



BLOOD
Revolution

GOD WARS BOOK THREE

Connie
SUTTLE

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CONNIE SUTTLE

The author's contact information may be found at the end of this book.

For Walter, Joe, Sarah S., Lee D. and Dianne J. Thank you.

And for Kathy, Beth, Albert and Lisa F. You are always in my thoughts.

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Chapter 1

Lissa's Journal

She's sleeping, now. I had to heal skull fractures. Karzac's mindspeech was relieved and grumpy at the same time. Only he might pull off those emotions in mindspeech and I wasn't sure what to make of that.

What happened? Who threw her against a wall?

I have no idea. I was hoping you'd know.

Belen is dancing around like he's drunk, though, I pointed out. He'd had some news and I was waiting for him to say what it was. He was doing the Nameless One version of a touchdown celebration in my study, and I was only waiting for Karzac to tell me my sister was all right before I demanded (as much as I could) that Belen tell me what he knew.

Your sister is fine for the moment, and as you have no idea how she was injured, I will have guards posted around her suite and outside her balcony, Karzac informed me. *Go. Do what you must. Ask Belen what you wish to know.*

Thanks, honey. I leaned forward and pulled Karzac's head down for a kiss. I had my sister back, things were looking up at the moment and I felt happy for the first time in months. Karzac's mouth settled over mine, with a promise that later, he'd be in my bed. I didn't mind that in the least.

* * *

Gavin waited outside Breanne's room until he was sure she was alone before folding inside. Lissa and Karzac had left seconds earlier, while guards took their positions outside the door and on the balcony.

"I should have done this the first time," Gavin murmured, bending down and kissing Breanne on the cheek before lifting a slender arm and tucking a teddy bear beneath it. "You saved me. You saved Lissa, and you saved my son. I can never repay those things, but should you have need, all you have to do is ask."

Breanne moaned softly as a finger trailed down her cheek. "Hush, my pretty child. Sleep now. Sleep."

* * *

"She destroyed the army?"

"Most of it, yes."

"But how?" I stared at Belen. His face was beaming so brightly I could barely look at it.

"I cannot explain it. I am the one lesser god allowed to know it. Only Breanne can recreate that event, should it become necessary, and the information will not be leaked to others. She will be hunted, now, actively."

"But you just said the army was dead."

"I did, and it is. A few individuals escaped. Most importantly, however, is that the majority of the army is gone. Their general, however, remains."

"General?" I gaped at Belen.

"Yes. That is how we describe him, but that does not adequately define what he is. Now that most of his minions have been destroyed, he will become more devious and far more dangerous."

"You're scaring me. I thought we had cause for celebration," I pointed out. I was ready to celebrate. Ready to be happy. Obviously, that wasn't to be.

"There is cause to celebrate, beloved. I feared that the army would be nearly impossible to defeat and take many lives and much of our time in a prolonged war. Your sister managed to defeat them. Now, we must turn our efforts to their commander."

"How strong is he?" I blinked at Belen.

"Even with only a few left in his command, he may still hold the power to destroy us all."

* * *

Breanne's Journal

I woke in my old bedroom on Le-Ath Veronis. My head hurt, and that wasn't a surprise. What was a surprise was that my skull was in one piece after it had come in forceful contact with one of Lissa's palace walls. A teddy bear lay in the crook of an arm, too, and I had no idea how it had gotten there.

The bear was a handsome one, and soft. I'd never had a bear. Ever. I hugged it to me and hoped the headache would disappear soon.

"Awake?" Karzac appeared from nothing beside my bed. "Don't worry, vampires have acute hearing," he grinned. "The guards outside heard you stirring and notified me."

"Why am I here?" I hugged my bear tighter.

"Because I had to heal skull fractures, that's why," Karzac's grin disappeared quickly.

"But why was I tossed back here?" I asked petulantly. Le-Ath Veronis was the last place I wanted to be. Too much pain had happened inside my sister's palace, yet that's where I'd been flung after the brief consideration of ending my corporeal self.

"Breanne, stop thinking about that fucking book." I jerked my head up at Karzac's words—and the profanity. He didn't employ it often—I knew that from past readings.

"I didn't know they took pictures," I sighed helplessly, burying my face against soft, faux fur.

"So many things should not have been," Karzac settled on the side of my bed. "So many blows should not have fallen. So many wounds cannot be healed completely."

He was right—there were scars on my spirit that would never disappear. Brief

thoughts of Hank—and Jayson—crowded my mind and I hunched my shoulders against the pain of it.

Jayson likely knew about the book, and that was hard enough to swallow. Hank usually knew whatever Jayson knew, and that meant he'd been aware of the book, too. My heart squeezed in my chest and I hyperventilated. Karzac's fingers were against my forehead quickly, and I was unconscious.

* * *

"Terry's still keeping the house up for her. He has it cleaned every three months and makes sure the lawn service is paid," Jayson sighed.

Hank sat across from Jayson in a booth at Bogey's. "It's been over two years," he muttered.

"She's probably dead," Jayson wiped a hand over his face. "The old man just blusters and makes excuses every time somebody points out that Breanne's disappearance happened right after the book was released. Barry Stokes got hit hard, too, when a copy of that letter he sent out telling Breanne he didn't want her associated with Mercy Crossings anymore was published in a competitor's newspaper."

"Your mom and dad still split up?" Hank asked.

"Yeah. Mom won't talk to Dad. She's at the Tahoe house and refuses even to talk to Dad's assistant. She asked me the other day if I missed Bree. How do you respond to that?"

"With the truth?" Hank chewed on two drink straws.

"Hell, it squeezes my heart every time I think about her. Part of me feels responsible, when I had nothing to do with that. I talked to my lawyer, too, and he says it's a good thing Bree is missing. He says the release I bugged her to sign has enough documentation behind it to indicate it may have been coerced. He also pointed out that it could end up in a really ugly trial, since Bree had no indication that the book was in the works. We misrepresented ourselves when we asked her to sign the paper."

"Is that what's worrying you? A lawsuit?" Hank's eyes darkened. Jayson hated to see that—it meant Hank was dangerously angry.

"No. Fuck, no. I wish she'd come back so I could explain. You know I didn't know about any of that shit. Mom knows it, too. At least Mom's heart is healthy and she's exercising and taking better care of herself. Maybe I could ask her to explain things to Bree if she'd just come back to us. The statute of limitations should have run out on the lawsuit, too, but Terry filed papers to extend the time period. I understand it's to protect Bree's interest in all this, but it's damned inconvenient."

"So you are worried about a lawsuit?"

"Yeah. I guess I am." Jayson's gaze held worry as he blinked at Hank. "I want things to be like they were. Before that fucking book ruined everything. If we see her again, she won't talk to us. You know that, don't you?"

"I'll do my best to convince her otherwise. Where I'm concerned, at least. You'll have to fight your own battle on this one, Rome."

"It doesn't matter—she's dead. People have been looking for her for two years. People from the government. They stopped showing up at my house nine months ago. They know she's dead, too."

"I won't give her up unless I'm given evidence," Hank growled. "I'm going home." Hank rose from the booth and stalked out of Bogey's, leaving Jayson to pay the tab.

* * *

Breanne's Journal

"Breanne?" Lissa's voice woke me. Opening my eyes, I blinked at her. What was I supposed to say? What?

"Why are you here?" I blurted. Yeah, those probably weren't the smartest first words to say to your half-sister.

"I guess I should have expected that," she sighed. "Thank you," she added, settling on the side of my bed and blinking at me.

"For what?" Yes, my manners definitely needed work.

"For saving my life. And Gavin's. Rigo's, Tony's, Gavril's."

"My asshole nephew?" Yes, Gavril, whom everyone else knew as Teeg San Geron, would likely never be in my good graces.

"Look, we all made mistakes. Some of us bigger mistakes than others," Lissa turned her gaze away and stared at the door leading to my closet. It was empty, just as it had been before. I'd never owned anything I'd worn the whole time I'd posed as my sister. It troubled me, too, that only twelve weeks had passed on Le-Ath Veronis since I'd left it behind to go to Earth in the past. So much time had gone by for me, while little had happened in the future.

I also wanted to point out that Teeg had placed compulsion on Trevor, Stellan and Kooper. They didn't remember me and probably wouldn't ever. It didn't matter—all my relationships eventually disappeared, for one reason or another. I wasn't destined to have that. My sister, on the other hand, had a plethora of mates. So many, in fact, that she had trouble keeping up with all of them.

"How's Merrill?" I asked. Yes, I liked him. He was decent, as was my half-sire, Adam Chessman.

"Merrill is amazing. Adam wants to see you soon."

"I figured as much. Look, I realize you're Queen of the Vampires and all that, but I really have no desire to bow down to any sire, no matter how nice he is. I read that crap when Gavin handed a comp-vid to me and told me to read the rules. I think I'm past all that, now."

"I don't think Adam will be demanding," Lissa began.

"I don't want anybody telling me what to do. I talked to Graegar not long ago. He told me what I am. Are you going to argue with that?"

Lissa stared at me in shock. "No." She held up a hand. "No. I wasn't aware that you knew."

"I didn't for a while. I still don't think it's sunk in, and frankly, I really don't feel comfortable here, now."

"I know you don't—I've talked to everybody. Asked questions, too. I realize this isn't easy. What I can't figure out is how you ended up back here."

"I don't have an answer to that, either. I was slapped back here—that's all I know."

"Somebody slapped you back here?"

"Yeah. I was thinking about doing away with my corporeal self, so somebody somewhere kept me from doing that. I'm sure if I read you now, I'd see that you and every other vampire from Earth have read that stupid, fucking book."

"Breanne, look, we didn't know. Nobody did. Gavin just wanders around in a daze, now, and that's not good."

"Put Rigo in charge of the Palace Guard." I said what I'd wanted to say for a while.

"Gavin's okay for that. Tony, too. It's just that he had some sort of mind cloud and things turned out badly. For you. Besides, Rigo has his hands full with all his spies."

"I know." I wanted to turn over so I wouldn't have to look at Lissa. Why had things come to this? Would I ever be comfortable around my sister? Probably not.

"He may want to apologize," Lissa began.

"Not interested."

"Does this mean you won't come to dinner tonight?"

"I was never asked to come to dinner, as you put it. Gavin would have let me starve before he'd allow it. He tried that, actually."

"I know." Lissa rose and walked away from the bed. I struggled to sit up, eventually working two pillows behind my back to make that achievement more comfortable. "Look, I know that still hurts you. I know it doesn't mean much to say he was affected by a mind cloud. After seeing that book, I understand how you distrust everybody who has ever mistreated you."

I almost snorted at her statement. Distrust was such a tame word. We shared some things, my sister and I. We both knew what it was like to be beaten by an angry, crazed human bent on destroying what they perceived as the source of all their problems.

She'd had a mother who loved her, however. I'd never had parents. I wanted to shudder, too, at that thought—of my first meeting with Griffin—when he'd dismissed me as nothing. I'd trembled and worked not to gape as I'd stared at my father. Would I ever consider him a parent? No. My grandfather, too, had stood next to Griffin and dismissed me just as easily. I wanted to weep at the memory.

"I know my mother protected me from a lot of blows," Lissa said softly. She'd wandered to my window to stare at the constant darkness blanketing Lissia.

"I know that, too."

"Do you want to meet Griffin again? He knows he has another daughter, now. I'll allow him to visit if you'd like."

"I don't want to see him. Or Wylend, either."

"I understand." I watched Lissa's head nod as she continued to gaze out the window. "He's had so many chances, and he hasn't delivered on any of them."

"He's shut all that off," I sighed. "He was tortured before he came to the Saa Thalarr. Maybe he's afraid to feel, now. That doesn't make me want to see him, though."

"I think he feels for Amara."

"Perhaps."

"Do you think he knows you saw all those things in him? I can't read him and haven't ever been able." Lissa turned to look at me this time, her curiosity almost tangible.

"I doubt he has any idea," I snorted and flung covers back. At least my headache was gone—Karzac was a miracle worker in my opinion.

"There's something else," Lissa sighed.

"What's that?"

"Ashe wants to see you. He says you may be able to help him with something."

"Not interested."

"I understand your first meeting wasn't ideal," Lissa began.

I was ready to leave—too many uncomfortable subjects had been brought up and I didn't want to talk about any of them. "I guess I have to borrow clothes again," I muttered. "I don't own any, here."

"What?" Lissa blinked in shock.

"I had to wear your stuff last time. Rathik Erwin stole my money and Gavin certainly felt no guilt about not giving me anything."

"I'll take you shopping."

"No. I can do this myself." I did. Just as the Larentii could do. I collected atoms and clothed myself in jeans and a plain T. Canvas shoes covered my feet as my sister watched in alarm. "See—not your problem." I held out my arms. "I'm not coming to dinner. I can get my own." Snatching my bear from the bed, I disappeared as Lissa called my name in desperation.

Chapter 2

The General studied his lieutenant carefully. Considered killing his current body, too, for the grievous mistake he'd made, sending half a million rogue godlings after one of the Mighty. Somehow, the one they'd pursued managed to destroy the godlings completely, when he'd have said that feat was impossible. Still, he didn't know exactly how it had been accomplished, or whether, in truth, they'd actually been destroyed.

"Perhaps it will be as it was with you before," the General mused aloud. "You were confused for days after being in close proximity to one of our enemies. We may see them straggling in before long, with little recollection of what happened."

"That is my hope," the lieutenant nodded vigorously.

"If they do not," the General went on, "perhaps I shall find a way to punish you for your mistakes. You should have instructed many to follow cautiously. The most powerful, certainly, should have been held back. We have no way of knowing how much power the Mighty have gathered or how well they understand what they are. Until we know these things, they are more than dangerous."

More nodding followed the General's words, and the lieutenant swallowed nervously. He liked his current body. It suited him and he had no desire to lose it. "I have assignments for you and your remaining minions," the General added.

"Yes?" the lieutenant looked up eagerly. He'd certainly do better on this assignment so he'd be in the General's good graces again.

"I have a list prepared—of those who have influenced the timelines in favor of our enemies. Only a few, mind you, but the impact has been great. I desire that you devise a way to kill them discreetly, so the enemy won't suspect. For some, you will be required to traverse the timelines to accomplish your assignments. Employ the Sirenali we have stationed throughout, and any others under your control. Allow them to do as much as possible, to keep the Mighty away from us and our remaining army."

"It will be as you say," the lieutenant readily agreed.

* * *

Breanne's Journal

The house in San Rafael hadn't changed at all. I landed there two years after I'd disappeared from Earth. It was my house, after all, and the only real home I had.

People had short memories, too, so I was hoping that they'd been distracted by something else and didn't remember much about that stupid book.

I wanted to shout at Jayson, still. He and his father had ruined everything for me. I'd never be able to face Hank again, thanks to Rome Enterprises. Whether Jayson knew about the book or not, his family had profited from it—I'd read that easily in Lissa's face.

The book had been a bestseller for months and netted Rome Enterprises nearly half a billion in profits. I guess Jayson could afford a few more cars at my expense—I wanted to weep from the callous betrayal. Hank (and everybody else on planet Earth) had seen photographs of my tortured, nude body. They'd bought the books by the truckload, and eagerly swallowed up the horror of my early life.

That wasn't the full extent of it, either. The book didn't cover the things Joyce Christian said while she'd beaten and tortured me—nobody knew about that. She'd always sent the housekeeper away on an errand while the dirty work was accomplished.

Sighing, I shoved the memories away and attempted to rein in my emotions. There was one more place to go before I settled in and attempted to put myself back together. I misted toward Terry Johnston's office.

* * *

"Terry, I don't want to talk about it. I just need updated credit cards—the old ones are expired," I muttered as I sat in front of his desk.

"Breanne, I've already done that," Terry slid a thick, sealed envelope across the desk toward me. "There's a new phone in there, too; I bought a new one after your old one ended up in deep water."

"Please tell me somebody didn't go to the trouble of pulling it out of there," I mumbled, feeling embarrassed.

"Yep. Government agency, I heard. Somebody was worried about you, I know that much. Kept showing up here, asking if I'd heard anything. They finally stopped about nine months ago."

"I want to kick Rome ass," I muttered angrily.

"So do I. I think you have a viable lawsuit against them, if you decide to sue. I've tolled the statute of limitations, if that's what you want to do."

"Terry, what do you think that might do for me, besides telling everybody where I am again? I want nothing to do with that. I just want to be left alone."

I did—peace and quiet sounded really good to me. PTSD is a strange animal. When you think you have it beaten, something comes along and triggers it again. It's the way things seemed to happen for me.

I just hoped Jayson and Trina never noticed I'd come home—I had no desire to see anybody. After all, I'd just walked away from my sister, and she did want to see me. Wanted to know me, too, and I was too numb and upset to allow it.

"Miss Hayworth," Terry said sternly, his dark-brown eyes quite serious as he blinked at me. "You cannot let that ruin your life. Get help if you need it. I was hoping that's what you were doing while you were gone. I kept hoping you were alive, too, since no body was ever found, but I was beginning to worry."

"I know. I didn't mean to worry you. You've always been there for me, and I appreciate that."

"You pay me well for my services," Terry sighed. "But that's not all it is. I like you. I can't say the same thing about a lot of my clients."

"People are different," I shrugged.

"Your car may need a new battery—it hasn't been started or moved since you disappeared."

"I know. I'll look into that. I think it has less than a thousand miles on it."

"You don't drive much."

"Yeah."

"I've gotten payments from Hank Bell—the entire loan—with interest, has been paid and he's expanded the club. You still own half—he continues to refuse my offer to sell your half back to him."

"I don't care anymore. Send the money he paid to a good charity, Terry. I don't want any of it."

"You think he knew about the book, too?"

"Possibly. He and Jayson Rome are good friends. What one knows, the other generally does, too. That's the way things usually turn out for me." I rose and lifted the envelope off Terry's desk. "Thanks for this, Terry. Give yourself a raise." I walked out of his office.

* * *

The grocery store had remodeled, and I couldn't find anything. That meant grocery shopping took twice as long as it should have. That would teach me to jump forward two years in time, expecting everything to remain the same in the meantime. I took the liberty of disguising myself, too, while I shopped. I had no desire to be recognized by anyone.

Was I depressed? In truth, I was so depressed I could barely move. It didn't matter—I'd worked under more difficult circumstances in the past. I pushed myself to do what needed to be done, whether I felt like it or not.

Lissa hadn't brought up the subject of what I'd done or where I'd been, either, and I was grateful. I was afraid I'd voice my fears aloud—that although I'd gotten rid of a large number of rogue gods, I felt I hadn't gotten all of them.

In addition to that fear, I worried that some of the remaining rogues were the worst of the lot. I had to work through my depression in a hurry, if I expected to have enough energy to deal with anything else that might come along. I wanted to shiver at the thought that I had absolutely no idea what form that might take or whether I'd survive it.

A cup of coffee was in order after I put groceries away, and I drank it on the back patio. Fog rolled in, obscuring San Rafael Bay below, and I watched as it enveloped the hill where my house lay. Was it wrong that I hadn't even glanced toward Jayson's house at the top? I felt no guilt over it.

* * *

Lissa's Journal

"I can't keep her here. What makes you think I can?" I blinked at Ashe in confusion. He and Trajan had both come. Trajan was prepared to go to wolf and growl for some reason, and I couldn't figure that out.

"What about Chessman? He might have convinced her to go to NorthStar at least," Ashe pointed out patiently.

"She said she didn't want a sire. She likes Adam, but she didn't want that. What was I supposed to say?" I shook my head at the Mighty Hand.

"I didn't even feel it when she pulled all those rogues into her wake," Ashe shook his head in disbelief.

"You know what happened to them?" I asked.

"Yeah. I know. It's not information I feel comfortable telling," he replied.

"Belen said the same thing. He said he couldn't say."

"Better that way. Much, much better," Ashe sighed. "Any idea where she went?"

"None. Never knew where she was before. Probably wouldn't go back there anyway. That would be crazy unless she wanted somebody to find her."

"True."

* * *

Breanne's Journal

A month passed. I read. Bought a computer and did research. Drank coffee and hot chocolate. Lost weight anyway. Took a chance at times and misted to Francie's for a veggie sandwich if I didn't feel like cooking. I always kept an eye open for Jayson and Hank. So far, I'd managed to avoid them.

I left the lights off at night, too, so Trina and Jayson wouldn't know I was at the house. As a vampire, I could see well enough at night without light of any kind. I'd only used them before because it was a comfort. Too many times, I'd been left chained in a very dark closet, in pain and suffering greatly, so I understood comfort more than most. Now, I lived without that tiny bit of reassurance.

The television barely saw any use, either, except during news times. I always watched the news when I ate or went to bed—after making sure the blinds were tightly closed.

"Three men were killed last night after leaving the Sub-Mariner, a club in the Castro District," the news anchor announced. "While there are no signs of struggle, each man died of a slashed throat. The bodies were discovered at a vacant rental property in Oakland. Police have determined that the men died elsewhere and were later dumped at the property across the Bay."

I watched as they showed images of a two-story rent house in Oakland, with yellow crime scene tape strung around the yard. Then the images jumped to an interview with a man identified as Dale Saylor, owner of the Sub-Mariner.

"I knew all of them, and this is horrifying," Dale Saylor said. I could tell easily that he really was upset. I toyed with the idea of reading him before dispensing with that notion. Several people stood behind Dale Saylor. I paid little attention to them until the camera moved slightly to catch someone standing nearby.

Hank Bell stood there, arms crossed over his chest in a familiar gesture. He looked angry. I blinked at him for a moment before turning back to Dale Saylor and reading everything I could from him. Dressing in record time, I folded space toward San Francisco.

* * *

Hank was doing very well. Dom Bell's now took up at least half the block as I watched the club's name blink in (much larger) green neon over a newly bricked façade. Looked like he'd bought the businesses on either side plus the accompanying apartments overhead, too. I didn't want to think what those apartments might be used

for. Yeah, I used to live right over the original bar. He'd expanded, so business was obviously good.

As I stood across the street, watching a few people walk in and out, six who exited the building caught my attention. Three women were on leashes and a dark limo pulled up outside as they waited on the sidewalk. Yes, my stomach turned at the sight of three women who'd allowed themselves to be leashed like dogs. I shivered and recalled Hank's explanation—this was their way of gaining permission to do what they craved. They wanted to be controlled. I shivered again.

One of the men spoke to the driver in Russian before shoving the girl he held inside the back of the car. "Drive to the house in Sausalito," was the terse command. The words contained a threat—a promise of violence to come. I was about to see what that threat involved, and if it involved extreme physical harm against any of the women, well, compulsion might be placed and those three men might become docile chimps. Yeah, I wasn't in a charitable mood.

Misting inside the car, I hovered over the heads of the three women, all of whom were squeezed onto the limo's back seat, too obedient to look up at the men who'd convinced them to play. I lowered my shields and read all three men. I didn't bother with the driver—he was a flunky and only doing what he was told. If I'd had blood running through physical veins at the moment, it would have run like ice water. These men—all three of them, bore an obsession.

An obsession meant I couldn't read past it to find the intent of the one who'd placed it, but they'd been ordered to find three women at Hank's bar, and then drive them to a specific house in Sausalito, where all would be gruesomely murdered. It didn't take a genius to add two and two—looked like somebody had it out for Dale Saylor and Hank Bell, and this was a way to expose and ruin both.

Shoving those thoughts aside and hoping that the one who'd placed the obsession was waiting in Sausalito, I did my best to calm down while I took the forty-minute trip as mist, following the would-be murderers and their victims.

The house was on the southern edge of Sausalito. A much better home than the one I'd seen in Oakland, it was single story with a well-maintained lawn. Misting through the roof of the vehicle, I waited for the women to be pulled from the back seat of the limo and hauled inside the house.

Two of the men were short and square-built, with shaved heads. I seldom used my nose, but it told me these two were brothers. My reading also told me they'd been involved in petty crime for years. Perfect for an obsession—it didn't take much to convince them to increase their activities.

The third man—taller, heavier and Russian by birth, appeared to be in charge. He ordered the driver to park the car in the garage around the side before jerking his head at the other two, who now held all three leashes. I followed as the women were led inside the house.

Murder had already taken place inside—the smell of old blood was evident, although it had been cleaned up as much as possible. A square sitting room was located right off the front door and the women were ordered to kneel near a wide doorway leading into a rectangular dining room. No furniture was inside either room—I had the idea that the house, like the one in Oakland, had been rented hastily for the purpose of committing murder.

"Remain on your knees," the Russian ordered the women. "Do not look up." His accented English was low and vulgar to my ears. All three women lowered their eyes to the floor, just like the obedient submissives they were. I watched as the Russian pulled a thin, metal knife from his boot. Well, the obsession was activating and things were about to go down unless I acted now.

It only takes a bit of power to heat metal, and the long, thin blade the Russian held became hot so quickly he swore in Russian and dropped it immediately, howling in pain. His two American flunkies rushed forward, which made things ridiculously simple for me.

No, the one who'd placed the obsession wasn't there; I'd known that the moment I misted inside the house. Only the ones I'd followed were inside. Exerting more power, I released the particles of all three men. The three women, who hadn't even looked up when a knife clattered to the floor in front of them, never saw the sparks of the men fly away. I defied anyone to convict me of a crime with no evidence or witnesses.

The driver walked into the house as the last man's sparks winked out. I materialized before the women while the driver squeaked in fear. Turning to him, I placed compulsion. "You will not remember me. Drive these women to their homes," I commanded. His eyes went blank and he nodded. I hated placing compulsion—on anybody—no matter how deserving. This situation required it.

"Now, you three," I knelt to look the three women in the eyes. The men had been choosy, selecting a blonde, a redhead and a brunette deliberately. "You will tell that man your address," I said, "and you will go home and not go out again tonight. Do you hear me? You will forget me and the three who brought you here."

They stared and nodded fearfully at me. "You may speak," I told them.

"Who are you?" the redhead's voice wobbled.

"Somebody who doesn't appreciate injustice," I replied. "Go with the driver, now. He'll deliver you safely to your homes. I have things to do." I backed away and watched as the three women rose and followed the driver out the door. I left the door of the house open when I misted away, flying as fast as I could toward my house in San Rafael.

* * *

"Charles!"

"Yes, Honored One?" Charles stood in Wlodek's study seconds later, an inquisitive expression on his face.

"Three murders occurred in San Francisco recently. I want you to track this, as all three died after their throats were cut. Should more murders transpire in the area from similar circumstances, I wish to be notified immediately." Wlodek pushed handwritten notes toward Charles, who reached out to take them from Wlodek's desk. "I received this call from one of ours in the area, and he is quite concerned about this."

"I understand," Charles nodded slightly. "I will research this right away. Anything else?"

"Bring me whatever you find. This troubles me."

"Of course, Honored One." Charles nodded respectfully and left Wlodek's office as quickly as he'd arrived.

* * *

Breanne's Journal

It didn't matter that I'd saved three women. Two others died anyway. At least these were last seen at a third club. The news described the two as a couple who had teenaged children at home. I was so angry I could spit.

These two were dumped at a house in Daly City. It looked as if they were killed after I'd taken care of the thugs the night before, so either this was a copycat crime or there was more than one team at work. More than one team wouldn't surprise me, with a Sirenali and an obsession on the loose.

Another house was shown, with more crime scene tape draped around it. With very little hesitation, I *Looked* to see where it was and turned to mist.

* * *

Scents came, which might help me find the killers. With an obsession clouding two murderers, I couldn't *Look* to get their location. I'd had to mist through the Daly City location, too, because it was still under investigation. A few investigators still wandered through the property, looking for anything they might have missed during their initial round of evidence collection. They had no idea I was there for the same reason.

While at the Daly City location, I found scents from the two murderers at the Oakland house, plus older scents from the three men I'd dispatched in Sausalito. Nobody was at the Oakland house, either, when I returned for a second time—they'd removed the crime scene tape already after gathering evidence.

I'd materialized inside the room where the bodies were found, and there was little blood. I wondered where they'd been killed, but with the clouded obsession blocking my way, I couldn't make a determination.

That meant one thing—I'd have to go looking for scents or other evidence around the clubs where these had disappeared. I knew what kind of clubs they were—the same kind Hank owned. Breathing a worried sigh, I misted home.

* * *

Here's the mail I thought you might want to see, the note read. It came in a large envelope sent by Terry. Inside were a few thank you cards from children who'd benefited from my charity. They had no idea who I was—my name wasn't attached to any of the funds, but they'd taken the time to write anyway. I wiped tears away after reading them.

At the bottom of the packet, I found another letter. This one had been addressed to me in care of Terry Johnston, Attorney at Law. Terry had opened it to read the contents, since I wasn't available for more than two years. The return address bore Mercy Crossings' logo. I pulled the letter out and began to read.

Dear Ms. Hayworth, it began. *Regarding recent events, i.e., the publication of Torture in Texas (yes that's what they'd named the fucking book), our legal department has advised us to terminate your association with the Mercy Crossings organization, as the book's impact could give our charity an unwelcome negative image.*

While we sympathize with you for any pain and suffering you may have experienced in your past, it is our hope that you will understand our position in this and accept it for what it is—an attempt to dissociate our organization from such deleterious social implications. Sincerely, Barry Stokes, Director.

Well, that spelled one thing to me—Barry didn't want to offend any contributors who might have been (or still were) Joyce Christian fans or supporters. I sighed and

folded the letter before slipping it back inside the envelope.

While I had no plans to return to Mercy Crossings—too many people would stare and whisper and I certainly didn't want that—this was a blow I hadn't expected. He hadn't even bothered to thank me for the service I'd given to the charity—in fact, he'd glossed over it altogether. Well, maybe he was a Joyce Christian fan, too. If so, I didn't need him or Mercy Crossings. At least that's what I kept telling myself as I wiped tears away.

* * *

"Opal, I'm not sure we ought to close the files on Oscar Forde and Keir Arthur," Bill sighed. He leaned back in his leather armchair and lifted an eyebrow at Opal Tadewi. "Just because we haven't seen or heard anything from them and the college girl murders have stopped doesn't mean they're not still out there, waiting to do more damage."

"I know." Opal stared at her hands. She was dressed as she usually was—comfortably—in nice jeans and a pullover shirt. "I know you still miss her," she added. "I do, too."

There wasn't any need for them to say the name—Breanne had come to be a subject they approached carefully with each other. Bill had even sent Opal to San Francisco twice—looking for any sign of Bree. They'd found nothing. Bill figured that Breanne would approach Opal before anyone else, and he'd hoped that she'd turn up.

More than two years had passed instead, and there'd been no sign. He still had Bree's crumpled cell in his desk drawer—and the suitcase from her hotel room in his closet. Those things were all he had left of her, and he held onto them as if the mundane items were the most precious things on Earth.

"Is the Vampire Council still hunting those two?" Opal changed the subject.

"I believe they're on the wanted list, but they've had no sightings either, so these two are dead or far underground. Wlodek agreed to let us know if they were found and eliminated."

"I think they left Austin the minute Bree disappeared. I just can't figure out how the two things might be connected."

"It is strange, I agree," Bill nodded. "I'm just concerned that we still may have two outlaw vampires on the loose, waiting for who knows what to happen before they start killing again."

* * *

Breanne's Journal

I waited in line at the small deli a mile from my house. The salesclerk, brown-haired, blue-eyed, pretty enough and wearing a nametag proclaiming her *Janine*, moved slowly at best, and her disinterest tried my resolve not to read her. The only reason I came to this particular shop for lunch was for their freshly made potato and leek soup.

"I'd like four servings of the potato soup to go, please," I said when I finally made my way to the counter.

"I can't do that. We only have two servings left," Janine sniffed.

"Then I'll take what you have," I said as politely as I could. I intended to make several meals out of what I was getting.

"It may be only one-and-a-half," Janine lifted the lid from the soup warmer with a

metallic clatter.

"I'll take that, then. Charge me for two servings anyway," I said. Honestly, I'd waited in line for twenty minutes and now Janine wanted to annoy me.

"All right, I'll charge you for two," Janine fiddled with keys at the register. I handed her a twenty, she handed me bills and coins back and went to dip the soup.

"Can we move a little faster?" the man behind me demanded.

"You want to come back here and help?" Janine snapped before knocking the container holding my soup off the counter and snarling angrily at the man.

I stared at the mess that was meant to be my lunch, which I'd already paid for. Well, it was the way my life was destined to be. Without a word, I turned and walked out of the deli while Janine and the man began a shouting match.

* * *

While I ate a peanut butter sandwich later, I switched on the news. A microphone was shoved in Hank's face and I blinked at him in shock. He was angry—extremely so—and not just with the reporter—I could tell by his words.

"Yes, my assistant manager didn't show up for work last night. I called the police because John is always on time and never misses a shift. I am only discovering now, through you, that his body was found near the wharf an hour ago."

"The police didn't call you?" The reporter—a young woman—feigned surprise.

"No. I assume they notified John's family first. How did you learn of the murder?"

"Through ah, well, the usual channels," she stuttered. I figured she'd gotten information through a source or listened in on police communications.

"You probably shouldn't mess with Hank right now," I spoke to the television screen. Too bad the reporter couldn't hear me.

"Are you involved in your assistant manager's disappearance?" Her question proved (to me, at least) that she had very little common sense.

"My whereabouts have already been disclosed to the police, who are in charge of this investigation, no matter how much you'd prefer to believe otherwise," Hank growled. "Where were you when my assistant manager disappeared?"

"What?" she squeaked.

"I can account for my time last night. Can you?" I almost laughed as she turned a bright pink. Yes, I dropped my shield and read her. She'd been in bed with her (married) producer. The station quickly cut to commercial while I snickered.

* * *

"Jayson, I need to hire another assistant manager. Trey can't handle everything by himself, and John's family is asking for help with the funeral as soon as the medical examiner releases the body," Hank sighed into his cell.

"I saw the ambush on television," Jayson replied. "I have no idea what that trollop thought she might accomplish by accusing you. How is John's family doing?"

"Not well. They knew where he worked and what he did, but that's about it. They didn't interfere with that, as far as I know."

"They need money?"

"Yeah—I'm planning to pay for the funeral, but John left instructions on what he wanted done with his brother, and quite a few from the community will be there."

"Will his family be able to deal with that?"

"I assume so, but this will be a private service, in case the media wants to show

up."

"You know I can't come—I can't be seen there in case reporters are parked outside," Jayson pointed out.

"Yes. I'm well aware."

"Do you think somebody's targeting the community?" Jayson turned to a new topic.

"It looks that way, doesn't it? Sometime after the funeral, I want to check out that new club. I know it's been open for six months, now, but something about this bothers me."

"I've driven by a few times—it's certainly upscale. Has valet parking, even."

"For wannabees with money?"

"Possibly. You know the subject's gotten hot the past couple of years. Too many wanting to experiment, when they don't have a clue about safety or where to start."

"Yeah. Got a call from Paul the other day. He's still working as a paramedic, and says he's seen some interesting injuries lately."

"No surprise," Jayson snorted.

* * *

"Well, he's handsome, but rude." Colbi Wayde muttered to her producer.

"Sweetheart, he shouldn't have said those things to you." Mitchell Graves, producer for the morning and afternoon local news segments, married with three children and having an affair with Colbi, muttered. "Come here. Sit on my lap." He patted his knee suggestively. "I'll tell you the best news you've heard in a long time if you do."

Mitchell, in his early forties, kept himself fit. He also felt protective of his wife—and his girlfriend.

"What did you find?" Colbi's sunny blue eyes narrowed as she sauntered toward Mitchell.

"I found," Mitchell began as he pulled Colbi onto his lap, "That Hank Bell has a co-owner for his club. It's a BDSM oriented business."

"Really? We can run with that," Colbi whispered, her eyes lighting with immediate interest. "We can drag him through the muck for being an asshole."

"Wait, you haven't heard the best part," Mitchell grinned before leaning in for a kiss. "You'll never guess who his business partner is."

"Who is it?" Colbi held her breath.

"Breanne Hayworth."

"*Torture in Texas* Breanne Hayworth? *Oh my God!*"