maybe a reason to go on, some looking for both. *Maybe that's why I like this place so much*, she thought. *Everyone here is just like me.*

Out of the corner of her eye she saw someone—a man—sitting alone in the corner looking at her. She turned fully to look at him, only to see the table where he was sitting a second ago empty.

“Excuse me, miss,” came a voice from behind her suddenly.

Startled, she turned to look at the source of that voice. Standing before her was the most handsome man she had ever seen. His soft black hair flowed down his shoulders, while his gorgeous blue eyes held her mesmerized. A jet-black trench coat covered his broad shoulders. Adorning his fingers were the finest jewelry Gabrielle had ever seen. His smile melted her instantly.

“I couldn't help but notice you sitting here at the bar all alone.” His smooth voice enraptured her.

Gabrielle stuttered to speak. “Maybe I was just waiting for the right person to join me,” she replied shyly.

“My name is Joshua. And a creature as beautiful as you should never be alone.” With that he reached out and took her hand. Gently he bent down and touched his lips against her smooth skin. A tingle coursed its way through Gabrielle's entire body.

“I, too, know what it's like to be alone,” he said, as he looked into her eyes. “I, too, have felt the pain and suffering of a tragic loss. I know the

agony which pounds through your heart every moment of every day.”

Gabrielle was spellbound. Unable to speak, she watched him intensely as he talked. His words were magic, filling her head with dreams and images of something wondrous.

Joshua reached out his hand to her. “Come with me,” he said softly, “I can help you forget.”

Without hesitation, Gabrielle brought her hand up to meet his.

Gus watched in disgust as Joshua led her out of the club and got into a big, black limousine. “Sooner or later, Gabby, you’re gonna get yourself killed.”

Chapter 3

“**O**ne of us has to go and find mom,” Angel stated to her sister defiantly.

“Well, it’s not gonna be me, that’s for sure,” came Jordyn’s reply.

“Look, Jordyn, mom’s been gone for over three hours. Supposedly, she was only going to get a pack of cigarettes. But we both know that’s not the case.”

“That’s not my problem, Angel,” Jordyn said as she turned to walk out of the kitchen.

Angel grabbed Jordyn by the arm, “Yes, it is. She’s our mother, and we have to look out for her.”

Jordyn looked quickly at her sister’s hand on her arm, a small fire burned in her eyes. “I suggest you take your hand off me, now.”

“Fine, Jordyn. Be that way-always thinking of yourself and no one else. I’ll go get mom, while you sit here in self-absorption and ignore everyone else in the world.”

Quickly she grabbed her keys off the counter and ran outside, slamming the door behind her. The tires squealed as she hit the accelerator and sped off down the street.

Inside the house sat a confused twenty-one-year-old girl, crying softly to her self. Angel didn’t know how scared Jordyn was, or how much she hated Twister’s, with its filth and disgust seething through the air. And no one else new the dark secret about that place that she kept guarded close to her heart.

Angel cranked the radio up as she drove the few blocks it took to get to the appalling place called ‘Twister’s’. Maybe the music would drown out the thoughts of anger and hatred running through her head. Or so she hoped.

She actually loved her mother very much. Really she did. That was why she became so angry. She wanted her mother back, her real mother. She wanted the mother that read stories to them as a child, and ran in to save them from a bad dream; the one that took them to the beach every summer,

or the carnival when it came to town; the one that played referee when her and Jordyn were fighting.

She was the one that helped them through the very awkward stages of puberty- showing them how to be a lady, and how to drive all the boys crazy; the same mother that was there to dry the tears away when boyfriend problems would arise.

But that had ended three years ago with their dad's death. On that fateful night, when the tragic accident happened, not only did they lose a father, but they lost a mother as well. Nothing was ever the same afterward.

Gabrielle began to sink into a deep depression. The only thing that seemed to comfort her was something alcoholic. It didn't matter what, as long as it was strong. She had lost her job long ago, failing to show up for work a few too many times, deciding instead to fall into a deep alcohol induced stupor on the living room couch.

Of course their dad had left a big insurance policy, so money wasn't an issue, at least not after they got all the legal stuff straightened out. This actually fueled the problem. Gabrielle knew that she didn't have to do anything anymore in order to survive.

So Angel was forced to abandon her ordinary life. No longer was she able to hang out with her friends, go to parties, or be the normal young adult. Someone had to take care of things around the house or it would never get done. She had always been mom's favorite, she knew that. Now, with mom wasting away, she felt it was her job to take care of everything. And besides, Jordyn was too busy taking care of herself.

She had tried countless times to help her mom get through this. Counseling helped briefly, but then she would revert back into her self-pity state.

"Dad's dead, mother," Angel would cry out. "He's gone. Nothing can bring him back. Nothing. But Jordyn and I are still here. We're hurting too, but we're alive, and we need you."

Sure, these were harsh words, but sometimes those are the only kind that makes a difference.

A couple of times she got slapped. But at least it was a reaction. And something must have awoken inside her. Mother changed, a little. She actually got up and around somewhat. At first she just went through the motions. But then she actually started to contribute something to the

household.

She wasn't quite the same as before, but at least it was a start. Her mannerisms were different; the way she walked, the way she talked, the way she dressed. You could tell that a lot of things that used to be important to her didn't really matter anymore. Her hair was regularly a tangled mess that looked more like a rat's nest instead of human hair sitting atop her head. Her fingernails had not seen polish in a long time and grew to resemble the dirty blackened nails of a diesel mechanic rather the refined ones of a classy lady. Her dress of choice was either a weathered flannel nightgown or a pair of ripped and worn sweat pants. I guess she still had a long, long way to go.

As Angel pulled in front of the club, a black limo raced away, barely missing her front fender. Angrily she jumped out of the car and waved her fist. "Damn idiot!" she yelled after the car as it disappeared into the night.

Walking toward the front door she noticed a silver lighter lying on the sidewalk. She looked at the gold **G** and **F** engraved on it and instantly recognized it as her mother's. Feelings of relief and disgust overcame her at once; relief because she had found her, disgust because she had found her here.

She hated this place and the people that came here. Like sharks, all of them, waiting for that first drop of blood. But she had a job to do, and her mother, even in all her stupor, meant the world to her.

She walked into the dimly lit club. The air was thick with smoke, and the smell was a mixture of stale beer and sweat. Off to the left a small dance floor was filled with bodies pumping and grinding into each other. She wanted to spit in disgust at the display, and although it wouldn't have been very ladylike it would have felt very gratifying.

She headed to the bar directly ahead. "Hey, Gus," she said as she sat down on one of the stools.

"Hey, Angel! You looking for your mom?"

"Aren't I always?" she asked coldly.

"You just missed her. She ran off with some tall, dark and handsome stranger."

"Cut the crap, Gus. Where is she?"

"I told you, she ran off. Some strange guy had been hanging out for a while when Gabby showed up. Almost immediately he came over to her at the bar and started getting cozy. One look at the rings on his fingers and the

size of his...wallet was all it took. Your mom melted right in front of him. They just drove off a couple of minutes ago in a black limo.”

“That creep almost killed me when I pulled up! Dammit, Gus. Couldn’t you do anything to stop her?”

“Why would I? She’s a big girl now. She can do anything she wants.”

Gus paused for a second, “And besides, I wasn’t about to mess with the guy. He gave me the creeps; something not quite right about him. Kind of strange, if you know what I mean.”

“Strange how? Like nerdy strange, or weird strange?” Asked Angel.

“No. Strange, as in freaky; not someone you want to meet in a dark alley, that’s for sure.”

“Thanks, Gus,” she said as she stormed out of the bar.

A steady rain had begun to fall, making this night all the more miserable. A chill wind began blowing its icy breath throughout the night air. Cursing loudly at whomever could hear her, Angel ran to her car.

After fumbling in her purse for a minute she finally found her keys, only to drop them immediately into a mud puddle that had formed right beside her car. Quickly she fished the keys out of the murky water, and with trembling fingers found the opening of the lock. She was rewarded with a soft click when she turned the key. She didn’t waste any time climbing inside the car and slamming the door in disgust.

“Damn you, mother,” she cried out loud as she pounded her fist on the steering wheel. Her hair was soaking wet, and her makeup had begun to run all over. After a few moments of sobbing to herself, she grabbed some tissue out of the glove compartment and tried to compose herself. One thing that Angel had learned these past couple of years was that everyday with mother was a day full of torment and grief. Her continuous displays of disregard for anyone other than herself had a way of leaving those around her drained mentally and emotionally. Angel knew better than to let this episode get to her. *No use crying any longer*, she thought. *It certainly won’t do any good.*

Having finally gotten herself under control, Angel grabbed the cell phone out of her purse and called home.

Jordyn answered it with a slight edge to her voice, “Hello.”

“Jordyn, it’s me.”

“Where are you? Did you find mom?”

“I just left Twister’s. Mom was there and apparently left with some loser just before I arrived. Gus said the guy was very loaded...although he gave Gus the creeps. Leave it to mom to jump on any guy with a little money.”

“Shut up Angel,” Jordyn hissed back at her sister.

“Like you care, Jordyn. I wonder sometimes if you care about anything at all, if you actually have any feelings hidden behind that mask of yours.”

That hurt Jordyn deeply, and Angel knew it. “I’m sorry, Jordyn,” Angel said. “I didn’t mean that.”

“Yes you did,” Jordyn replied sharply.

There was a brief silence before Angel spoke up, “Look, I’m going over to Adam’s for a little while to try to calm down.”

“You mean you’re going over there to get laid. That’s what you should have said-a good fuck to take your mind off things.” She was silent for a moment. “How long will you be gone?”

“Until I feel like coming home,” Angel retorted.

But then her voice softened somewhat. “Jordyn, I have a bad feeling about all this. I don’t know...something doesn’t feel quite right. I’ll be home in a couple of hours.”

A click, and the line was silent.

Jordyn slammed the phone down in disgust. She was tired of playing all these games. Sometimes she wished that her mom would just disappear and make all of their lives a hell of a lot easier. She did love her mother, and she knew that Angel loved her too, but sometimes she wondered if her mother actually loved them at all.

“Dad, I wish you were here,” she said as she curled up on the couch and started to cry.

Chapter 4

A low creaking noise made Jordyn jump. She must have dozed off at some point. Sitting up on the couch, she looked around.

The room was completely dark.

Reaching up, she turned on the floor lamp beside the couch. She looked at her watch and realized that it was 11:00, and still no mother. *Well mom, she thought, I'm certainly not going to wait up for you.*

She turned to make her way to the bedroom. She decided to leave the lights on until Angel got home. It gave her the creeps to be home all by herself. Ever since she was a child she hated to be alone in this house. During the daylight it promoted nothing but warmth and cheerfulness, but was transformed into something menacing in the darkness, with its squeaky floorboards that groaned from time to time as the house settled into its resting place, the trees that reached out their talons to scrape at the windows incessantly, and the dogs that barked and howled constantly just doors away. Hopefully Angel would be home soon.

The rain had slowed to a steady mist as Angel walked up to Adam's apartment. Just the thought of his dark brown eyes and charming smile made her feel a little better. Never mind that her makeup had run all over her face and that she looked like a clown on Halloween, totally ridiculous. She knew that Adam would make everything all right. He always did.

Slowly she knocked on the door.

She realized that she forgot to call first to make sure he was even home. Being a detective meant that a call could come at any time, and he would be off running to save the world from the next disaster. It was hard to count the times when they had just started a romantic dinner, or snuggled together to watch a movie, or had just begun to make love, when that phone of his would ring.

But what could she do? It was his life, his passion, his work. He had poured his soul into making detective at such an early age. At 30, he was the youngest one at the precinct by almost 10 years. She knew all of that going into the relationship. It wasn't fair to ask him to give up everything he had

for her, everything he had worked at for so long.

“Hi, gorgeous,” came the husky voice from behind the door.

As the door swung open, she saw his beautiful smile and jumped into his arms. She ran her hands through his dark hair as she kissed him desperately; her legs wrapped around his torso as he held her tight. Big, powerful arms lifted her with ease as they made their way into the living room, shutting out the rest of the world.

No words were needed as they embraced. He knew that she was hurting inside. She knew that he would save her from her torment.

They fought frantically to strip off their clothes, each feeling the urgency of the moment. The heat inside them was rising to an almost unbearable level. Their hands scratched and clawed at each other’s flesh, bringing the added excitement of pleasure and pain.

This fevered pitch continued for some time until both of them lay on the bed in a heap, exhausted. Stretched out together, they held each other tight. They were a perfect union of two souls. Angel looked up at Adam and smiled. *With you by my side what can go wrong*, she thought.

The phone startled both of them from a sound sleep some time later. Groggily, Adam answered it. Angel gave a brief sigh. She knew who it was. She heard the “I understand”, and the “no problem”, and finally the “I’ll be right there”; the same things she always heard.

“I’ve gotta go, dear,” Adam said quickly.

“Why? What’s the matter?”

“I don’t know yet. Something happened to some lady downtown. A witness said he saw some guy attacking a woman. Only now, it seems, the victim has disappeared. I have to go check it out.”

“Why do you have to go, Adam?” Angel asked. “Why can’t they send someone else. I need to be with you now.”

“It’s okay Angel. I know you’re upset right now. But your mom is fine. I’m sure of it.” Adam gave Angel a playful smile. “And besides, I’m the best there is.”

“You got that right,” Angel answered, with a hint of seduction in her voice.

She snuggled up close to him for one more brief moment. “Be careful,” she whispered.

“Always.”

With that, he got dressed and opened the door to leave. Their lips met for a final touch and then he closed the door behind him as he left. A single tear ran down Angel's face as she watched him go.

After a few moments of watching the ceiling fan above her turn slowly on its axis, and daydreaming about how her life would be different if Adam had a 'normal' job, she decided to get dressed and go home. Hopefully her sister was asleep and she wouldn't have to face her until morning. It's not that she hated her or anything. Jordyn had her own ways about her. She just dealt with things differently, and it was very hard for Angel to understand sometimes.

Chapter 5

The alarm woke Jordyn with a start.

“No, God, please no,” was the plea that slurred sleepily out of her mouth as she hit the snooze button, “just another few minutes.”

A night of total restlessness-tossing and turning constantly- had left her exhausted. Horrible visions and nightmares had haunted her dreams the entire night. Unseen foes had waited at the edge of the darkness in her mind, ready to spring upon her and devour her in her sleep. More than once she had bolted up in bed, wide-eyed and terrified, trying to escape the enemies in her dreams.

She turned over, trying to catch those last few elusive moments that would somehow rejuvenate her. But as the alarm went off again, she resigned herself to the fact that any hope of sleep now was pure fantasy.

Slowly she dragged herself out of bed and staggered groggily through the hallway. The door to her mother’s room was open, revealing an unwrinkled bed. She continued toward the living room, frowning in disgust as she looked at the empty couch.

“Well, I certainly hope you enjoyed yourself last night, mother,” she said out loud. Disgust filled her eyes just as much as it did her voice.

She looked at the clock on the wall and realized that she needed to pick up the pace if she was going make it on time for her first class.

Knowing that mom wasn’t going to be much support, Angel had persuaded Jordyn to think about the future and try to make something out of herself. Reluctantly, after numerous counseling sessions, most of which Angel had been the primary speaker, Jordyn had agreed-almost just to shut her sister up-and entered the fall semester at the community college. For some reason, probably a strong lack of desire, she found it difficult to make it to class on time. Professor Williams would be pissed if she were late for his literature class one more time. And with Professor Williams you never quite knew what reaction to expect. He was like a Jekyll-and-Hyde, almost as if multiple personalities lived inside that dronish brain of his.

Quickly Jordyn brewed a fresh pot of coffee and made her way to the bathroom. One look at the face staring back at her in the mirror told her that she looked like shit. Dark circles enveloped her eyes, making them seem like ghostly caverns on her face, while her orange and black hair wound its

way over her head in a dozen different directions in a manner that would have made Medusa proud. She was still half-asleep as she stripped off her clothes and stepped into the shower.

The water felt incredible as it cascaded over her body, the pulsating jets massaged the tension away. She closed her eyes, absorbing the moment and letting the troubles of last night wash themselves away. The sweet smell of lilacs helped breath life back into her, as she gently spread the lather over her entire body. Slowly she felt renewed and ready to face whatever troubles today might bring.

Angel awoke to the sound of running water. Glancing at the clock on her nightstand beside the bed, she figured it was Jordyn getting ready for school, although a little bit of her hoped that mom had come home and was actually trying to resemble a normal human being.

Her first class didn't start for another two hours, so she wasn't in any kind of a hurry. As she lay there, staring at the ceiling, memories of the past came creeping in as they always did, threatening to cause Angel to start the day on a very sour note.

She sighed as she turned on her side and looked at the painting that hung on the wall to her left: a beautiful, rich landscape, with full rolling hills and lush greenery. The sun was just peeking its head above the purple mountains in the distance.

Her mom had painted this picture for her a long time ago.

At one time, her mom had been a promising artist. With seeming ease she was able to transform a blank canvas into a brilliant masterpiece. The vibrancy of her colors made the subjects dance before the viewer's eyes. Everyone was moved when they looked upon her creations, for you could tell that a little piece of her soul went into each one.

She had even had a couple of showings at local galleries. The results were spectacular, and everyone was very impressed with the quality of her work. At one show, she even sold one of her paintings for almost \$5,000. A large celebration had followed, promising great things for the future.

Sadly, those days were gone now. Mom's paint had all dried up, the bristles on her brushes were rock hard, and her sketchbooks were buried in

dust. All of her energy and inspiration had left, and Gabrielle was an artist no more.

Everything was different now. Life had become a meaningless void in which all hope had been lost. They had all gone through a tough time, and each one had dealt with the incident in their own way.

Jordyn started hanging out with the wrong crowds. Bikers and skinheads became close acquaintances of hers, and her defiance grew. Jewelry adorned nearly every part of her body, as well as a number of tattoos. One in particular, a Chinese dragon with its body coiled in a tight spiral, covered almost her entire back. Skirts and dresses turned into jeans and leather. Authority was something to scoff at, not obey. And Mom wasn't very thrilled when Jordyn spent her hard-earned college money on a 1975 Harley Roadster.

One person in particular, Anthony-how Angel hated that name-had turned Jordyn on to the drug scene. They started first smoking pot, and then worked their way to a little coke once in a while. After that they got heavy into ecstasy.

Everyone knew that a big part of this was just so Anthony could get inside Jordyn's pants. Of course he succeeded quite frequently. A number of times Angel had walked in on them screwing wherever they thought was appropriate: the sofa, the kitchen table, on the hood of the car in the garage.

But things had gone too far one time. Jordyn had missed her period one month. Anthony had become furious and gotten a little out of hand. Somehow he thought it was all Jordyn's fault, and that he had nothing to do with it whatsoever.

A pregnancy test had come out positive, sending Anthony into a violent rage while he was at the house one day. A number of expensive items found themselves smashed to pieces as he hurled them across the living room, accompanied by numerous vulgar curses and threats. Once he had exhausted his supply of ammunition, he rushed at Jordyn and grabbed her forcibly by the neck. A swift backhand to the side of her face sent her sprawling to the floor.

Looking down at her cringing in fear, he shook his finger at her. "Don't even think about having that baby, bitch. If you do, I swear I'll kill both of you."

With that he stormed out of the room.

A stabbing pain started in Jordyn's midsection soon afterward, as she lay sobbing on the living room floor. This was followed shortly by very painful and intense cramps in her lower abdomen, and then the blood started to flow. Like a dam bursting open, blood pooled out on the floor beneath her.

Mom had just walked through the door and rushed to Jordyn's side. Frantically she called 9-1-1, and an emergency team arrived within three minutes.

Involuntary abortion is what they called it—a miscarriage in normal terms.

"I'm sorry, Mom," Jordyn said sadly, as she looked into her mother's eyes, "For everything."

"It's ok, baby," she replied softly as she held her daughter's hand tightly and kissed her gently on the forehead.

In some respects this was a small turning point for both of them. Unfortunately it usually takes a tragedy to bring a family back together again. But the end result is what's important sometimes. And if something bad happens that prevents something worse from happening, in that case, it's for the best.

The doctors had decided to keep Jordyn at the hospital overnight, just for observation. Mom stayed the whole night with her in her room, and when Jordyn woke up, she found her curled up on a chair next to her bed, the way a mother should.

Of course, Anthony never bothered to show his face again. That was okay with Angel. He was nothing but a big loser. After such a close call, he decided that he and Jordyn were finished, and she never saw him again.

Of course Jordyn was upset at first.

It's funny how some women can twist and turn even the most despicable excuse of a man, until in their own mind, something in him actually resembles something good. Never mind the fact that he physically abused her. Never mind the way he verbally assaulted her. Never mind the emotional anguish he put her through. Somehow she found in her mind something redeeming about him, and she clung to this as if it were her sole prized possession in this world.

All anyone could hope for, as Jordyn's friend or family, was that sooner or later she would be able to see things clearly. Angel had hoped and

prayed that it wouldn't be later.

Angel, on the other hand, just acted as if everything was fine; that this was all just a bad dream. Soon they would all wake up and go about their normal, everyday lives.

She went about her everyday business, pretending nothing was wrong, refusing to accept the fact that her dad was really gone. She even made up a story in her head-that dad had jumped out of the car before it went into the river; that he had hit his head on a rock and couldn't remember who he was, but someday he would remember and come back to them. She did everything she could to deny the fact that their family lay broken, for the entire world to see.

Luckily for her, that's when she met Adam. He was the recently-promoted detective in charge of their dad's case. Sure he was a little older than her, nine years to be exact. Maybe that was one of the things that had attracted her to him. He wasn't some immature, horny little boy like everyone else at school. He was mature, responsible.

He had spent numerous long hours searching for any kind of a clue to find out exactly what had happened. Every avenue had been investigated, from dad's job as an investment banker- thinking maybe some irrational investor on the losing end of his investment may have sought some form of retribution; to thinking maybe he had simply been drinking and had run off the road.

But in the end, dad was gone, and no answers were found. Adam felt horrible. His first assigned case and he had failed. All he could do was try to comfort everyone and help them through this.

Then, against the advice of everyone else at the station, he asked Angel out to dinner one night, just as friends. She accepted, and instantly they felt a connection. They started seeing each other more and more, until they came to the conclusion that they were both terribly in love with each other. He was her knight-in-shining-armor. He protected her from all that was bad in this world. She knew in her heart, with all certainty, that it would last forever.

Then there was mom. Dad's death had hit her the hardest. She was but a shell of a woman without him by her side. Immediately she sank into a deep, dark depression. That was understandable, to an extent.

How she had loved him! He was everything to her. He filled her life

completely. When he died a large part of her died too.

Everyday was worse than the one before. Sometimes she would stay in bed all day, refusing to get up, even to eat. Other times she actually carried herself to the living room where she would stare blankly at the television set. And occasionally she spoke to them, usually muttering something barely audible and mostly incoherent.

This continued for almost two years, until Jordyn and Angel had had enough. Even though their dad was dead, they were alive. They needed their mother. Jordyn's miscarriage had awakened something inside her. She grew to resemble just a little bit of their mother of old. But sadly this didn't seem to last all that long. So they proceeded to take steps necessary to help her recover.

Somewhere in between all the therapy, drugs, doctors, and hypnosis, they brought mom to the place where she was now: someone searching to find what she once had. Unfortunately it was usually with either a total stranger or a half-empty bottle.

Sighing to herself, Angel rolled out of bed. Her bedroom was immediately across from the living room and adjacent to her mother's room. So she knew immediately when she opened her door that her mom hadn't come home last night.

Oh well, she thought. No use getting upset again. It's not like this is the first time she's done this, and it probably won't be the last.

She made her way to the kitchen where she smelled the rich, lively scent of fresh brewed Columbian coffee. Groggily she poured herself a cup. Her senses began to awaken as the strong aroma wafted to her nose and she began to sip slowly.

Jordyn had finished her shower and was drying her hair as she walked into the room. She saw Angel sitting at the table and both knew what the other was thinking.

"Hey, sis," Jordyn said quietly. "Listen, I'm sorry about last night. I didn't mean what I said."

"It's okay Jordyn," Angel replied. "I've learned to ignore most of what you say anyway."

That brought a little chuckle out of both of them. "I think both of us are just a little stressed out right now. There's been a lot of shit going on. Between school and Mom, it's hard not to be on edge. Plus I had kind of a

funny feeling about last night that something wasn't quite right."

Jordyn looked into her sister's eyes, "I know, I had it too. But you know Mom, always one for the dramatic; always keeping us guessing."

A tear started to well up in Jordyn's eye.

Angel reached out to wipe the tear from her sister's face. "Yeah, I know, mom, the drama queen." Jordyn held Angel's hand tightly, almost afraid to let go.

"Hey, I have an idea," Jordyn said suddenly. "How about if we ditch school today?"

"We can't do that," exclaimed Angel. "You're already on Professor Williams' shit list as it is."

Professor Williams- now there's one for books. A case for the loony bin, for sure. Not only did his appearance make him look ridiculous on a regular basis, complete with a worn plaid blazer, an obnoxious bow-tie that apparently came in a large assortment of offensive colors, and a mop of disheveled hair that seemed to have been thrown on top of his head randomly and glued there; picture also a strong case of paranoid schizophrenia, mixed with obsessive compulsive behavior, combine that with pure ignorance, and you get the worst teacher in college history: Professor Donald Williams.

Both of them had observed him a number of times in the school parking lot, checking four or five times to make sure the lights were off in his car. Jordyn had spied him talking very vigorously to himself one day when the door to his classroom had been left open a crack, a closer peek inside had affirmed her suspicions that he had indeed been alone.

"Williams can go fuck himself, as far as I'm concerned. Besides, he's a bore anyway."

"Ain't that the truth," Angel laughed.

"Plus, I'd rather spend the day with you," Jordyn said as she looked somberly into her sister's eyes.

Angel reached out and touched the side of Jordyn's face. She could feel the pain and anguish coursing through Jordyn's being. She came over and embraced her sister tightly, forming a bond that no force on earth could separate. They held each other for a long time, feeding off of each other's power and energy, renewing their own strength, and resolving to themselves that they would get through this.

Unfortunately, both of them were oblivious to the television set in the other room showing the scene of a gruesome murder last night.

Chapter 6

They spent the day wrapped in each other's arms, almost as if they were protecting each other from the outside world. For long moments they just lay there, close to each other. Sometimes they talked softly about the past and the way things used to be. They watched television for a while, and played a couple of games. But they would always go back to reminiscing, to the thoughts of days past; the way things used to be.

Regardless, they knew they always had each other.

Finally, as the day began to wind down and dusk was approaching, Angel got up, grabbed her purse and headed for the door.

"And where do you think you're going," Jordyn asked defensively.

Noticing the tone in her voice, Angel glared back at her. "I'm going to Adam's. Why?"

Jordyn rolled her eyes. "I should have guessed. Adam this, and Adam that. Everything's about Adam. I thought that maybe, just for once, we could spend an evening together. But I guess I was wrong."

Angel couldn't believe what she was hearing. Her jaw dropped in astonishment, "Adam's my boyfriend, Jordyn. I'm supposed to spend all my time with him. That's the way a relationship works. And, in case you've forgotten, we're getting married soon...plus, we just spent all day together."

Then it dawned on her- Jordyn was jealous. She was jealous of Adam, and wouldn't admit it. Angel softened a little. "Look, I'll only be gone for a short time."

"All right, if you have to. Just be careful. I couldn't live if I lost you too."

"Me neither," Angel replied as she headed out the door.

For hours Jordyn lay on the couch flipping through the channels one by one. It's funny how some days, with over a hundred channels to choose from; she still couldn't find anything on worth watching.

After a time, the channels seemed to blend together into a pooling mass of digital ooze as Jordyn's eyes became heavy and the sleep-witch cast

her curse down upon her.

A loud creaking noise jolted her from her sleep. Or had she dreamt it? She had been dreaming of some horrible creature-something tormented and twisted, and it had been chasing her, reaching out for her, eager to snatch her up from the murky darkness in which she ran. Or was it calling to her for help? She wasn't quite sure, for the snarled growl that issued from its mouth seemed to be followed by a pleading cry of agony. But a feeling of sheer terror had consumed Jordyn. She knew that it wanted her, and she had been running for her life, desperate to escape the wraith that was after her. Just as it about to grab her with its razor sharp claws, she forced herself awake.

She sat on the couch shaking uncontrollably for a long time, and then, as the fear subsided, she realized that she was covered in sweat. Her tongue felt like a huge cotton ball and her mouth was dry as a bone. Snow covered the picture on the television in a hypnotic pattern, and she pressed the button on the remote to turn off the loud static.

“How could I sleep through that?”

She got up and headed to the bathroom for a drink of water, hoping the cool liquid would calm her nerves. Her eyes still half closed, she stumbled her way through the hallway. After turning the light on, she ran the faucet and splashed her face with water. The water felt refreshing as it fell down her face and dripped off her chin. Only after looking up into the mirror was she horrified to see blood splattered everywhere; on the walls, on the ceiling, on the mirror looking back at her.

She turned in terror to see a mutilated corpse lying in the bathtub. It was a young woman with blond hair and cold, dead, blue eyes. Her right arm dangled lifeless over the side of the tub. A small puddle of blood had formed on the floor below the hand that seemed to be pointing straight down to Hell. Her clothes had been ripped to shreds, like she had been fighting feverishly to escape whoever had done this to her, whoever had viciously stripped her life away like a wild animal devouring fresh meat.

But one thing was even more frightening than the carnage staring back at her; she looked kind of familiar. And Jordyn realized it was their next door neighbor.

A low hiss suddenly issued from the air around her. Instant terror overcame Jordyn. Paralyzed by fear, she stood there and did the only thing she could do-she screamed.

Quickly, icy fingers closed around her neck, cutting off her voice. Something like a knife could be felt puncturing her flesh. Blood poured from the wound in her neck.

As darkness descended upon her, she glanced up and saw in amazement who the attacker was.

“Hello, daughter,” the creature whispered softly. “I hope you didn’t worry about me too much.”

A sinister laughter filled the air as Jordyn looked into the face of death. The eyes that looked back were ones she had seen a thousand times before- eyes that at one time held compassion and love for her. This time the eyes of her mother were filled with something sinister. Those same eyes watched the life slip from Jordyn’s body.

Angel reached Adam’s apartment about 8:15, just as he was heading out the door. The warm air that had previously occupied the night sky immediately turned cold. Hurriedly she jumped out of her car and ran up the walk toward him.

“Adam, please don’t tell me that you have to go again.”

“I’m sorry, Angel, but I have to. It’s important.”

“You and that damn job of yours!” She knew instantly that she had made a mistake.

“Hey, you knew going into this who I was and what I did. And that my ‘job’ was the most important thing in my life.”

“I know,” she said softly, as she tried to get her emotions under control. “It’s just that I get so worried sometimes, that something might go wrong one day and you could get hurt...or worse.”

Adam grabbed her and held her close. “Listen, nothing’s going to happen to me, okay? I’m too stubborn for that.”

His strong arms always had a way of calming her down. “That’s for sure.” she stated quietly, as she tried to get hold of herself.

She changed the subject, hoping it would ease her mind a little. “By the way, what happened on your call last night?”

“Nothing much. Turned out that our witness was nothing more than some homeless wino who couldn’t even remember his own name. Go

figure. But listen, Hun. I have to go. Now. The sergeant said it was urgent. I'll call you as soon as I can."

He then kissed her quickly on the lips and jumped into his car. She winced slightly at the sound of his siren as he sped off. She watched him as he vanished into the horizon. Angel couldn't shake the feeling that she would never again feel those precious lips touching hers.

Since she was already here, she decided to go in and fix something to eat. With a large ham sandwich propped up on her lap, a bag of chips at her side, and a cold beer on the end table next to her, she turned on the television. Not exactly the kind of date she was looking for, but it would do.

Chapter 7

Adam arrived downtown moments later. As he stepped out of his vehicle he looked around to ascertain the crime scene. He was standing in a dimly lit alley located directly behind a dilapidated apartment building, in a very seedy part of town. *Not surprising that something horrible would happen here*, he thought.

“What’ve we got, Joe?”

“Some torn clothing, a woman’s purse scattered on the ground, and a whole lot of blood. But no body,” Joe stated. “The lady who saw the attack is inside the squad car. She’s shaken up pretty badly, Adam. She said she could hear the victim’s blood curdling screams and watched as the attacker ripped her apart. She then ran and called the police. She said that when she got back to her window the man and his victim were gone.”

“Did the lady see the attacker clearly?” Adam asked.

“Kind of. It was pretty dark. She said that he had long black hair and was wearing a long black trench coat.”

“God, that could be almost anybody. You also said there was a woman’s purse found. Where is it?” Adam asked.

“Over there, on the trunk of the car. We found her wallet still inside, so it doesn’t look like she was mugged. We haven’t gone through it yet, though. We’re still looking around the area to see if we can come up with a body. My guess is that she didn’t want to put out for someone, so they let her have it. Or maybe it was a drug deal of some kind? Who knows?”

“Give me a minute to go through the purse and then I’ll talk to the witness.”

After putting on some rubber gloves, Adam went over to the purse and began rummaging through it. All the normal female things were there: makeup, hairbrush, perfume. Then he found a small tan zippered pouch. Careful not to smear any possible fingerprints, he unzipped it slowly. A handful of cards spilled out. A couple of credit cards, an insurance card, a video membership. And then his jaw dropped when he saw the name on the I.D.

“Oh my god!” Adam cried out as he sank to his knees. Gabrielle Ferrotte’s name rocketed to his eyes with the force of a nuclear missile. He was struck numb in an instant. His mind raced frantically. He had to call

Angel immediately.

“Are you okay, Adam,” asked Joe.

Adam’s face had turned white as a sheet. “It’s Gabrielle! Oh my God, it’s Gabrielle!”

He was shaking visibly now. To imagine his future mother-in-law being mutilated by some madman was more than he could bear. His stomach convulsed violently as he spewed his insides out. *Have to call Angel*, he thought again.

Joe tried to calm him down, to no avail. “I’m sorry, Adam. Look, maybe she got away. Remember, there’s no body here. I’ll call and have someone check all the hospitals. Maybe somebody found her.”

But Adam already knew somehow that Gabrielle didn’t get away. He knew that somewhere her body lay, torn and mangled. Somewhere, someone had violently ripped the life from her.

Adam picked up his cell phone. What was he going to say? How do you tell someone their mother has been brutally murdered? How do you tell your girlfriend, the love of your life, that her mother is gone forever?

He was shaking profusely as his fingers fumbled for the buttons. He tried to punch in the right numbers but couldn’t control his hands.

Finally he took a deep breath to try to get himself under control a little and dialed his apartment, hoping that Angel was still there. After letting it ring a few times he hung up. He guessed that she must have gone home. He tried her house and the line was busy. *Who in the hell are you talking to at this hour, Jordyn?* He was getting frantic. He couldn’t reach Angel’s cell phone, either. She must have forgotten to turn it back on before she left his apartment.

He jumped up and ran to his car. “You take care of this here, Joe. I gotta go over to Angel’s. Call me if you find out anything else.”

With that he sped away, searching beyond all hope to find the right words to say, knowing there weren’t any.

Angel sat up in a panic. She spun all around, unaware of her surroundings, with a look of bewilderment covering her face. As her senses slowly returned, she realized where she was. She was still at Adam’s and

must have fallen asleep. The clock on the wall read 9:45, so she hadn't been asleep long.

What a horrible dream she had.

The details were fuzzy, but she remembered being chased; chased by something terrible and evil. She was running through a terrifying maze that seemed to go on for eternity, but led to nowhere. Every twist and turn she ran down led to another long corridor waiting like a giant behemoth to swallow her whole.

There was blood everywhere- like everything was painted with it. Now she was running through a river of blood which coursed through the maze like the river Styx. A loud sucking sound came from her feet when they lifted from the thick fluid as she ran. Her feet slid out from under her in the slippery, red substance, sending her crashing to the floor. As she lay there helpless on her back, the thing approached her. Giant tentacles, with razor-sharp claws reached out for her, ready to slice her into a thousand tiny pieces. A hideous laughter arose from somewhere inside the beast. Just as it was about to tear Angel apart, she forced herself to wake up.

She quickly jumped up and searched frantically for her keys. A churning feeling ached inside her stomach. Something's not quite right. She had to get home, make sure everything was ok. She tried to call home as she ran out the door, but the line was busy. She hoped Jordyn was talking to Mom, trying to persuade her to come home from god knows where.

She raced home, ignoring all traffic laws. Luckily no one saw her reckless driving as she weaved through the city streets at breakneck speeds. Her mind was a jumble of emotions as she drove; fear, worry, sorrow, anger, love, all of these pummeled Angel's heart at once, hitting it with the ferocity of a cyclone.

Her heart eased a little as she approached her house. Everything looked normal. The porch light was on. The front door was intact. Nothing to suggest that a nameless horror was waiting around the corner to consume her. She sighed when she saw her mom's car in the driveway, *It's about time, wench.*

She pulled in the driveway behind her mother's car and got out. After a quick inspection of the car, she determined that everything looked fine, no dented fenders or scraped paint, no flat tire and no cracked windshield, nothing to suggest that mom's disappearance was anything other than her

own irresponsibility. *Nothing to worry about*, she thought. *Just another crazy time at the Ferrotte household.*

She walked up to the front door and found it unlocked and cracked open a little. Apprehension grew in Angel as she recalled the feeling of dread that had invaded her only minutes before. Quickly she played it off as only the foolish workings of her imagination.

“Damn It, mom. Too drunk to even close the door behind you,” she said muttered as she grasped the door handle. Opening the door slowly, careful not wake anyone, she stepped into the foyer. Quietly she hung her coat up and put her keys on the small table in the hallway. Walking softly she made her way to the living room where she usually found her mother passed out on the couch. It was pitch black in the room so she switched on the light. She was startled by what she saw. Her mom was sitting on the couch with Jordyn cradled in her lap.

“Shhh,” Gabrielle whispered as she stroked Jordyn’s beautiful, long hair. The colors danced through her fingers as they methodically weaved in and out of the silky strands. “Be quiet or you’ll wake her up.”

“It’s about time you came home, Mother. You had us all worried sick. When are you going to stop all this? When are you going to start behaving like a real mom and take care of this family?”

“My precious Angel,” Gabrielle replied softly. “My dear precious Angel. I promise you that from now on I will take care of you. Things have changed dramatically, as you’ll soon find out. We will be a family again; a wonderful family, such that the world has never seen before. I assure you that things will never be the same again.”

Gabrielle paused for a moment, then a wide smile played across her face, as if she was relishing in the excitement of what was to come. “You see, my darling daughter, I have a dark secret that I’d like to share with you.”

As Gabrielle sat there stroking Jordyn’s hair, Angel saw a change in her mother’s eyes. Almost as if they were made of fire. She noticed for the first time that her mother’s skin was very pale, as white as a ghost, and that her fingernails were longer than she had ever seen them. In this light, at this strange moment, her mother looked more like a devil to her than her beloved parent who had cared for and raised her.

Gabrielle then sat up and laid Jordyn’s head carefully on the couch.

Angel let out a terrible scream as she beheld her sister's face. Her skin also was stripped of any color, while her eyes stared into the heavens, void of any resemblance of life. Blood still dripped from the massive wound in her neck where her flesh had been ripped out.

In one giant leap, Gabrielle spanned the distance between them and grabbed Angel by the throat. Utterly powerless to resist, Angel stood in total shock. This creature, which had once been their loving mother, now resembled something straight out of a horror film, complete with venomous fangs and demon claws.

"Don't you see, my darling daughter," Gabrielle hissed, "When darkness falls upon you, we will all be together again; One big happy family. A new world awaits us and we shall rule the night together."

Then her teeth sank deeply into Angel's neck. Angel could feel her life force leaving her as her blood was being drained. The last thing she could say before her life vanished was, "How could you Mother?"