

~ Long Nights ~

by Windstar

As always any feedback, negative and positive, are welcome at: Adarkbow@yahoo.com.

The world you live in is a lie.

I know this; my family has known this, for as long as there has been a history with people in it, as long as there has been darkness, we have been there. Protecting you, stopping the things that would come out of the dark shadows and eat your very soul if they had a chance. This story is about a war that most humans know nothing about, a war even we, my family and I, did not know was raging until almost far too late. Here is a recounting of what happened, as truthfully as I, and others, could remember it. My Legacy to future generations of Magisters.

The First Night

The ghoul's trail led her to the alleyway a few minutes short of midnight.

Her prey was nearby. She could feel it at the edge of her senses, like a barely felt itch that tingled along the perimeter of her mind. Newspapers swirled around her as a slight breeze swept through the narrow space between old buildings, helping ease the stench for a few moments.

"I know you're here."

Her voice was swallowed by the deep shadows surrounding her. It seemed as if her statement would go unanswered, when another gust of wind clawed at her long black trench coat, whipping about the few fine strands of hair that always seemed to escape her braid.

This time though the air bore the reek of death on it.

Something shifted in the shadows to her right, more felt than seen. The hunter's fingers closed about the hilt of the sword hidden beneath the trench coat, easing the blade from its sheath.

"Magister..."

The thing that emerged from the pool of darkness had been dead for quite a while. Its jaw hung from muscles already decaying, visible through holes in flesh that was well on its way to being decomposed. The stench was fetid and choking, the hunter didn't seem to notice as she watched it calmly.

Blue fire ran along the length of the sword she held, providing just enough illumination that she could see the blood that covered the front of the ghoul's shirt. It had fed recently, which might make her job harder.

As these things went, a ghoul was not a particularly smart enemy. When its jaw opened

impossibly wide and it lunged for her she was waiting. The sword carved a blue arc through the air, slashing across in a move so smooth it looked like she was dancing.

By the time the head and body hit the ground, separately, they were both rapidly decomposing. The Magister watched closely as flesh and bone turned to dust in a matter of seconds, making certain that the ghoul was dead. A whispered word of power and the wind whistled through the buildings, sweeping away the remnants.

The tall woman stood still for a while longer, her breath white in the air in front of her, trying to sense if there were any other undead nearby; the alley was empty though. She sighed, stalking back towards the entrance to the alley. The late model SUV had been double-parked; its hazard lights casting yellow flashes across the wet pavement. Her sword was carefully placed in the passenger seat; the cell phone from her breast pocket was placed into the hands free hookup. A press of a button later, it autodialed for her, even as she started up the SUV and pulled away from the alley. The gruff voice on the other end coughed a few times before talking.

"Yeah?"

"Eric, I'm on my way back downtown. The ghoul's been taken care of."

"You have any problems, Sarah?"

She winced at the hacking coughs that followed, and waited patiently for the red light in front of her to change; the wipers an odd counterpart to the wheezing on the phone, as the light turned green the coughing subsided.

"You ok, Eric?"

"Yeah, yeah, just... another cold."

As always, Sarah didn't call him on the lie.

"Yeah, another cold. You have anything else for me tonight?"

The rapid tap of keys could just be heard through the connection.

"Nope, nothing, another quiet night."

The raven-haired woman tossed her head, using one hand to free her shoulder length hair from the intricate silver band she'd used to hold most of it back.

"It's been quiet for almost a month now."

"Ha! You say that like it's a bad thing."

"Yeah, well, the first two weeks I welcomed. It was nice to have down time, get some rest and check all the gear. Now though..."

"Now you're feeling itchy."

Making a right she nodded, not caring that he couldn't see her through the phone.

"Yeah, it's making me nervous. How many times have you known things to be this quiet for so long? I mean, Eric, this was my first time out all week. I'm starting to get worried. Even with the occasional zombie sightings over in the industrial district, it's far too quiet."

The man sighed, and the squeaking of a chair gave her the sudden image of her old friend leaning back, lacing his hands behind his head and staring at the cement ceiling above him in thought.

"No, I've never known it to be this quiet, even during the summer solstice we've had some minor problems. No use worrying about it until we find out if anything really is going on though. Where are you?"

"Just passing River Drive."

Cursing as a taxi dodged out from a non-existent yellow light and cut her off.

"I still say we should take a look at these taxi drivers."

Laughter greeted her disgruntled remark.

"You know they're harmless, no sense going after them. Look, if you're down that way, Dr. Banergee gave me a call a little while ago. He's got a strange patient that he thought we might be able to help him with. You wanna go take a look?"

The driver snorted, changing lanes and taking a left in preparation to double back the way she'd just come and head towards the hospital.

"He still working night shift at Mercy?"

"Yup, he said he'd be on call until six AM if you could stop in."

"Sure, nothing much else to do tonight might as well go see what he's got. Probably another possession case, I'll be in and out in under an hour."

"I need to learn to keep my mouth shut."

"What's that?"

Letting out a breath Sarah shook her head, not answering the tall black man who strode by her side. The sound of their footsteps echoed down the institutional hallway, she suppressed the urge to glance over her shoulder. Hospitals were some of the worst calls she got.

"I really do hope you can help shed some light on this, Ms. Mordicai."

She looked up at the British man, giving him a chiding look. As long as he kept calling her so formally she'd keep right on using her own pet name for the man.

"I keep telling you, Doc, call me Sarah. I'll do what I can. Did she have anything on her?"

The doctor nodded to the nurse on duty at the station, and she buzzed them both into the psych ward of the hospital. She'd seen enough odd things around in her past five years that the gray-haired woman didn't say a word about the visitor with him.

Holding the heavy door for her, Dr. Banerjee followed her into the next stretch of tiled hallway.

"The paramedics found her downtown in front of the Simon's department store. You know that big mirror set up they have?"

She nodded, knowing exactly where he meant, she'd been impressed by the huge mirror set up they'd put up behind a row of mannequins dressed in the upcoming spring fashions.

"Well, it seems she was screaming at her reflection and tossing stones at the windows. The cops had to help them strap her down to the stretcher, we've had to sedate her periodically."

The slightly shorter woman arched an eyebrow at that, not quite certain what this had to do with her yet. Seeing the look on her face, the elder doctor hurried to continue, knowing her sometimes-touchy patience.

"She was screaming about monsters that came out of mirrors."

That was original enough for a small spike of intrigue. It wasn't like she had a lot else to do that night after all.

"Any injuries?"

"None that we could find on her, except some cuts and scratches. Other than screaming she hasn't talked at all since we brought her in. I really don't know what to make of this one. Here she is."

The woman had been put into one of the observation rooms, the circular window in the door giving Sarah her first look at the woman huddled in the farthest corner. That she was terrified was obvious.

"Can we go in?"

The doctor shifted a bit on his feet at that, uncharacteristically nervous.

"She attacked the last doctor who tried to get a look at her."

Hazel eyes, which stood out even against her lightly tanned skin, met his and, as always, he looked away in discomfort. Usually she was wearing sunglasses, but tonight he could see the shifting colors in her irises. It was disconcerting to say the least, one moment you could swear her eyes were brown, then the next they seemed to be a pale ice blue.

"Can we go in?"

Even by her standards she was tense tonight, although he was starting to get used to the cold edge her words carried.

"Yes, but not for long."

His key pass unlocked the reinforced door, and without waiting, she slipped through, closing it right behind her before he even had a chance to follow. The woman cringed at the sound, and her head slowly rose from the folded arms on her drawn up knees that her forehead had been resting on.

My god...

The exclamation was mental only because her body was frozen in place. The woman's eyes, a blue deeper than anything that Sarah had ever thought she'd seen, pinned her to her spot. Measuring her, as if the nameless woman was judging, if Sarah were friend or foe.

"It's alright."

The words slipped passed her lips before she knew she was going to speak. They worked though, the wary regard fading from the woman's face into something that resembled hope.

"I won't hurt you."

Once more the words came without conscious thought. Ignoring the voice that was screaming inside her head asking what she was doing, the black-haired woman lowered herself down to her knees a few feet away from the other woman.

Her skin is so pale; she must burn easily in the sun.

Indeed the woman's skin was pale, an almost alabaster white, her hair was a white-golden color. Startling large, clear blue eyes watched her with intelligence, waiting for her to do something.

She reminded Sarah of a photo that had been bleached of all color, with only those blue eyes to give testament to the vibrant colors the photograph had once held.

"Can you talk?"

When that got no answer, Sarah sighed and concentrated on the woman in front of her, invoking what some called the sixth sense. Whatever name it was called, it was recognized in every culture on Earth. It was the ability to see beyond what others perceived in the world about them, seeing that which lurked under the surface of their neat and tidy existence.

Whatever she was, the pale-skinned woman was not an undead. An aura of life so powerful it made the Magister wince burned around her, giving testament to a ferocious will to live. Slitting her eyes, Sarah focused on that aura, testing and prodding it. There was nothing hidden here, the woman's terror was real, not the product of some masking spell. Other than the fact she'd never seen such a powerful aura before, even among her own family, and that was saying quite a bit, the woman seemed normal enough.

Gray eyes opened and she let out an unsteady breath, her specialty was the more offensive spells. Any of the other disciplines always took more concentration and effort on her part.

"I don't know if I can help you."

Blue eyes gazed at her trustingly.

With another sigh Sarah rose and started to shake her head, blinking and turning as she caught sight of something odd out of the corner of her eye. The wall surrounding the door she'd come in through had been torn to tatters. The padding hanging in shreds, an odd compliment to the sterile white of the other walls.

That wasn't what held her attention though.

Between the shreds of fabric, covering the entire wall, were glyphs. Carved into the cement wall, now that she could see them, she could feel the latent power in those symbols, like the slight hum of electricity in a high-tension wire.

Perhaps the most disturbing thing though, was that she recognized none of those symbols. The hesitant opening of the cell's door broke her startled gaze as the doctor poked his head inside.

"What do you think, Ms. Mordicai?"

"Call me Sarah."

The answer was automatic though and lacked her usual commanding tone, her hazel eyes wandering across the symbols.

"Are these new?"

"Are what... dear God, how did she do that!?"

While Dr. Banergee continued to wonder out loud how the silent slip of a woman had ripped through the padding and carved into the cement, Sarah dropped back to her knees in front of the patient. Blue eyes, which had not once strayed from her, stared back hopefully.

"I want to take her with me, Doc."

"I don't know if I can..."

"Doc, look, you wanted me to see if I could help you right?"

His nod was slow and a touch uncertain.

"Alright, I can't do that here. Something in my field happened to her, I'm almost certain, so let me take her with me and see what I can do."

The man's gaze returned to the carvings in the cement, and he swallowed a bit uneasily. Each of those carvings was a half an inch deep at least.

"I'll put you down as her relative, we'd better come up with a name for her."

"Gwyn."

"Gwyn?"

Sarah shrugged, not caring what he thought of the name, it fit the blonde and if there was one thing she'd learned since starting as the Magister, it was to follow her intuition.

"Yeah, put her down as Gwyn."

"I hope you know what you're doing. I'll go get her possessions and get the paperwork started."

When Sarah rose to follow him the woman surged forwards, grabbing hold of Sarah's hand and stopping her. The whisper was barely more than an exhalation of breath, but they both heard it.

"Stay.... Please?"

There was desperation in that voice, and fear. Sarah glanced at the doc, then back down to the slender, pale hand that held hers so tightly. There were no calluses from physical training on those smooth fingers, a small part of her mind noted randomly.

"Doc, come get me when you're ready. Do me a favor and see if you can get a Polaroid camera from somewhere? I want to take a few pictures of those symbols."

At his startled nod, she sat down, her usual impatience to be off and about doing her job, for now, pushed into the background by the puzzle this woman presented.

Gwyn? Why in the name of the books did I choose that name?

She never did get an answer to that question.

It was well past sunrise when they left the hospital. The forms that the doc had brought back for her to fill out had been surprisingly lengthy. Some of them had required her to make up quite a few details of Gwyn's new fictitious life.

Gwyn was now Gwyn Mercy; Sarah had taken the name of the hospital to be Gwyn's last name after racking her brains for a good fifteen minutes and not coming up with a name that seemed to suit the pale blonde. They'd no sooner gotten Gwyn into the SUV than she'd passed out in the passenger side seat.

From there it had been a tense twenty-minute drive through heavy traffic to her home. The old estate had been there for as long as the city had existed. They were above most of the city now, with only the downtown skyscrapers challenging them and the tall hill that the city people called The Mountain, for height. From the road it didn't look like much, a tall stone wall, and iron gates, which opened to a touch of a button from inside the SUV.

Past those gates though was something few even knew existed, something that Sarah's family had paid handsomely in the past to insure would exist through the generations.

The Mordicai Mansion had nearly sixty rooms spread throughout the length of the four-story gothic architecture building. Spread about it, were carefully maintained gardens, and even a small, tended wood in back of the house, filling the two acres that the house occupied.

When it came time to pay land taxes, Sarah did her best not to wince at the numbers her accountants informed her were due and thanked the stars that her family had several funds set up.

"Gwyn. Gwyn?"

There was no way she was going to be able to carry the other woman from the barn turned garage, into the main house, and Sarah sighed. She hated waking the obviously exhausted woman but the sooner they got her inside, the sooner she could maybe get some real rest. That and the long night of hunting and rising tension were beginning to tell on the Magister.

Hopping out of the tall vehicle she moved around to the passenger side and opened the door, frowning when the woman inside didn't so much as stir.

"Gwyn?"

No answer.

A touch hesitantly, she reached out and shook a green scrub-covered shoulder. Gwyn's clothes had been in tattered ruins when she'd been brought into the hospital, but Doc had managed to scrounge them up a pair of scrubs that sort of fit.

The second her fingers closed over the green material though, the peacefully sleeping woman jerked upright and screamed. The utter terror in that scream seized Sarah's heart, and she almost convulsively pulled the screaming woman into her arms.

"Shhhh... it's alright, it's just me."

Uncertainly, Sarah held her, feeling the tears soak through her shirt. Sarah didn't know how long she stood there, the woman in her arms half out of the car, arms wrapped tightly about her neck, shuddering and sobbing. Finally though, the tears slowed, then stopped, and red-rimmed blue eyes peered up at her.

Gently, Sarah brushed the tracks of tears on the woman's cheeks using her thumbs.

"Come on, let's get you inside and you can sleep some more, ok?"

Gwyn didn't answer, but she did follow when Sarah led her from the garage to the main house.

You know those things you see? Out of the corner of your eye? Even though you know you're alone, but you swear you see something moving, and you think it's just your imagination? It's not. You think you can get away with believing they don't exist, but they do, and what you can't see can kill you.

~Initial interview with Jane Doe, Case #2332009

The Second Night

At first she thought the demons were coming for her again.

Dark shapes with claws and sharp fangs hunted her in her dreams, paralyzing her with fear. When sleep released her she lay gasping on the strange bed, clutching the strewn pillows and blankets to her chest, curled up into a small ball.

Her thoughts were as strewn about as the blankets around her. Unlike the past few days, which were little more than a blur to her, today her mind slowly started to settle. While there were still huge gaps in her thoughts, she at least remembered something about what had happened yesterday.

Remembered eyes that changed colors, arms that had held her while she cried, soothed the fear that had been her entire world, all she could remember from... before.

Even now she couldn't remember anything from before the hospital; barely even remembered that.

Gwyn.

Her name now, the black-haired woman had given her that name.

"Gwyn."

Her voice she realized was husky, as if unused for a long while, and her throat ached slightly. Licking dry lips she carefully rose to her feet and let the blankets fall aside.

Who am I?

There was no answer in her memories, so she set the question aside for a while; instead taking in the room that she had been sleeping in. The four-poster bed had been soft and inviting, and golden light from the sun outside the windows streaked in across it. Outside those windows she could see a balcony, beyond which was a bed of flowers. It was late afternoon by the position of the sun in the sky.

Not long until nightfall.

Why that was so important escaped her at the moment.

There was a mirror mounted above the mahogany dresser, and she looked at herself critically. Frightened blue eyes peered back at her out of a triangular face framed by short cut almost white hair.

The face in the mirror didn't look familiar.

Frustrated she turned, looking about the large bedroom once more. The green things she was wearing, scrubs, a distant part of her mind supplied helpfully, felt odd and she fingered the collar while stalking across the hardwood floor towards the door.

Maybe there were answers on the other side.

Reaching her fingers towards the doorknob she gave a shriek and jumped backwards as the knob turned before she'd touched it and the door swung inwards.

I have to run!

The thought died almost as soon as it was formed though, her mind registering who had opened that door and was so cautiously stepping inside of the room.

"Good afternoon."

Gwyn silently nodded in response, watching this stranger, and having the oddest feeling that she should be remembering something. Something important, something she was supposed to tell her...

Shapes, dark as night, flitting across the walls, spraying them with blood...

Warm hands touched her hands, drawing her back from the place she'd briefly visited, and Gwyn blinked up at the taller woman. Noting the obvious concern in eyes that had been brown, but were shifting towards a multicolored hazel, watching them change color in amazement.

"It's all right, you're safe here."

Gwyn didn't know where here was, but she nodded slightly, ducking her head and feeling her skin warm as she realized she'd been staring.

"I brought you some clothes, I hope they fit."

The pair of jeans, two packets of still sealed underwear and t-shirt that were thrust into her view looked about right, and she took them, glad for the excuse to look elsewhere. She wasn't sure, but she had an idea that eyes didn't normally change colors like that.

"Well... I guess, I mean, we've got dinner started downstairs, if you want to join us?"

Gwyn did raise her head at that, a small smile edging about her lips and she nodded. Her stomach was reminding her of how long it had been since she'd eaten last, something they'd fed her in that vaguely remembered hospital room, the one with the soft walls.

"Good. I'll just leave you to get changed then."

Was there a strain to her rescuer's voice? Gwyn canted her head slightly to one side, studying the woman that was slowly backing away from her towards the open door.

She's nervous.

That someone who had struck her as so completely in control could be nervous eased the last bit of uncertainty that she had held about coming here. The smile this time was larger, less hesitant, and was instantly returned by the taller woman as she stopped just outside the door. Even if she didn't know what it was they were smiling about.

"I can wait here if you want? Or you can just come downstairs and we'll be in the kitchen. I imagine you could find it easily enough, that's where the smell of food will be coming from."

The nervousness with a touch of shyness was endearing, Gwyn thought as she silently crossed the room and just as silently closed the door, still smiling to the dark-haired woman.

I trust her.

The loose-fitting scrubs were tossed aside and she started working on the plastic packaged underwear and bras. Fingers stilling as another thought swam to the surface.

I don't trust anyone though...

Outside, a cloud passed in front of the setting sun casting the room into shadow. Shivering against an imagined cold, she hurried to get dressed and flee the room that felt empty, a sensation that seemed familiar to her.

"Ugh! I sounded like a blithering idiot!"

The man across the table didn't even glance upwards from the gadget he was working on, his tone disinterested as he answered the now thoroughly annoyed Magister.

"Oh?"

The total disinterest in his tone didn't stop the upset woman from continuing her rant.

"I can wait if you want..."

Her tone was mocking as she poured herself a cup of coffee, glaring out the window at the setting sun, as if it were the cause of all her problems.

In an odd twisted sort of way, it was. For when the sun set, generally speaking, her job began, although there were the odd daylight missions, the dead tended to avoid daylight.

"I still don't think you should have brought her here."

The older man frowned at the bulky looking pistol he was working on as he spoke.

"What was I supposed to do? Leave her there? She's frightened out of her mind."

Cool brown eyes glanced up from the weapon at that, and Eric studied the Magister. She was more agitated than he had ever seen her outside of a hunt.

"We don't know who she is. Bringing her inside the defensive perimeters is a mistake. Since when do you bring back strays anyway?"

The glare he received told him all he wanted to know about Sarah's feelings on the subject and he went back to working on the pistol, a small shrug of frail shoulders in answer.

"Eric, she needs our help."

If that didn't exactly answer her old mentor's question, neither of them made mention of it. It was a good question though, since when did she bring home people she didn't know? Hell, she didn't even bring home people that she did know. Sipping on the hot coffee she suddenly realized that Gwyn was actually the first non-family member to visit the mansion.

"She's very pale, Sarah."

"I know, I checked her in the car, she's got a reflection, so she isn't what you're about to suggest she might be. Besides, you saw her aura, she's more alive than anyone I've ever met."

The old man knew his student, knew when she wasn't going to change her mind, and this was one of those times. So he spared himself the trouble of an argument and a headache, turning his attention to the pistol he was working on. When she made it down the stairs, and followed her nose towards the promising smells, Gwyn found the two of them studiously pretending the other didn't exist.

"Thank you for the clothes."

The words broke odd silence, and both of the kitchen's occupants looked at her in confusion, both for different reasons. Eric because he had been under the impression that the stray couldn't talk, Sarah because she suddenly couldn't come up with anything brilliant to say, a first for the Magister. With an odd glance at his suddenly silent student, and finding her staring at their uninvited guest, Eric eased himself upright out of the chair. Old aches and pains making the operation take rather longer than it had in his youth.

"Welcome to Trilium Manor, Lady...?"

Gwyn faltered, blue eyes darkening as his question caused her to once more try to force her mind into giving answers it couldn't yet supply.

"...Gwyn. Her name is Gwyn until we find out what her real name is, Eric. I'm positive that won't take long."

A thankful look to her rescuer and the smaller woman smiled in thanks as she took a seat in the chair that Sarah had drawn out for her at the table. Three place settings had already been set out, and she felt her mouth water at the piles of food that the tall woman was setting down in the center. The blonde waited for the other two to start though, not wanting to appear anymore uncivilized than she was certain she had already.

"Thank you."

The words surprised her two dinner companions, they certainly surprised her, and they sounded odd to her although she did mean them. Sarah and the old man, what was his name, ah, Eric,

shared a glance.

"For what?"

The confusion in Sarah's eyes brought a sudden smile to Gwyn's face, which felt odd though, almost strained.

"Taking me away from that room."

The smile that felt like a grimace slowly faded as fragments of memories from that room came back slowly. They were disjointed, confusing, but they were the first true memories she could claim to have remembered.

Flashes of things with impossibly long claws and mouths that opened far too wide mixed with images of orderlies who had held her down.

Warm fingers curled around hers, ending the memories as quickly as they had started.

"You're welcome."

She met eyes that were so dark they were nearly black and felt her breath catch.

"If you two are quite done, we do have a schedule to go over."

Startled, she slid her hand out from under Sarah's, blinking to try to clear the odd feelings that had coiled through her at that touch and the look in the black-haired woman's eyes. Eyes that were going from black to a pale gray even as she watched.

"Of course. What do we have for tonight's line up?"

Gwyn ate the pasta that had been placed in front of her, working her way through the large bowl methodically and then on to the salad next to it. The light sauce was excellent, and the slices of roasted chicken mixed in with the lettuce were great. Most of her attention though was on her two companions.

"There's a report about a shoplifter downtown that, and I quote "walked through a wall and didn't show up on the security camera's" sound familiar?"

A quick glance to Sarah showed the other woman was nodding as she ate, gray eyes thoughtful as she listened.

"Then we've got another report of something in the west end going through dumpsters."

The bald man waited for both members of his audience to look at each other questioningly before he grinned and continued.

"The animal control guys who went down there swear they saw something that was larger than a wolf, and it told them to leave it alone."

Since Sarah didn't seem to find that odd, Gwyn hesitantly spoke up.

"Wolves can speak?"

She didn't think they could, but then again, she wasn't sure what those strange things in the kitchen did. Although she thought the big one in the corner that Sarah had pulled the salads from, kept food cold.

"Wolves? No, they can't speak, not to humans anyway. Werewolves on the other hand, now that's a different story."

The oddest thing about that answer, Gwyn thought as she took another bite of salad, was that it sounded perfectly reasonable to her.

"Eric, you got that thing working yet?"

"Yeah, four shots each for wood and silver, here's the safety and selector switch. Range is only a hundred feet or so, but the stakes are pure silver or ash wood."

She stopped chewing at that and looked at the two of them questioningly. The silver she instinctively understood, a long forgotten memory of how to take care of werewolves surfacing. The ash wood she wasn't so certain about. This time it was the old man who answered her unspoken question.

"Werewolves aren't the only things that can take the shapes of wolves. Some of the older vampires have been known to be able to pull off that trick. Although we don't usually have too much trouble with vamps around here."

Sarah finished her examination of the weapon and carefully set it aside, nodding in agreement.

"Better safe than sorry."

Gwyn was certain that this wasn't how a normal meal was supposed to go, but then she couldn't quite remember what a normal meal meant so she mentally shrugged, accepted the explanations and finished her dinner.

Once her new charge had gone back upstairs to take a shower, Sarah dug into her coat pocket and returned to the table, handing over the packet of Polaroids she'd taken at the hospital.

"Take a look at these while I'm out will you, Eric? I don't recognize any of those symbols."

The old man set the last of the dishes into the sink and returned to the table, frowning as he pulled a pair of bifocals from his shirt pocket and peered intently at the pictures. A low whistle as he started setting the Polaroids out across the table to form a mosaic picture of what she'd seen in the observation room.

"Gwyn did this?"

"Yeah, I don't know how, but I could feel the power in them, Eric. It bothers me that I don't know those symbols. That means I don't know what kind of magic she might be able to use."

Eric winced as he carefully sat back down, coughing a bit and waving away Sarah's instant look of concern. Once he'd caught his breath again he shook a finger at his student.

"You should know that the legacies don't cover everything."

"I know, but I've gotten used to them at least mentioning everything we have to go up against. This though, those symbols..."

They both fell quiet, staring at the pictures laid out on the old kitchen table. Darkness was falling outside and the Magister could feel the fine hairs on the back of her neck standing on end. Eric put her thoughts to voice, sounding uncharacteristically worried.

"There's a storm coming."

"I know. I can feel it too."

Neither was talking about the weather.

She'd only meant to take a quick shower and go back downstairs to say goodbye to her...

My what? Friend? I've only known her for all of a day, and most of that I spent asleep. Ok, let's call her my rescuer for now, and we can add the title of friend later, hopefully.

It would be nice to have a friend.

I have so few...

The thought, like all the others that hinted at her past, was gone before she could examine it. She'd only meant to take a quick shower, but the bed had looked so inviting afterwards, and she'd been tired still, feeling drained from something that she couldn't even remember doing. Or maybe it was the drugs from the hospital, they had messed her up pretty well after all.

New clothes had been placed on the chair just inside the door of the bedroom when she woke up several hours after going upstairs. This time they included a few more pairs of pants, underwear, shirts, and toiletries still in their packaging.

Sarah must have gone to the store for me, another thing to thank her for.

Gwyn had hoped to thank the dark-haired woman right then, but to her disappointment, when she'd gone downstairs the house had seemed empty. No sign of either Sarah or Eric. So instead she'd decided on a bit of exploring, and had begun to wander through the mansion.

"Wow, this place is big."

Plush carpeted hallways swallowed the sound of her voice and footsteps.

The ground floor was huge, with two main wings, which spread off from the main area where the kitchen and dining room were. She'd seen studies, a huge library, billiards room, a modern living room, and even a long rectangular workout room so far.

The quiet clacking of someone typing quickly drew her away from the third study she'd been about to wander through and towards the room at the end of the hallway. Where the rest of the rooms she'd gone into were plush and comfortable, this one looked like a bunker. The solid metal door and bare cement walls were in stark contrast to the rest of the mansion she'd already seen.

Inside, sitting in a rather beat up leather chair, peering some sort of screen and typing away madly while humming to himself sat Eric. Sensing her presence he glanced up and waved her inside.

"Well, come in and stop gawking."

"Where, I mean, what is all this?"

She gingerly weaved her way through stacks of odd looking and mysterious equipment to take a seat on a rickety looking wicker stool.

"My contribution."

Eric's answer didn't do anything to clear up her confusion.

"Umm... contribution to what?"

"Well you might have noticed we're not exactly a run of the mill household."

Tracing the yellow stenciling on the side of a crate she looked back up at him blankly.

"You aren't?"

He stared at her for a long moment, mouth slightly open in surprise, then shook his head and turned back to the brightly glowing thing.

"Ok, you've got one heck of a case of amnesia there, lady. Let's see if I can put this into terms that should make sense to you."

A few quick clicks and the main screen displayed a map.

"This is the city."

Nodding to indicate she was with him so far, Gwyn shifted so she could see the large screen better.

"Now, we're the largest gathering of sentient life in the entire area, so we also attract the most dead. Which makes sense since they need to feed on the living to continue cheating death. With me so far?"

That sounded perfectly reasonable and she grinned, much more fascinated with the screen itself than the explanation so far. A disapproving look stopped her from touching it though.

"Sarah's family owns this house, they also own houses in most large cities throughout the world. They help sort out things that prey on the living, and I make sure Sarah knows where to go to pick up the trail."

That didn't sound as reasonable and pale eyebrows drew together in slight confusion.

"How do you do that?"

"We've got friends throughout the city, people who can see the truth, or those who Sarah's saved before, along with a few free mages. They give us a heads up, then there's the police band, and sometimes we even catch something from the news."

Most of those words didn't mean anything to Gwyn, but she got the general idea.

"What do you mean those who can see the truth?"

"Trust me on this, people don't want to see the real world. They like things nice and square, fitting into white washed houses with picket fences outside their doors. You ever really looked at some of the homeless people wandering downtown?"

Blue eyes darkened as she tried to remember if she had, predictably she drew a blank.

"Well, a few of them aren't what you'd call normal. Sure, most are, but there are other things that wander the streets in the guise of people. Sometimes they aren't even very good disguises, but people fill in the blanks. Most people don't want to see what really wanders the nights. Your mother ever tell you there was no such things as monsters?"

"I don't know."

Which stopped what looked like the beginnings of a rant, and bought her enough time to ask another question.

"What's that?"

"You mean the computer?"

"Yes, what do you use it for?"

"Dear God, woman! You don't know what a computer is?"

The blank look was starting to feel permanent.

"Well, good thing you stopped in, let's start filling in a few of those gaps in your memory."

The hours that followed were filled with strange and wonderful ideas, along with words like World Wide Web, CDs, electronics, and her favorite, television.

The ghost hadn't been much of a problem.

The band of traveling dead heads, who were exactly what the name suggested, that she'd stumbled over afterwards had been a bit of a surprise. Still, the night had been looking like another slow one, nothing much was going on. Eric, assisted by a happy sounding Gwyn, hadn't had anything to report to her for the last two hours. The talking wolf hadn't been spotted at all so far. She'd been just about to call it a night and go see what they could find out about their houseguest when she'd caught sight of something, as her grandmother would have put it "Not Quite Right".

"Sarah, Eric says you've stopped, what are you doing? Uh, Over?"

Using a hand to adjust the small headset that Eric had given her a few weeks ago, and she'd never found a reason to wear until now, Sarah grinned at the voice in her ear.

"You don't have to say over, Gwyn, I suspect that's Eric's idea of a joke."

The wheezing laugh in the background made it a certainty.

"And yes, I've stopped. I saw something strange just past 5th, I'm going to take a peek."

This time it was Eric who spoke up.

"What kind of something strange?"

"Not sure, it was quick out of the corner of my eye kind of thing. I think I saw someone dressed

in black rags carrying a staff of some sort walk into this alley way."

"Just be careful, Sarah."

"Oh please, Eric, when am I not?"

The hilt of her sword was comforting in her right hand, while her left stayed close to the pistol handle at her waist. That time with the costume ball people had cured her of any desire to draw her weapons before being certain about what she was dealing with ever again.

"Eric said to ask you about that time on Winter Solstice."

Gwyn's voice was a warm counterpoint to the cold dark alley, and Sarah could hear the smile in the pale woman's voice as she spoke.

"Yeah, well you should ask Eric about that door to door salesman."

That shut up the laughter on the other side, and she smirked as she heard Gwyn asking Eric about that. The snarled response brought a full smile to Sarah's lips.

"Umm, Sarah, I think he's pouting."

Which was quickly followed by an indignant yell.

Ouch, she's got you there, Uncle.

The ruckus on the other side of the radio faded into the background as she moved deeper into the alley though. Her senses expanding, questing for even the slightest hint that paranormal creatures were on the prowl. Concentrating, she looked about her in mage sight, seeing the ordinary aura's that surrounded everything. Other than a few rats nothing alive was in that alley besides her.

There was something that glowed brightly enough to make her wince and raise an arm to protect her eyes. A few feet from where she was standing, painted onto the dark asphalt, was a circle of power. Its borders were ringed with glyphs, and once more to her dismay, the Magister didn't recognize any of them.

"I've got some sort of circle of power here, Eric, no sign of whatever caused it though."

The arguing coming from her earpiece stopped instantly and once more her mentor was all business.

"How wide?"

Careful to stay away from the edges, she paced around it, keeping a wary eye out on her surroundings as she did.

"About six feet in diameter I'd say. I count eight cardinal points, and it's been painted onto the ground using blood."

The air held a hint of copper to it now that she was this close, even though whatever kind of blood that had been use was well on its way to drying.

"I'd say an hour or two, maximum, since this was made."

"Any ideas who might have made it, Sarah?"

"Funny, Eric, I was about to ask you the same question. I'm going to close whatever this is after taking a few pictures. Any luck with those the symbols from Gwyn's hospital room?"

"None so far, I'm still running a database search to see if any of the other Legacy Houses have seen anything like them before."

In the background she could here Gwyn asking what a Legacy House was. In some ways it the fact that Gwyn couldn't remember anything was working in their favor, she was asking a lot less questions than a normal person with an idea of how the world worked would have in her place.

"Eric, I'm going to take the copies of those Polaroids and go see Marina. She might have an idea what those are."

"Understood, just watch your back, Sarah."

"Always."

"So that's what she does every night?"

"Get me a beer will you?"

The pale-haired woman stared into the refrigerator, then back at the man hunched over yet another pet project spread over the tabletop. Not really sure what she'd just been asked to get, Gwyn grabbed the first bottle shape she came across.

"What's this?"

"Beer?"

Eric stared at her with an odd expression on his face, shrugged and opened the bottle of orange juice.

"Well, I guess it's better for me anyway. What did you ask?"

Taking one for herself as well, she cautiously tasted the orange liquid before sitting down and smiling.

"This is beer?"

"Ah no, this is orange juice. That was your question?"

Gwyn blinked, and then grinned as she realized where she'd lost track of that conversation.

"Sarah, is that what she does every night?"

Once more she had the feeling that Eric was considering his words carefully before answering, thoughtfully fingering a screwdriver.

"More or less, yes. Tonight's pretty slow."

Whatever it was that he was working on, it certainly looked like a weapon.

And how would I know what a weapon looks like? I didn't even know what a television was.

"That's not normal is it?"

Eric snorted, returning his attention to his latest project.

"No, it's not normal. Why?"

"I just wanted to make sure I understood. Because that show, what was it called?"

"Which one?"

"The one with all the yelling?"

"Oh, Jerry Springer."

"Yeah, that one, Sarah seems normal compared to that."

She wasn't sure why he started laughing, but she grinned anyway.

"Gwyn, everyone looks normal compared to those shows. That's why people watch them."

The grin faded into a perplexed frown.

"You mean people watch them to feel normal?"

"You got it."

"That's just strange."

Eric shrugged, fitting what looked like a barrel onto the front of the stocky weapon before answering.

"Just human nature I guess."

That was definitely not the most reassuring thing she'd ever been told.

I think.

"Um, anyway, how did she become... whatever it is she is?"

"Hold this? Yup, right there. She's the Magister for this city and the surrounding area. Ok, now push down, that's it. Ok, hold that and let me screw in the sights."

Just when she started to worry that he'd forgotten about their conversation, Eric snapped the sight into place and continued.

"It's a family position."

Blue eyes watched him expectantly, hoping for a bit more than just that. Unfortunately Eric wasn't exactly known for his chatty nature, and he'd given the stranger more information than he'd wanted to.

The black SUV smoothly pulled into a parking space in front of what had once been a chapel. In the eighties, as the rest of this part of the city was going downhill, the building had been sold off as the last of the order of nuns which had owned the property died. Since then, the property had been privately owned by a person who had off and on aided the Magister of the city when unique situations arose.

Even though Sarah had never needed her help so far, she'd kept in contact with the woman throughout her training and the past two years of active service. Since this was starting to qualify as unique, the Magister figured it couldn't hurt to ask if she knew something that could help.

Even though the insides had been remodeled, rooms had been set up, a kitchen installed, and most of the religious symbols were long gone, the place still felt like a church. No matter how hot, or cold, it was outside when she visited, the inside was a constant pleasant temperature. The air held a stillness to it, a peacefulness that always served to relax Sarah.

Respectfully the Magister left all of her weapons but her sword in the SUV, and removed her boots upon entering. Placing them on the straw mat just inside the doorway.

"Magister, as always, you honor me with your visit."

Rising from setting aside her boots, Sarah smiled at the truly petite woman facing her. That Marina had managed to quietly approach her without her knowledge no longer unnerved her as it had in the past. Now she just accepted it as yet another one of this unique woman's quirks.

"Marina, I am sorry it is so late, but I wished to ask you some questions."

The small oriental woman smiled gently and gestured further into her home, the kimono that she wore rustling faintly as she did.

"Come and have some tea with me, and we shall see if I have any answers to give you."

Tea with Marina was not a simple act of sitting down and enjoying a cup of tea. Tea for with her meant a veritable ceremony, one that Sarah was used to after her prior visits. It was well past midnight by the time she got to the point in the ceremony where she could ask her hostess some questions.

"I've never seen any markings like these before."

The small woman methodically laid out the Polaroids that Sarah had handed over, spreading them out on the tabletop, recreating an image of the shredded observation room wall.

Long minutes passed without either moving, Marina staring at the Polaroids, while Sarah stared at her, hoping for some real answers this time. Finally the Asian woman let out a small sigh and leaned back in her seat, rubbing her eyes in an uncharacteristic show of fatigue. Concerned by the out of character show of weakness, Sarah started to rise, only to sink back down into her chair as Marina shook her head.

"Do not worry, I just had not expected this..."

Sarah waited patiently, giving her friend time to sort her thoughts.

"The person who carved these, the one without any memories, where is she now?"

"At the manor. Marina, what are they?"

Delicate fingers traced the patterns pictured in the Polaroids, staying just above the glossy surface. Dark eyes met Sarah's, and for the first time since she'd known her, Marina looked worried.

"I need to contact a friend, to make sure these are what I think they are. In the mean time, bring her here Magister, bring her here quickly."

The urgency in her friend's voice had Sarah standing and going to put on her boots before she'd even finished speaking.

"Why? What's so upsetting about those symbols?"

"It's not the symbols, it's what might have written them."

One of the more disturbing answers Sarah had gotten in the last week.

Gwyn was happily ensconced on one of the comfortable leather chairs in front of the television set. The big living room was comfortable, and it was obviously one of the rooms that Sarah spent time relaxing in. Two of the walls were dominated by floor to ceiling bookshelves full of well-read hard and soft cover books. Eric had left her alone an hour ago now, saying he had to run a more thorough scan on the symbols from her hospital room.

The entire hospital stay was nothing more than a vague bad memory. Besides watching this show about the ten biggest greatest buildings in the world was much more fascinating than trying to remember those confused and frightening memories. If she concentrated enough on the TV she could even pretend that she was normal, someone who knew who they were, what they were doing, instead of constantly questioning everything.

What's this thing called again? A remote control, nifty, I wonder if people fight over who gets to control what channel to watch?

Just for the fun of it she flicked through a few channels, winced at the music she stumbled across on one of them, and hurriedly returned to the channel showing the big buildings.

"You never did like loud music."

The quiet voice startled her and with a shriek she bounded up off the sofa, whirling to face the source of that question. Coming face to face with a completely unremarkable looking older man, his hair was nearly as dark as Sarah's, but unlike the Magister, this man's eyes did not change color.

Eyes that regarded her with a mixture of amusement, anger, and was that sympathy?

Attack or flee...

For an endless moment while she met the stranger's eyes, Gwyn struggled with the decision. Trying to understand where the impulse had come from, and why she would want to attack or flee.

"A-Are you a friend of Sarah's?"

The anger and amusement disappeared as if they had never been and the man watched her with

eyes devoid of any emotion that she could comprehend.

"No, I'm not a friend of the Magister's."

Her muscles quivered with the need to do something, but she held her place, trying to understand what was going on, who this was.

"Who are you?"

The amusement returned, stronger this time and he took a step towards her. Immediately she backed up, knowing that the TV was behind her, but that somewhere in the house was Eric, and wondering if he would hear her if she screamed. The thought must have shown for the man raised black-gloved hands in a placating motion.

"I am not your enemy. You can call me Gabriel."

"What do you want?"

They seemed like the right questions to ask, even as she slowly edged her way along the bookcase towards the doorway into the hall. The man, Gabriel, did nothing to stop her, turning in place to keep her in sight but nothing more. A faint twitch to lips that she somehow knew was equivalent to a smile for him.

"I came to deliver a message."

She licked dry lips, wondering how much this man knew about who she was, and if he'd tell her.

"What?"

"The enemy knows you are here now. Guard yourself, little sister."

"What enemy?"

"You should go help the old man."

Gwyn stared at him in confusion, not even sure what he was talking about or what questions he was or wasn't answering.

"What?"

The faint twitch of lips returned, but before he could say anything there came a sudden cacophony of sound from down the hallway towards Eric's workroom. The sound of metal clanging off cement echoed down the hallway and she turned towards the sound, checking her rush towards it only at the stranger's call.

A groan reached her ears from the same direction as the banging of metal had come, and Gwyn

spared a glance over her shoulder as she ran down the hallway. Strangely unsurprised when she saw no sign of Gabriel.

"Eric!"

Gwyn gasped his name in surprise as she saw the old man lying on the floor, storage boxes tumbled down around him. He was coughing, weakly, and even from the door she could spot the blood that coughing brought up.

"Gwyn? Eric?"

Sarah rested her hand on the hilt of her sword, warily setting aside the trench coat and moving further into the manor. Eric hadn't buzzed her in through the wrought iron gates as he usually did when she pulled up, and she hadn't seen any sign of either Gwyn or Eric so far.

Something was wrong.

She could feel it, and a Magister who didn't listen to those sorts of feelings was a Magister who didn't last long.

The blade whispered as it slid from the sheath at her side, glyphs blazed along the length of the cold steel. Quietly she moved down the hallway, letting the early AM shadows wrap around her, providing a measure of cover from any hostile eyes. The kitchen was empty, as was the living room, and the study beyond. Methodically, she made her way through the manor, searching for her houseguest and uncle, or anything that didn't belong.

"Eric!"

That was Gwyn and it came from down the hallway, Eric's workroom!

Abandoning the cloak of shadows she'd gathered around herself, she sprinted down the hallway, skidding to a stop just inside the armored doorway. The sight that greeted her was not one she'd been ready for. Eric lay on the floor, bits of electrical equipment scattered around him. Crouched over him was Gwyn, on her knees, both hands pressed against Eric's chest, a look of concentration on her face.

Sheathing the sword, Sarah hesitantly stepped inside.

"Gwyn?"

Luminous blue eyes peered up at her, and if anything, Gwyn looked even paler to her.

"He's dying isn't he?"

She looked so sad that Sarah had to swallow against the lump in her throat before she could answer. Dropping to her knees next to Gwyn, the dark-haired woman gently touched her uncle's wrist, reassuring herself that he was still alive.

"Yes."

Eric didn't seem to be in any pain, if anything he seemed to be sleeping. Forcing herself to let out the breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding, Sarah carefully slid her arms under the older man's shoulders. Once again shocked at how thin he'd become in the last few months.

"Help me get him to his bed and you can tell me what happened."

Between the two of them they managed to get Eric to his bed, settled in and even woke him long enough for Sarah to get him to drink some medicine the doctors had given him. A cup of tea later and they were both in the living room, watching the sunrise over the city below through the large bay windows.

Sarah watched Gwyn, as she sipped her tea, enjoying these few quiet minutes. The blonde had a bit more color to her, and had haltingly made her way through recounting the events of the evening. The tall woman had listened carefully to Gwyn's description of the strange man, and then what had happened afterwards. The blonde's words still echoing through her thoughts.

"He was laying there on the floor Sarah, and I didn't know what to do. I'm sorry Sarah, I didn't know how to use the phone, Eric was going to show me, but then I started watching the television and..."

"Gwyn, just tell me what happened."

Gwyn had taken a deep breath at that and nodded, blue eyes darkening in memory.

"He was laying on the floor, and he was coughing up this blood. I wanted to help him, to stop it, and I could see this... this darkness in him. I don't know how to describe it, but I could see it. So I put my hands on his chest and, I think I pushed against it, trying to push it out. I couldn't though, it was hard to move, but I did shove it down a bit."

A quiet sigh followed.

"I'm sorry, Sarah, I can't explain it better."

Silently she had reached over and pulled Gwyn into a hug; feeling the surprise in the smaller woman's frame at that.

"What's that for?"

She'd smiled, and gently cupped Gwyn's cheek.

"For helping him."

"Sarah?"

Gwyn's quiet voice roused her from her own thoughts, and she set aside the cup of tea before turning in her seat to look at her houseguest questioningly.

"Hmm?"

"What happened to him? What was it that I saw in him?"

"I was careless, that's what happened. We went up against a mummy that the Natural History Museum had unwittingly imported from Egypt. What you saw must be the curse, it's a rotting disease that kills you from the inside out. His lungs are starting to go, and neither of us knows how long he has left."

Blonde eyebrows drew together as Gwyn thought about that answer.

"It can't be cured?"

"No, we took him everywhere, to every free mage in the city, and even to conventional medicine after that had failed. If it can be cured Gwyn, no one in this city knows how to do it."

In silence they both watched the sun rise, until Sarah remembered her meeting earlier in the evening.

"Gwyn, we'll make sure that Eric is alright, and then I'm going to take you to meet a friend."

Blue eyes, no longer luminous as they had been when she'd been crouched over Eric, regarded her curiously.

"Who?"

"Someone who may have an idea about who you are."

Sarah didn't add it out loud, but the, *I hope*, tacked on to the end of the sentence was understood by both of them.

God? God is love. I don't love you.

~Lucifer

The Third Night

It wasn't until dusk of that day that they managed to get back to Marina's place. Gwyn had almost

literally crashed after they'd watched the sun rise. She'd fallen asleep on the couch, but Sarah had somehow gotten her up the stairs and into her bed. At least she assumed it was the Magister who had carried her, since she'd woken up around three when Sarah had come to wake her up for a late lunch.

"Do you ever sleep?" was said with a bit of an accusing glare at the Magister, even after nearly eight hours of sleep, Gwyn still felt sluggish. Sarah, to her annoyance, just smirked and adjusted the sunglasses she was wearing, keeping one hand on the steering wheel.

"No one in my family sleeps much. Too much to do during the night I guess."

Which sounded like a good answer, until Gwyn thought it over and realized what Sarah meant by too much to do during the night.

Too many things to hunt down, she means.

Desperate to distract her thoughts from calling up mental images of the nameless monsters she'd once more dreamed of, Gwyn changed topics.

"Eric feeling ok?"

The driver snorted, keeping her eyes on the road and dodging through the vestiges of the evening rush hour.

"Best he's felt in months, I don't know what you did to him Gwyn, but he looked good today."

A brief glance at her passenger and she smiled.

"Thank you for that."

The blonde shrugged a quick smile forming, then dying as she looked back out the window. Watching the blocks streak past as they went to meet this Marina. Sarah's next words were softer, and she could feel the concern in them.

"What is it?"

Gwyn shrugged, keeping her eyes on the world outside the SUV.

"I keep on thinking about how their lives must be."

Nodding towards the people outside, hurrying home from work, or going about daily chores.

"How it must be to know where you come from, who your friends are, what your name is..."

She didn't realize she was crying until Sarah pulled the vehicle over into the parking lot of a McDonalds and reached over. Gwyn gave a sniffled whimper and met the Magister halfway,

burying her face in the taller woman's shoulder.

"I can't remember anything, and I keep trying and trying, but I can't and then I dream and I think things are chasing me. But I don't know what they are and who they are, or why they want me. I don't even know if they're real or not!"

Through it all the arms around her had not loosened and Gwyn greedily soaked up the comfort that Sarah was offering. After a long few minutes, and some odd looks by the people passing by outside, when Gwyn's sniffles had died off, Sarah pulled back. Offering her a Kleenex, the Magister smiled slowly, her eyes a shimmering hazel.

"Don't worry, we'll figure it out, ok?"

Gwyn nodded slowly, finding she couldn't doubt the other woman when she looked so certain of that fact.

"Ok."

Gentle fingers touched her cheek and Sarah smiled once more before putting the vehicle in gear and pulling out.

"I hope your friend, this Marina, can help."

"So do I, Gwyn, so do I."

It wasn't that long a drive to Marina's, although it did take a while to dodge her way through the evening rush hour traffic. As yet another taxicab tried to cut her off, the Magister growled in frustration and edged the large SUV into a gap in the traffic through sheer willpower.

That and the guy driving the Beetle was in no position to really object too much.

"Come on, come on. HEY! Learn to drive! This is why I don't like to drive during the day, all the freaks are out."

The feeling of being watched caused her to glance at the grinning blonde in the passenger seat. The grin disappeared the second Sarah growled at her, but Gwyn's blue eyes were still dancing with mischief.

"Something amusing?"

Sarah growled, once more glancing at her passenger, before returning her attention to the crowded road, just barely making her way through the yellow light.

"Does everyone get this upset driving?"

"Only because of other drivers... Yeah, I'm talking to you, asshole! Get out of the way!"

The taxi driver in question gave them a one-finger salute and kept right on weaving his way through traffic, leaving Sarah snarling, as she had to stop at the next red light, and cursing under her breath.

The giggling from the passenger side seat was not helping.

"Fine, next time you can drive if you think you can do better."

"But why would I deny you such pleasure, Magister."

"Smart ass."

There was a bit of silence as Sarah finally managed to duck her way out of the traffic and into the quieter residential areas leading towards Marina's.

"My ass is smart?"

Laughing, Sarah pulled the SUV into a parking space in front of the converted church.

"Never mind, come on, let's go see Marina."

Getting out onto the sidewalk, Gwyn smiled down at the tufts of grass that were growing between the cracks. A pool of light spread out around them from the nearest working streetlight. Her smile widened as she looked up and saw the building that they were walking up the path to.

"Your friend lives here?"

"Yup."

"Nice place to live."

"Oh and the Manor isn't?"

Gwyn nudged the Magister at that, grinning as they reached the front door.

"That's not what I meant, I love your house, but this is different."

"Yeah different is one word for..."

The blonde looked up at the dark haired Magister, puzzled at why she'd stopped dead like that.

"What is it?"

"The door's open."

From the tone of voice she'd used, Gwyn was pretty sure that wasn't a good thing. A soft whisper of sound and Sarah was holding a sword that blazed to Gwyn's eyes, blue flames crawling along the length of the blade.

"Stay here."

A quick glance assured her that the rest of the street was dark, and things were moving through the shadows. Biting her lip she shook her head and took a hold of Sarah's free hand.

"Gwyn, it could be dangerous."

"I'm not staying out here alone."

Sarah stared at her through those sunglasses she constantly wore then slowly nodded.

"Stay behind me."

Gwyn obediently took hold of the taller woman's jacket, holding onto the waistband tightly. She couldn't see much around the woman in front of her, but whatever was beyond the doorway was enough to make Sarah freeze.

"What is it?"

Even her whisper sounded loud though, and Gwyn winced, peering behind them fearfully at the thick shadows across the street. Something was moving there, she was certain of it, a shape darker than the shadows around it. She could almost make it out.

The enemy?

Sarah's lunge forward dragged her through the door before she could see anything else. The inside of the converted church was not as peaceful as Gwyn was expecting, indeed it was making her uneasy. Furniture was strewn about; papers and books flung carelessly everywhere. Lanterns had been shattered, and the only light came from two table lamps lying on the floor, their shades missing. It was on the tip of her tongue to ask the other woman if her friend was always so messy when Sarah slowed to a stop. Following her gaze, Gwyn looked upwards, towards the vaulted ceiling.

Specifically the chandelier hanging from it on chains.

More specifically the body that had been crucified on it.

In shock, the blonde let go of Sarah's jacket, staring up at the sight numbly, her lips forming silent words with no meaning that she knew. The Magister skirted the edges of the crimson pool that had formed below the body. Even as they watched, drops of blood continued to fall and

splatter onto the pool below. Grimly Sarah went to the chains that held the chandelier aloft and undid their stays, grunting as she lowered the body slowly to the floor below.

Gwyn took a step backwards, then another, and another as the body and chandelier came to a rest in the pool of blood. Her lips still struggling to say words her brain no longer remembered she clutched at the front doorframe, legs threatening to give way under her. The Magister had sheathed her sword, and now gently undid the thick cords keeping Marina's body tied to the chandelier, carrying the body to the nearby couch and laying her down on it.

Gazing down at what had once been her friend she closed her eyes against the furry that was building inside her. Someone had carved symbols into Marina's skin, some of which looked like the ones she'd found in Gwyn's hospital room.

"Why?"

Her voice, even to her ears, was hard and cold as she stared at the small blonde. Gwyn stared back in confused shock, her skin once more completely white.

"WHY!?"

The yell was enough to shake Gwyn out of her shock and she managed to take another step backwards as Sarah stalked towards her.

"Why did they kill her?"

Gwyn just shook her head helplessly.

"Who did this, Gwyn? WHO?"

The Magister grabbed hold of the smaller woman's arms, holding her in place.

"Who, damn it, who?"

"I don't know!"

She was crying again, Gwyn could feel the tears trickling down her cheeks as she stared up at the enraged woman holding her arms. Sarah's eyes were completely black, as hard as obsidian, and there was a dangerous glitter to them.

"I don't know!"

Sarah's jaw worked as if she wasn't certain what she was doing, and her grip loosened, then slid around the trembling woman, gathering her into a tight hug.

"I'm sorry, shhh, I'm sorry."

Closing her own eyes she held Gwyn tight, feeling the racking sobs that shook the other woman.

"We'll find them, I promise, we'll find them."

Sarah wasn't sure which one of them she was promising; in the end it really didn't matter though. Someone had killed a friend, in her city, and she was going to find them, no matter what.

Gwyn slowly pulled away, using the sleeves of her new shirt to wipe her eyes.

"You ok?"

The blonde nodded slowly, hugging herself against a chill that had nothing to do with the cool night breeze.

"We'd better give the cops a call."

Gwyn shrugged, not meeting Sarah's eyes, and looking over her shoulder towards the SUV. Which was how she spotted the thing stalking up the walkway. For a split second she thought it was another one of her nightmares, then it hissed, and she knew it was real.

"SARAH!"

The Magister had been turning towards the church and pulling out her cell phone. The phone hit the ground as she turned around at Gwyn's terrified scream. The blonde was pointing towards the sidewalk leading up to the church door, but she couldn't see anything that would have scared her.

"What? What is it?"

The blonde was by her side in an instant, and steadily backing towards the door behind them, tugging Sarah along with her.

"It's here."

"What? Where?"

"One of the things from my dreams."

The creature had bat-like wings, and its maw held an impossible amount of teeth as it screeched at her.

"Can't you see it?"

Gwyn yelled to overcome the screech she heard, Sarah heard and saw nothing out of the ordinary though, and the Magister slowly drew her blade, dark eyes flicking back and forth, trying to search for a hint of movement, anything to give her an idea as to what it was that Gwyn was seeing.

"Where is it?"

"Heading right for us!"

Sarah slashed outwards, the tip of her blade becoming a blur of silver as it cut through air. She thought she felt something, just barely, slow the blade as it passed through empty air right in front of her, and the glyphs on the blade flared brightly for a split second. Gwyn saw the blade pass right through the creature, who howled in what she thought was more surprise than pain, and raised a clawed hand, backhanding Sarah. The Magister came up off her feet and flew across most of the yard, falling into a tangle at the far edge near a row of cedar bushes.

"Sarah."

She'd meant to scream, but it came out more like a whimper.

Gwyn's back hit the front doorframe to the church and her blue eyes were wide with terror as the creature reared upward. It had only looked to be four or five feet tall down on all fours, but as it reared up, it loomed over her, at least eight feet tall. The bat-like wings flared outwards and it screeched again, dull, red eyes glared with hatred at her and a clawed hand came up for a killing blow.

She acted in reflex, bringing both hands up to shield her head from the blow, and closing her eyes.

When she heard the thing scream instead of being turned into a piece of mangled meat, she cautiously opened her eyes.

Light played along her fingers, white and pure, crackling with energy. The creature had reared back from her, trying to shield its eyes from the light with its wings. As she stared at her own fingers in astonishment, the light faded, dying out until there was only the light from the far streetlight. Gwyn gulped and looked up, as the creature let out a sound that sounded suspiciously like an evil snicker.

The sound of a metal object bouncing along against the cement sidewalk brought both Gwyn and the creature's attention down to the ground between them. The fist-sized metal sphere that rolled to a stop between them didn't look very threatening. Indeed Gwyn wouldn't have moved if Sarah hadn't yelled.

"Gwyn, duck!"

Trusting her friend, Gwyn tossed herself to the side just as the globe exploded with light. The flash, even though her face was averted as she hit the lawn and her eyes closed, was blinding. She could hear the creature screaming in pain, a sound like a thousand knives being dragged against glass. Then strong arms were hauling her to her feet, and dragging her towards the SUV. Her eyes were still dancing with after images as Sarah yanked open the door, tossed her inside,

slammed the door, and ran to the driver's side.

"That's it, we're getting the hell out of here."

As long as there has been life, there has been death. There cannot be one, without the other, they are linked, now and forever. That is the way of things, the cycle of nature. It's when that cycle is broken and things don't stay dead that things become messy. That's when we get involved.

~Unknown Magister

The Fourth Night

"Sarah?"

The Magister had been sitting-- brooding was a better name for it-- on the couch ever since noon. Eric was up and about after his fourteen-hour nap, looking much better than the last time Gwyn had seen him. She'd left him sitting in front of that computer of his, searching through something called a data base for the creature that she'd described to him.

"Hm?"

She moved carefully now, slowly approaching the taller woman, not sure why but feeling that if she did move too quickly Sarah would flee.

"Are you alright?"

Gray eyes watched her sit down on the couch then went back to studying the beautiful gardens outside the bay window. Not getting an answer, Gwyn decided to go for another tactic.

"Eric says he hasn't found anything like the creature in the Legacy yet, but he's still not done searching."

That didn't even get her a glance.

With a silent sigh Gwyn tried to think of something, anything to say, to get the Magister to talk. Her eyes felt heavy, and she repeatedly tried to stifle a yawn. None of them had felt like sleeping after getting back to the manor. Sarah had spent the entire morning checking and double-checking the manor's security systems, both mundane and magical.

A soft whimper brought the Magister out of her thoughts. Gwyn had fallen asleep on the couch, and by the way she was curling around herself, Sarah had a good idea about what the pale woman was dreaming of.

"Gwyn."

Keeping her voice low she moved over towards the shivering woman, hesitating then stroking her fingers through strands of blonde hair so fine they were like silk. Still asleep the smaller woman turned towards the source of comfort, snuggling into the startled Magister's lap, before making a contented sound and slipping deeper into sleep.

What am I going to do with you, little one? Who is hunting you?

The troubled thoughts followed the Magister into her sleep, and it wasn't until Gwyn woke up long enough to get Sarah to lay down on the couch, that they both slept easily.

"Sarah, I think I have something..."

Eric stopped at the doorway, blinking in surprise at the sight before him. His niece was asleep on the couch, a smaller body curled up almost on top of her, arms wrapped around one another. Quietly he moved over to the blinds and closed them before the rays of the setting sun could wake the two sleepers. Then, just as quietly he left them to their rest, heading back to his room to see what else he could dig up.

For the first time she could remember, her dreams were not haunted by monsters. Stretching a bit she snuggled into the warmth beneath her cheek, smiling as arms tightened their hold on her.

Blue eyes opened suddenly.

Arms? What? Where am I sleeping... oh.

The warm comfortable thing she'd been resting her head on turned out to be Sarah's chest. The Magister was still sleeping, and a bit guiltily she took the opportunity to study the taller woman, mentally tracing the high cheeks, lips and brow. Asleep, the other woman looked even younger than Gwyn had thought she was.

As if sensing her scrutiny, Sarah's eyelids fluttered open, revealing gray eyes which darkened even as Gwyn watched. They stared at each other for what felt like hours, but was only a few minutes. Then long fingers were slipping around the base of her neck and Gwyn eagerly leaned forward; her body reacting before she'd even started to realize what was going on.

Sensations blazed themselves into her memory.

Soft warm lips pressing against hers.

Warm fingers curling in her hair.

The strong body beneath her's feeling so right pressed up against her that Gwyn whimpered in protest when Sarah pulled back. Her breathing was ragged, and she tried to lean forward to continue the kiss, only to be stopped by a pair of fingers pressed to her lips.

"Gwyn, look at me."

Swallowing she half opened her eyes, focusing on the other woman's lips, and licking her own. The same fingers tilted up her chin to force her to meet eyes nearly gone black with arousal.

"We can't."

The words took a few seconds to penetrate her consciousness.

"What?"

Carefully but firmly Sarah disentangled herself from the smaller woman, leaving Gwyn to scoot over to the far corner of the couch and watch her in confusion.

"We can't do this."

"Why?"

Even to herself, the small woman's voice sounded small and confused, something that she was sadly becoming accustomed to.

"Because you don't know who you are Gwyn, I don't know who you are."

Then, before Gwyn could even think of something to say, Sarah was up and out the door, stalking down the hallway; leaving the small woman curled up against one end of the couch, hugging her knees to her chest and staring after the Magister. Wondering how it was possible to feel so sad over the loss of something she hadn't even known existed.

Slamming the door behind her, Sarah stalked into the bunker that Eric called a room. Ignoring the startled look he sent her way she dumped books off of the nearest chair and took a seat, glowering at him.

"What do you have?"

"Well, good evening to you too. How are you doing, Eric? Why thank you, Sarah, I'm doing much better, I can actually take a deep breath without hacking up a lung, how are you doing? I'm doing fine, Eric, I slept for more than three hours today."

Sarah made a face at her uncle's little diatribe.

"You done yet?"

"Sheesh, I would have thought waking up holding Gwyn would have put you in a better mood."

Which only served to earn him an even darker look.

"Eric, what have you found out? Or do I have to go out and fight these things without a clue as to what they are?"

"Ok, Ok, sheesh, what's wrong with you today? Here's what I've found so far. Not much, but it's a start."

She snatched the manila folder out of his hands and started reading through the print outs he'd put inside it, frowning as she did.

"You should have woken me up if you found me on the couch like that."

"Why? You two looked comfortable, and trust me, Gwyn definitely looked like she needed some sleep. So did you for that matter."

"Eric, it's best if I keep my distance from her."

The bald man cast a curious look at his niece for that comment, watching her speculatively as she read through the information he'd managed to gather during the day.

"Oh, and why is that, Sarah?"

"Eric, she doesn't know who she is, remember? No memories of anything before the hospital. For all we know she's got a husband out there somewhere."

"No wedding band, Sarah."

The Magister glanced up from the print outs just long enough to glare at him, then went back to reading.

"Sarah, look, I know you think you have to forsake anything even approaching a normal relationship because of your position as Magister, but..."

"No, Uncle, I don't think I have to, I *know* I have to. Look what happened to my parents. My father had no idea what he was getting involved in. I am not letting an innocent person who has no idea what she's getting herself into, get involved in my life."

Wisely Eric kept his mouth shut, turning back towards his computer screen and starting another search through the large database that all Legacy Houses shared. He knew his niece well enough to know she wouldn't listen to him when she got like this. His thoughts kept turning towards the Polaroids that Sarah had taken of Gwyn's hospital room though, and he wondered exactly how innocent the small woman was.

"Will you at least tell me where we're going?"

She'd only had a few minutes to sit on the couch when Sarah had barged back into the living room and tossed her a coat. They'd eaten dinner at a diner downtown, neither talking much and both avoiding looking at the other. The drive from the diner had been just as quiet, and finally Gwyn couldn't take it anymore. Twisting in her seat she put her back to the dark streets they were passing and watched the driver. The occasional street lamp illuminated the Magister for brief seconds as they passed underneath, letting Gwyn catch glimpses of the way Sarah's jaw was set.

"To see someone."

It was the first time they'd actually said anything to each other since they left the manor. Closing her eyes against the ache the Magister's clipped tone caused, Gwyn looked back out the window. The rest of the drive was made in complete silence.

Sarah led the way through the park. Few people came down here after dark, even the police patrolled down here only when they had to. The Magister had long ago come to an understanding with the local gangs though. They didn't interfere in her business, and she'd keep them from becoming dinner for the latest undead.

Here and there figures slipped away from behind trees, deliberately granting her a large leeway.

Which was a wise idea on their part, considering what she had done to them the last time they had been so unwise as to try to stop her. Gwyn trailed along behind her, as silent and pale as a ghost. An ethereal vision that no doubt caught more than a few of the eyes watching them.

They headed deeper into the park, past the ponds and grassy places that teemed with people during the summer days, and to the bridge. It wasn't much; just a bridge for one of the many pathways that wound through the park, spanning what was usually a dry creek bed. Ducking a bit she could just make out the piles of cardboard boxes underneath the north side.

"Professor?"

Something stirred deep in the shadows.

"Go away!"

She could feel Gwyn smiling behind her. A darkness that she hadn't been aware of hanging over them lightened.

"Professor, it's Sarah."

That brought a bit of shuffling and a hunched over figure moved towards the edge of the shadows. A smell somewhere between stale cigarette smoke and rotting eggs wafted out as well.

"That you, Magister?"

"Yes, I have a question for you."

Ignoring her he stepped fully into the light and Gwyn winced at the scared face visible in the faint moonlight.

"Who's your friend?"

"She's my question actually."

"Hmph, well, come on inside."

Inside meant crouching underneath the bridge while the Professor fumbled around and lit several candles. The smell was just as bad inside here, but truthfully, compared to the smell of decomposing bodies it wasn't too bad. Gwyn kept on looking a bit green around the edges though. Arranging things as he liked them, the Professor, bundled in so many layers of clothes that it was hard to tell exactly how big he really was, sat down at the head of the improvised table, an old milk crate.

"Now, what can I do for you ladies?"

Silently she handed across the Polaroids from Gwyn's hospital room, watching the other man tuck long, dirty, blond dreadlocks behind his ears, and settle cracked bifocals on a long thin nose to study them closely. She never asked what one of the most powerful free mages in the city was doing living under a bridge in the park, and he never volunteered.

Her mother had often told her, before he died, that the business of a Magister was that of the dead, not the living.

"Interesting wall paintings-- you trying to redecorate?"

Gwyn had been silent so far, and Sarah cast the small woman a glance, mentally wincing as she saw the lingering hurt still in those wide blue eyes.

It's for the best...

"She carved them on the walls of her hospital room."

The Professor shifted his attention from the Polaroids to Gwyn herself at that. Sarah had the feeling that he was about to say something when her replacement cell phone chirped. With an apologetic look she snapped it open and listened quietly, nodding every once in a while as Eric spoke.

"Sorry we can't stay, Professor, Eric's got reports of a zombie over near the industrial district. I'll have to go take care of it. Place keeps getting visits lately."

The Professor stood as she did, Gwyn slowly stood a few seconds later, looking a bit dazed for some reason.

"Go take care of your business then, Magister."

He handed her back the Polaroid's, which she promptly tucked away in one of her jacket pockets.

"I'm sorry I can't tell you anything about those symbols."

Sarah studied him as they stepped out of his piles of belongings, eyes narrowing, he was holding something back, she was certain of it.

"If you think of anything, Professor, you know how to get in touch with me."

"Be well, Magister, may the light shine on all the dark paths you must tread."

She nodded and stepped out from under the bridge, turning around just in time to see him grab a hold of Gwyn's arm and tug her close, whispering something to the pale woman. Whatever he said it only took a few seconds, then Gwyn was out from under the bridge as well, looking a bit shaken.

"You alright?"

The shorter woman avoided meeting Sarah's eyes, and nodded, hugging herself.

"Fine, can we just go now?"

Behind them the Professor began packing his things; his long wait was finally at an end.

Gwyn was surprised that Sarah didn't ask anything until they'd gotten back to the black SUV. The dark-haired woman had not struck her as someone possessed with a lot of patience. She'd just gotten into her seat, and buckled the seat belt as they pulled away from the curve.

"What did he say?"

Gwyn bit her lip, looking out the window at the trees that streaked past, soon enough they would be back into the city itself, then it would be gray buildings streaking past them.

"You didn't see them did you?"

Sarah glanced in the rearview mirror, then back down to the road ahead of them, smoothly cutting across two lanes to make a left handed turn onto 5th avenue.

"See what?"

"The lights."

In the reflection from the window, Gwyn could see the Magister looking at her curiously as they headed deeper into the city.

"What lights are we talking about here, Gwyn?"

She didn't see them; she really didn't see them. How could she miss them? Of course she didn't see the monster either. Great, now how do I explain them to her?

Keeping her eyes on the city outside, the smaller woman slowly started to try to describe what she'd seen.

"They were carved into the underside of the bridge. Hundreds of them, just like the one's in the pictures. They were all glowing with this sort of gold light."

The following silence was only broken by the sound of the wheels going over the inevitable potholes, until Sarah carefully pulled them up in front of an abandoned warehouse in the industrial district and shut off the engine.

"Are you telling me that the Professor had the same sort of glyphs you had in your hospital room, all over the underside of the bridge?"

Gwyn nodded.

Sarah stared straight ahead, her fingers flexing around the steering wheel, as if she was imagining strangling someone. Her voice was fairly level though when she spoke again.

"I see. Well we'll go pay the Professor another visit after this. In the meantime you stay here, keep the doors locked, and use the car phone to call me, or Eric, if anything happens. Understood?"

Gwyn nodded, watching as the Magister grabbed her weapons from the back of the SUV, along with her sword and trench coat. She watched as the tall, dark-haired woman seemed to wrap the shadows around her and disappear between the rows of warehouses, behind which loomed the imposing bulk of an oil refinery. Fire occasionally lanced upwards into the night sky from the dark mass of steel and cement. In her mind she kept on replaying the whispered words that the Professor had said to her as she left.

"Welcome home, little sister."

She was so intent on watching the doorway that she didn't see him until he was right up to the passenger side window. Unlike the other time she'd seen him, this time Gabriel was carrying a trumpet, its surface so polished it seemed to glow. Using the mouthpiece of his horn he tapped on the window, causing Gwyn to yelp and jump from her seat, staring at the figure suddenly outlined against the dark window. Gabriel lowered his head enough so that she could see his face, her heart pounding from the sudden shock. His small grin was unrepentant, and she scowled at him as she rolled down the window.

"What do you want?"

"I came to see how you were doing. Enjoying the city, Gwyn, is it?"

He had said that he wasn't her enemy. Cautiously she nodded, watching him suspiciously.

"Well, Gwyn, I thought you might want to know, your Magister's in trouble."

"Sarah? She's in trouble? What kind of trouble?"

Gabriel leaned against the hood, watching with vague amusement as she scrambled for the phone.

"She'll be dead before the old man gets here."

He offered helpfully, receiving a scowl from the pale-haired woman. Who changed her course of action and leaned back over the rear seat, where Sarah kept her equipment.

"How do you know she's in trouble, Gabriel?"

The man waved away the question, answering her first one instead.

"One of the local vampire lords thought it would be a good idea to get rid of the Magister. Big feather in his cap you could say. So he's hoarded the undead for the past several months, building a nice little army for himself. Now he's brought her to him with bait."

The other black duffel bag was right where she'd seen it last, and Gwyn tugged it up into the front seat with her. Grunting a bit under the unexpected weight, a quick look inside assured her that it held weapons.

"The zombie you mean? That was the bait?"

There was no answer, and when she looked up he was gone. Distantly she thought she could hear the sound of trumpets, but it might have been the wind howling around the buildings.

"Next time I see you, Gabriel, you're going to answer some questions."

Hefting the bag she headed for the same door that the Magister had disappeared into.

The warehouse was, not particularly surprisingly, empty of everything but an occasional rat. The remnants of old crates were stacked up in a far corner and after a brief search, she moved through the abandoned building towards her real target. The chain link fence that surrounded the massive oil refinery had seen better days. Near the front gate the fence was in good condition, and even patrolled by the occasional security guard, back here there were gaping holes in the fence that were nearly as old as she was.

Careful not to snag her coat on any sharp edges, she ducked through and stalked across the dusty dead ground. Not even the occasional weed grew this close to the refinery, and she moved a bit faster. She never did like coming here, the place felt far too cold and mechanical for her liking.

Coming from someone who spent a lot of her time hunting undead, that was saying a lot.

The metal grating made moving silently a challenge, even for her, though the shadows still cloaked her. Endless piping stretched down the hallways, occasionally belching walls of steam here and there. Doing her best to ignore the smell, Sarah headed toward the front of the large complex, smiling as she managed not to get lost, not a small feat, considering that all of the corridors looked almost exactly the same.

The security office wasn't much, little more than a booth with closed circuit TVs lining a wall, and a seat that hadn't been comfortable in at least two decades. The man staring at those TVs hadn't changed much in the last two decades either. He'd grown a bit more rotund, and a few more gray hairs, but Billy was just as she remembered him when she'd started going out on calls with her mother.

"Billy!"

The cup of coffee that was apparently part of the uniform nearly went flying as the man almost crashed off his chair in surprise.

"For the love of God, Sarah! You nearly gave me a damn heart attack!"

Unrepentantly the dark-haired woman lounged against the doorway, smiling as she watched him get to his feet a touch unsteadily. Coffee was not the only thing that graced the coffee cups he drank from; he often added a touch of liquid courage to his drinks.

"Sorry, Billy."

"The hell you are! What the hell you trying to do, send me to an early grave?"

She grinned in answer to that and waited as the security guard rambled his way through a few more curses. When he finally ran out of steam, she pushed off from the doorway, standing

upright and motioning towards the bank of TVs.

"So, whatcha got for me?"

"Hell if I know, Sarah me girl, got another one of those freaks wandering around in the lower levels. Can't go a week without one of them showing up!"

That had been the case for as long as Sarah had been Magister, and she shrugged. It never was particularly difficult to deal with the odd zombie that turned up here. As long as she didn't have to hunt the things down in the warren of passageways, it would only take a few minutes to take care of.

"Well, I'll do my rounds, take care of your problem, then head off. See you next time, Billy."

"Take care girl, and don't sneak up on me next time!"

Sarah grinned to herself as she headed down the hallway, it was always fun to terrorize Billy. The man was definitely too stressed out as far as she was concerned, of course having undead show up on a weekly basis probably did that to a man. Of course they'd never come up out of the lower levels, at least not that she knew about, which was a bit odd, but she wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth. As long as they stayed in the lower levels of the complex she wouldn't have to deal with disappearing workers.

The way down into the bowels of the complex was just as confusing as the rest of the passageways, only the occasional sign here and there to tell her where she was going. She'd been this way quite a few times though, and the Magister's footsteps were certain as she headed down flight after flight of stairs.

Magister's tended to avoid elevators.

Nasty things could happen to you in them if something decided to drop in.

"God, could it stink any worse down here?" Sarah muttered, coughing a bit on the ever-present stench of petroleum and petroleum by-products. Down here, without the cleansing breeze that sometimes flowed through the upstairs corridors, the smells were even worse. Which always made tracking down the zombies a bit harder, since she couldn't trace them by following the scent of rotting flesh.

No matter, she knew where they always tended to wander.

She walked down another series of corridors, going deeper and deeper into the complex, now somewhere around the fifth sub-basement. The sword she drew cast flickering shadows on the walls as the glyphs up and down its length burned with blue flames, letting her know there were, indeed, undead nearby.

The old mine shaft was right where she remembered it, the heavy iron doors flung open and the

chain that had barred the way broken and discarded on the floor. The oil company, she remembered, had used this place to dump toxic waste during the '80's. Right up until the EPA slapped them heavily on the wrist and made them cart everything out and dispose of it properly.

Not that the ground wasn't still contaminated all over the place. Cement floors changed to hard packed dirt and rock as she moved down into the shaft. Only one out of every five of the bare light bulbs strung down the shaft actually worked, and the sword in her hand gave more light than they did.

She was getting closer now.

"Why do they always have to come down here, why couldn't they just hang out in an alleyway or something? I hate this place."

The darkness in front and behind her swallowed her words, but she kept moving forward, ducking under the occasional support column. This little weekly ritual was one she could do without.

Further down the shaft she moved, the creatures trail, like the one's that had come down here before it, a dragging shuffle down the center of the shaft.

Wish I knew why they come down here.

It didn't fit the usual pattern. Magister's were based out of cities because of the simple fact that cities were where most of the food was concentrated. The food being humans of course, and such a dense cluster was bound to attract everything that fed on living beings for miles around. One didn't usually expect a zombie to break into a mostly empty oil refinery and go down into the basement.

Unless it was searching for something of course.

Unfortunately if they were searching for something, she'd never been able to find out what it was, neither had her mother. As far as every test and spell they'd ever cast could tell them, this was just an empty mine shaft that a greedy oil company had dug to illegally dump toxic waste into.

The Zombie was right where she expected it to be, near the bottom of the tunnel, where ground water had seeped in and formed a pond. The pale green water was bitter cold to the touch, despite being so far underground, and even the undead didn't enter it.

Unfortunately it wasn't alone.

Not one, but five zombies stood at the edge of that pool of water, studiously ignoring her presence, even though the light from her sword was reflecting off the water. Each of the five held a wet burlap bag, the dark wet stain forming at the bottom of the bags a clue to the macabre contents.

The hair at the nape of her neck stood up, and Sarah snarled as she felt the magic being woven. Something was using these zombies as puppets, directing them to perform whatever ritual they were attempting. The dark haired Magister had no clue what they were attempting, but she had no intention of allowing them continue.

Long, slender fingers curled around one of the grenades clipped to her belt.

Gwyn hesitated as she wandered out the other side of the big empty warehouse.

Oh God, how am I going to find Sarah in that?

Up close the oil refinery looked even bigger than she had thought possible, and the pale woman shifted back and forth uncertainly. The gap in the chain link fence lay directly in front of her, and she was pretty certain that the Magister had come through here. The problem lay in where she'd gone from there.

Not for the first time in the past few minutes she cursed herself for not calling Eric.

"Ok, so she came through here and went into..." frightened blue eyes peered upwards at the massive metal structure "that. Sure, I can find her. No problem."

Come on, Sarah's in trouble, Gabriel said she was. So I gotta go find her.

Holding that thought firmly in mind she stepped through the gap in the fence, promptly sinking to her knees as waves of dizziness washed over her. She swallowed suddenly, desperately trying to avoid throwing up, her eyes tearing from the pounding pain in her head.

"It hurt's doesn't it?"

Under her the earth itself was tortured, dying, it cried out to her, begging for help. Tears streaked her cheeks as she looked up at those words.

"So much pain..."

Her words trailed off into a sob, and slender shoulders shook.

The Professor crouched down a few feet to one side of her, waiting patiently as she got herself under control. His dirty fingers tenderly touching the dry soil beneath his boots, and he sadly nodded.

"Much pain."

It took an effort, but Gwyn slowly managed to look over at the other man. Tears still streaked her cheeks, but she wasn't helpless under the overwhelming sadness and pain that had rolled over her.

"Why is there so much pain here? Is it because of that?"

She waved towards the mass of steel pipes and concrete, which belched fire upwards into the night in counterpoint to her sentence. His fingers patted the dirt tenderly, and he gazed towards the building she'd been heading towards.

"No. Humans cause pain and sadness to the earth sometimes, that's true enough. But this is not of their making."

An image of Sarah forced herself to her feet; using strength she didn't know she possessed to stand upright. Swaying a bit unsteadily she watched the street man rise fluidly as well. The question of how he had gotten here so quickly never even entered her mind.

"Who then?"

"We made it, little sister."

The lullaby of sadness made it hard for her to focus on what he was saying, and every part of her screamed for her to find the source of that sadness and comfort it.

"What do you mean we?"

"I mean our kind."

Whatever he meant by that he didn't elaborate.

"You need to go now, little sister, quickly. The enemy knows you're here. Be careful who you trust."

A low growl sounded behind her, and she knew, with a terrible certainty what had made that sound. A brief glance over her shoulder showed the same creature from Marina's house slinking out of the back door of the warehouse.

"Professor?"

With a gulp she realized that the man had disappeared, as suddenly as he had come, layers of coats and all. The creature by the warehouse reared up onto its hind legs, wings half spread and hissed, a long forked tongue snaking out to taste the air. Red eyes snapped towards her and it dropped back down to all fours once more, breaking out into a surprisingly fast shuffling run.

"Oh shit."

Using the grenade, Sarah admitted, was not the wisest idea she'd ever come up with. Coughing she waved her hand, trying to clear some of the dust that the explosion had kicked up.

At least none of the tunnel collapsed.

I think.

The ringing in her ears was loud in the sudden silence following the explosion and she gingerly moved back down the tunnel from where she'd taken cover behind a support column. Through the still billowing dust she moved, covering her mouth with her left hand to try to filter out the air, while her sword was a comforting weight in her right hand.

The zombies had been reduced to kibble by the blast and she spared a small smirk at the nearest piece of rotting flesh.

Hope that gave whoever was controlling them a headache.

Tracking down whoever had sent these zombies, unfortunately, took a distant second place to finding out who, or what, was after Gwyn. The pale haired woman had become disturbingly important in only a few days.

The sooner she gets her memory back, the sooner my life goes back to normal. Well, as normal as it ever gets.

She was so intent on planning how to make sure that Gwyn was safe that she didn't even realize that the water was glowing until most of the dust had drifted back down to the floor of the cavern.

"What the hell..."

At least a dozen feet below the surface something was glowing in a pure golden light. It lit up the entire shaft, making rippling patterns along the walls of stone and dirt. Fascinated she crouched down and stared into the water, trying to see whatever it was that was radiating such light. That it was magical in nature was without a doubt, she could feel the power radiating from it now that she was paying attention. There, half buried in the sandy bottom, was an amulet.

Gingerly the Magister extended her blade, sinking the tip into the glowing water. The flames that danced across its length eerily still in existence underwater. The tip ground into the sandy bottom and, squinting her eyes against the light, she moved the blade feeling when the metal hit something other than sand. A bit of fishing and she was able to pull up the blade with a quick stroke, the chain from the amulet sliding down the blade to hang by the hand guard. Even as it left the water, the brilliant flare of light dimmed then faded completely, leaving only a diamond amulet hanging from her blade.

Gwyn could feel the creature's breath on her back when she lunged into the building. Desperately she yanked open the heavy metal fire door and tried to slam it closed again. Except the creature was there, and its claws curled around the door, keeping it from closing as she screamed in fear and an odd sense of excitement.

The thing's claws curled and she felt it start to pull the door open, she had only the push bar to hold onto and slowly but relentlessly the door began to open. Adrenaline surged through her as the creature's face peered through the steadily widening crack. Without thinking she yelled and lashed outwards, her body reacting instinctively before her mind could catch up with what was happening. Her fist trailed white light as it connected with the snarling creature's face.

A soundless explosion of force sent her hurtling backwards, skidding to a stop several feet down the hallway. Blue eyes were wide with shock as she stared down the hallway towards the slightly bent metal door, the creature was gone, although its resounding scream of pain echoed in her mind.

"Wow... ok that was new."

Wincing she scrambled to her feet, shaking out her right hand, which had gone numb.

I hope Sarah didn't run into one of those.

The fact that the Magister wasn't able to even see the creature was not lost on the amnesiac. Deciding moving was the best option she had open to her, Gwyn turned back towards the center of the complex, and stopped dead as she realized she had no clue where she was going.

Just inside the doorway three corridors split off and angled deeper into the oil refinery, each one looking more or less exactly like the other, complete with the occasional puffs of steam.

Uh oh.

Now what?

Come on Gwyn, think! There has to be a way to find her, what if she's battling one of those things and can't even see it! I know Eric said she was very good at what she does, but if she can't even see what's attacking her...

Only by closing her eyes and forcing herself to ignore the image of Sarah laying in her own pool of blood did the blonde stave off the rising tide of hysterical fear for the Magister. Instead she concentrated on images of Sarah alive and well, the first time she'd seen her in the Hospital, through a haze. When the world was a place of even more insanity and chaos than it was right now, and the glowing woman who had come to see her seemed like the only one who could help her.

The glowing woman...

Wait, I remember her glowing, with this sort of blue fire encasing her.

Eyes still shut tightly she frowned, then pale blue eyes flew open as she realized she was seeing that same blue fire. A trail, thin and almost completely transparent in the overhead fluorescent lighting, but it was there. Stretching down the center hallway and leading the way into the large building.

Without questioning it, for if she did she'd start questioning everything and she'd end up curled up in a fetal position in the corner, Gwyn started forwards.

"Thank you so much for finding my key, Magister."

Sarah hadn't heard him approach, hadn't even felt him approach. Impossibly she hadn't even known he was there until he spoke up and she whirled, sword en guard, and the now simple diamond amulet clutched in her gloved left hand. Standing only a few feet away was a man just as pale as Gwyn, with pale blue eyes, although his hair was jet black. Unlike her friend though, his eyes held no warmth or humor, only a detached amusement at her.

"Who are you?"

That his aura flared as brightly as Gwyn's did was obvious to one such as she.

"Oh, I'm hurt, Gwyn didn't tell you I'd spoken to her? How is she doing? I hope she didn't get cut up too bad from the Demon Spawn."

She sliced the tip of her blade down in a rapid move, warningly, as he took a step towards her.

"You're Gabriel."

"Two points for the talking monkey. Now give me my key, and I'll let you live through the night. Pretty fair deal, don't you think?"

She didn't answer, casting a glance over her shoulder and frowning as she realized she was not in a good position. The only way out was past the thing in front of her, and she was reluctant to attack him without having any clear idea of what his powers might be.

"What are you?"

"Tsk ts, you haven't figured it out yet? You aren't much of a Magister are you."

The tip of the blade carved through the air, neatly opening a gash along his cheek before he

realized what she was doing. Her lips pulled back from her teeth in a snarl.

"Oh, so why are you the one bleeding?"

Gabriel backed a step away from her, his hand coming up to touch the blood dribbling down his cheek, and his eyes were dark as he stared at her.

"You're pretty good for a talking monkey, why don't you come over to my side. Good perks, we pay well, and all you have to do is give me that key. Whadda say?"

The tip flicked again, and a gashed opened on his other cheek.

"Go to hell."

"Eh, been there, this place is much more fun. How about this? I'll just take the key from your broken bleeding body."

"You think you can take me?"

"Me? Oh, I could take you if I wanted to Sarah, but truly, why waste the effort? When they can take you for me?"

Her eyes darted back and forth, every sense in her probing the rest of the tunnel for anyone, anything else.

"Looks like your reinforcements are late, Gabriel."

"Oh no Magister, I assure you, they are right where they need to be."

Then the first blow slammed her into the stone wall.

The security guard had been surprisingly helpful, although she wasn't sure why he kept on calling her his girl, almost like he'd thought she was his lost daughter.

I don't even want to know why I know he lost his daughter to Cancer.

She followed his directions and the whisper thin trail that she was pretty sure Sarah had left. That trail slowly grew thicker as she went down level by level, until it was a ribbon of electric blue leading her into what looked for all the world like a tunnel opening.

There was something else here, she could smell something different, a scent that seemed familiar.

The sound of an inhuman scream sent her pelting down the tunnel, heedless of any dangers she

might encounter on the way down. The sight that greeted her at the bottom of the tunnel jerked her to a stunned stop though.

Sarah knelt by a pool of ground water that filled the bottom of the tunnel, her hair had come undone and it hid her face, but Gwyn could see the other woman's shoulders heaving as she breathed. Closer to where Gwyn was stood Gabriel, the man was watching the Magister as if she were some particularly interesting insect. Around Sarah, collapsed on the tunnel floor, were two of those creatures that had attacked her at Marina's, both obviously dead. Another four held back, and to Gwyn's eyes, looked cautious as they hissed at the Magister.

"Ah, right on time Gwyn. Your friend is very impressive, I must admit. She managed two on her own. A pity she lost the Key to one of my associates isn't it? Want to see if she can handle four more? Or maybe a few more after them?"

Gabriel's smile was devoid of warmth as Sarah jerked a bit at the sound of Gwyn's name.

"That's right Magister, look who's come to the party."

"Go Gwyn, take the jeep and get back to the Manor!"

Blood had soaked through Sarah's side, and even from where she was, Gwyn could tell the Magister had not escaped without grievous wounds.

"If you do, your pet monkey here dies. I promise you Gwyn, her death will not be a pleasant one."

Hints of memory stirred in the back of her mind, fragments still, but a collage that was starting to gather both form and texture. Whatever else he was, Gabriel was not lying about this, she knew that with an absolute certainty. Blue eyes met eyes darkened with pain.

If I go, then she dies, and I owe her everything.

The decision wasn't a hard one.

"What do you have in mind Gabriel?"

Ignoring Sarah's shouted "No!"

"You come with me, and we don't kill her. I rather think that's fair."

Sarah was desperately trying to get to her feet, using her sword as a cane and actually snarling in rage at the two closest creatures.

"Neither you or your creatures kill her, agreed?"

Gabriel's smile was chillingly sincere.

"Agreed."

His hand curled around her arm, but she ignored him as he tugged her up the tunnel. Her eyes locked with Sarah's trying to communicate to the other woman everything she'd hoped to have time to tell her. The creatures made sure that Sarah didn't follow them closely until they reached the end of the tunnel and exited back out into the corridor.

The sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach only intensified as two of the creatures took up position on either side of her and Gabriel stepped back towards the entrance of the tunnel. Even from here she could hear Sarah screaming her name.

"Say goodbye to your friend, Gwyn."

"What?"

That jerked her out of her sense of loss and she tried to hurl herself at the man, only to cry out in pain as the creatures sank their claws into her shoulders.

"You agreed!"

His smile widened into what, she was terrified to realize, was true amusement.

"Yes, I did agree that we wouldn't kill her, and we won't. We'll just seal her into the tunnel."

Power surged and he pressed his fingers against the top of the tunnel opening. Gwyn could feel the fabric of the rock weaken along the entire length of the tunnel and begin to crumble.

"SARAH! GO BACK!"

She didn't know if the other woman had heard her, for only a few short seconds later the tunnel collapsed on itself.

Sarah did hear her, indeed she'd had a feeling about what was coming. Ignoring the pain in her left side, where one of the invisible creatures had gotten too close for comfort, she tried to limp her way as far up the tunnel as she could. That Gabriel could collapse the tunnel around her, she had no doubt, indeed the Magister knew more than a few arcane ways to do it herself.

When the rock above her head began to disintegrate the tall woman slammed the tip of her sword into the dirt floor. Going to her knees she grasped the hilt in both hands, stilling her thoughts and channeling her power around herself. Murmuring incantations to help her focus she formed a perfect sphere of power around herself in a shield. None too soon either, for just as it formed the entire tunnel collapsed, suddenly trapping her in a prison of earth and stone.

After the sudden crash of tumbling earth, the silence afterwards was deafening, the only sound her panting breath.

Well Shit, I don't even know how close to the tunnel mouth I am.

Stifling several choice curses, Sarah carefully began taking stock of her situation. The glyphs on her sword would provide her light to see by long after dehydration had killed her. Breathable air was a different story and the Magister scowled at the prison she found herself in. If not for the fact it would have wasted her oxygen she would have screamed in frustration.

Someone had taken Gwyn and she was stuck!

If he hurts her, I'll mount his head on a pike and use it as signpost.

Ignoring the small voice in her mind snidely asking her why she was so worked up over the safety of someone she didn't care about.

Oh shut up, and help me figure out a way out of here.

Not surprisingly the little voice didn't have any helpful suggestions. The cell phone in her pocket was useless this deep underground, so calling Eric for help was out of the question. Telepathy this far from the manor was a waste of energy. Doing her best to keep her breathing even and light, she focused on the wall of dirt in "Front" of her. She'd been careful to stay facing in the same direction as the outside hallway.

Concentrating she focused on what had once been a tunnel, closing her eyes to sense the way ahead of her. Gabriel was not the only one who could loosen dirt. Inch by inch the dirt and rock ahead of her was compacted to either side. It was going to be a small tunnel, barely more than she could squeeze through, but it would be enough.

As long as I don't pass out from lack of air before I finish it.

Tendrils of fear kept on distracting her. She wasn't normally claustrophobic, but this was an extreme situation and she couldn't help thinking about how many tons of rock and dirt were pressing down on her. Only the thin shield kept her from being entombed permanently.

Another five feet of tunnel was opened up, it was barely enough, but she managed to force herself forwards. Conforming the shield to the smaller space was hard, but handling two tasks at once had been part of her training. Foot by foot she forced an opening in the solid dirt in front of her, and inched forwards. As she passed the tunnel collapsed again behind her.

The air inside her shield was becoming stifling, and she felt light headed.

Another foot of dirt was shoved aside, nearly frantic now to escape. Her lungs burned with the need for fresh air, and she gasped, knowing there was no more oxygen to breath.

I should have kept kissing Gwyn.

Then the darkness claimed her.

Did you ever notice how in the Bible, whenever God needed to punish someone, or make an example, or whenever God needed a killing, he sent an angel? Did you ever wonder what a creature like that must be like? A whole existence spent praising your God, but always with one wing dipped in blood. Would you ever really want to see an angel?

~ Thomas Daggett, ex-seminary student/cop*

The Last Night

"Wakey, wakey!"

Blairly she swam upwards towards consciousness, groaning as the dull ache in her side and the pounding headache each vied for her attention. The light being shone in her face won and Sarah opened her eyes, then immediately wished she hadn't as she was nearly blinded.

Her fist came up and around in an instinctive action, and there was a startled yelp of pain. The glare of light disappeared as well and she cracked open an eyelid, confusion reigning as she remembered the tunnel.

Where the hell am I now?

"God damn it Sarah! You didn't have to slug me."

"You didn't have to shine that in my eyes either."

She growled, managing to get into a sitting position. She was, she found out, in her bedroom. Her side had been bandaged, and most of the dirt had been cleaned off.

"What happened?"

"You nearly died."

The Magister wasn't particularly surprised to see the Professor sitting in one of the old rocking chairs her parents had left her. Eric had picked up the flashlight she'd swatted aside and was ruefully rubbing arm where she'd hit him.

"What happened?"

Her throat was soar, but she frowned as she realized her side should have hurt a lot more than it did. A quick check of the bandages proved that some sort of magical healing had been used, the gashes were still there, but they were the thin red lines of old healing wounds instead of gashes only hours old.

"You were trapped, Magister. I alerted Eric and he came to dig you out."

The bland answer earned the Professor a glare that even made him wince.

"Not that I'm not thankful, but how the HELL did you know about that?"

Eric was watching the other man curiously also, he'd been too busy making certain his niece was alright to ask, but it had been something he'd wanted an answer to.

"Simple, I was there."

Ignoring the pain in her head and side, Sarah surged to her feet, uncoiling with an explosion of power and slamming the homeless man into the wall. Her voice was a jagged snarl even to her own ears.

"And you didn't stop him from taking Gwyn?"

Black eyes watched her sympathetically despite her move, and his voice was a calm counterpoint to hers.

"I can not interfere in this fight."

Her knuckles whitened as she grabbed a hold the outermost coat he was wearing and hauled him to his feet, only to slam him into the nearest wall.

"What does that mean?"

"It means I have my orders."

She would have slit him open to find out what he knew, and it showed in eyes as dark as the darkest night.

"From who?"

The long haired man simply smiled, and she had to hold up a hand to keep Eric from pushing the muzzle of the gun he was holding into the Professor's face.

Patience is not a family virtue.

Instead of saying anything, the man she held up against the wall managed to free a hand and point a finger upwards. She glanced at it, then up at the ceiling, then back at him in puzzlment that rapidly gave way to something approaching understanding. That he was telling the truth was blazoned across his entire aura.

"What, exactly, is it that Gwyn's involved in?"

"Don't worry little one, it's almost night fall. It will all be over soon enough."

Gwyn refused to answer, staring out the window at the setting sun. She half heartedly tugged on the thick chains that Gabriel and his associates had wrapped around her and the granite bench she was sitting on. She'd given up yelling at him when her voice started to go hoarse, and was now doing her best pretending he didn't exist. The dark haired man seemed to find that amusing as he watched her from his own position, perched on the edge of a chair. The old abandoned warehouse they'd taken her to wasn't that far from the oil refinery, but she had no illusions about anyone being able to hear her screams for help.

Now she just concentrated on picturing her captor being eviscerated by Sarah.

Sarah, oh please God, let her be alright. Please, please let her have survived.

She didn't know if anyone heard her prayers either, but it was all she could do for now.

"You should be honored, little one, you're going to wipe a scourge from the earth."

Pained blue eyes swung towards the perched man, watching as he idly played the valves.

"Don't call me that."

He smiled mockingly.

"What, little one?"

Her glare was his answer, and if anything his smile grew.

"What should I call you, Gwyn? You know that's not your real name."

She leaned forwards, not much, but it was enough for his grin to turn triumphant.

"Oh yes, I know who, and what you really are."

Despite what she might think of him, she wanted, needed to know what he knew. She knew Gabriel did not miss the hopeful expression on her face, and at that moment she didn't care.

"Who am I?"

The gaunt man hopped down from his perch, still carrying his horn, and leaned down towards the chained woman. His lips were only a hairs breath away from her ear when he spoke again.

"Don't you know? You're an Angel, just like me."

"What the FUCK do you mean she's an Angel?"

The Professor choked for a second and only Eric's hand on her shoulder called the Magister back from the rage swelling inside of her. She forced herself to let go of the other man, watching silently as he gasped for breath, if he even twitched wrong she was going to gut him where he stood and read the answers she wanted in his entrails.

"Step back Sarah."

"What?"

Whirling she glared at her Uncle, lips curling.

"You kill him and you won't learn a thing."

His low urgent words managed to stem the tide of rage, and the Magister stalked away from the still gasping Professor. Her Uncle stayed close to him, eyeing the man narrowly.

"You better start talking, or she'll start cutting."

The homeless man straightened, an odd smile on his face, despite the bruises forming on his neck.

"She's going to need to know you care for her."

Sarah took a step towards him as he spoke, intent on making him answer their questions, and he hastily held up both hands.

"Wait, wait, I'll explain, as much as I am allowed to."

Two sets of eyes watched him expectantly, both dark as night, and he did not need his God to show him what would happen if he did not answer their questions.

"The being you call Gwyn is a messenger of God, a being created from pure light, made of love, and her entire existence since the beginning of time has been in His service."

When no one tried to gut him, he continued, certain he had both their complete attention.

"She was sent here on a mission, before you ask, I can't tell you what it is. Somewhere along the way something went wrong, and she was forced into a human body. Gabriel probably had something to do with that, maybe used demons to hurt her, I don't know."

There was a pause as he drew in a breath to say more, but Sarah beat him to it. The woman's eyes pinning him where he stood, her entire body almost radiated the need to do something, to strike out at an enemy. Even the Professor would not have cared to face a Magister in full war cry.

"You said she was an Angel."

"She is, or to be more precise, part of her still is. It's just locked inside of her, held in check by the body of flesh she now wears."

She motioned for him to go on.

"Gabriel will try to use her to win his war."

At confused expressions from both of the Mordicai he embellished a bit.

"I'm not surprised you don't know about it, not many of your kind do. There's a... well, let's call it a war in heaven. Gabriel and his supporters are jealous of you."

Sarah arched an eyebrow.

"Oh for the love of... not you specifically, Magister, you as in your kind, humans. They are jealous of you, that God raised you up above even they, it enrages them you see, to have talking monkey's walking around in paradise. So they war, to find a way to wipe your kind from the face of the planet, while those still loyal to His word try to thwart them."

"Why doesn't God just stop them? If He's all powerful, he should be able to right?"

The Professor simply shrugged in way of an answer and smiled that annoying smile back at her. Sarah really was starting to wonder if she had ever thought of this man as anything but annoying and what the best way would be to remove every single one of his teeth as painfully as possible would be.

"I do not question His word, Magister."

She was nearing the edge of her patience, which wasn't that difficult. The professor hurried up a bit though, so it must have been obvious to the homeless man. She knew that Eric was tensing also, and his shotgun was firmly aimed at the Professor.

"The key you found, he'll use that to open a hole to hell. Through that he will command an army of demons."

The Magister stared at him in rapidly dawning understanding, a sickening feeling blossoming in the pit of her stomach as the Professor nodded.

"You understand now?"

Her voice was shaky, but stronger than she'd expected considering the images dancing through her thoughts.

"To open a gate to he'll need to sacrifice a being of pure light."

Eric's voice was quiet in the sudden grim silence.

"Gwyn."

"Have you met my associates, Gwyn?"

Escorted by the four remaining monsters, all she could do was glare at the back of Gabriel's head.

"I can smell their stench from here."

It had not escaped her attention that as they entered the park other things had been waiting for them. The smell alone would have told her that they weren't the only things that prowled through the trees.

"Dead talking monkey's, almost as clever as live talking monkey's and even more malleable to my will."

Indeed the park was crawling with undead, she winced as she caught sight of zombies, their decaying flesh hanging in strips from wet bones. Skeletons, only clothed in traces of the clothes they'd been buried in, and worse prowled between those dark trees. Gabriel, the amulet that Sarah had found firmly clasped in his hand.

"What's an Angel doing using undead?"

Her memory was still an abyss of darkness, but in that abyss there were more and more islands of memory. They were random, but ever since the encounter with the Professor, they'd grown. Some made no sense to her, like the one where she was using a bow and trying to shoot an arrow through something that looked like a small man with huge bat like wings. Others, her wielding a flaming sword against a host of creatures like those which flanked her right now, were terrible enough that she wasn't sure if she was glad she remembered them or not.

"I will use whatever means necessary to win this war."

"The ends justify the means Gabriel?"

"You always were too smart for your own good Gwyn."

They'd reached what she'd known was going to be there final destination, the bridge over the

Professor's home. A huge pentagram had been drawn across the entire width of the stone structure, and a creature whose soul clung to her like a diseased cloak, strode forwards. She might have looked beautiful to a normal person, but Gwyn could see the disease below the flesh and jerked back in surprise. Gabriel laughed as he strode forwards, not pausing as he passed the tall blond.

"Gwyn, I'd like you to meet Maeve, she's such a good friend, aren't you Maeve."

Maeve was running her tongue over elongated canine teeth, eyeing Gwyn appraisingly as she sauntered towards her. The smaller woman had a very good idea of what would happen to her once the Vampire reached her and tensed.

"Maeve."

The name was said deceptively softly, but the Vampire jerked backwards, scowling. For just a split second Gwyn saw naked fear in the Vampire's face, and she wondered what Gabriel could have done to place such there.

"Go make certain that none of the Magister's friends, or anyone else, interfere in the ceremony. We only have one sacrifice, so we can't mess it up."

Maeve hissed, reminding Gwyn of nothing so much as a cat, and she expected the other woman to refuse. Instead she turned and slipped into the shadows, taking the other undead with her.

"So nice to have somewhat reliable help."

Giving a tug against the claws that still held her arms captive, Gwyn could do little more than glare at the Angel.

"When did you loose your grace, Gabriel?"

"Don't you dare ever lecture me about grace, Gwyn."

He sneered at her, moving around the carefully drawn pentagram.

"You who lust after a human, a talking monkey. Little better than a snail with a soul, and barely even intelligent enough to realize they actually need this world to survive. Even then they continue to destroy it, so don't you dare lecture me. Because, little one, in the end I am in the one who is right here. They are a plague, nothing more than an accident, and I am going to remove them and make it like it used to be. You remember that, don't you? When we were His best, his closest, and we were held highest among all."

Gwyn watched him as he talked, noting the hint of insanity in his eyes as he rounded the pentagram and came to stand before her.

"He doesn't talk to you anymore, does he Gabriel? You know why? Because you've become like

Lucifer."

The blow came so fast she saw nothing more than a blur before his fist slammed into the side of her head, rocking her back on her heels. If not for the demons holding her on either side she would have fallen.

"Your friend erased my other Gate, so I couldn't call more demons to my service. I was rather annoyed at the Magister for that, and I'd hoped that the old man would have died, what's his name? Ah yes, Eric. Too bad you healed him before that happened, Gwyn. No matter, now that I have you here, and the Key, I can command all of them that I want."

His ramblings washed over her, the pale haired woman barely heard him, the ringing in her ears and the fight to keep upright consumed most of her concentration. She did hear his next words perfectly clearly though.

"Strip her, it's time that she become somewhat useful."

"Sarah!"

"Get out of my way Eric."

"Goddam it."

The older man cursed as his niece shoved him aside and yanked open the door to her SUV.

"Would you wait until I get my stuff!"

"Meet me at the park."

Her tires smoked as she squealed backwards, only closing the door at the last second, and barely avoiding having it wrenched off by the edge of the garage doorway. Eric was yelling at her again, even as he yanked the tarp off of his own car, an older 1960s vintage muscle car that he'd had ever since his first days in the city. She was glad he'd get one more chance to drive it into battle.

"If you lied to me, Professor, I'll hunt you down and stake you where it hurts."

She growled, wrenching the wheel hard over, sending the big vehicle barreling down into the street outside of the manor, heading downtown. The Magister had only had to threaten the homeless man a few more times to get him to tell her where it was that Gabriel had to make his sacrifice.

That it was the bridge that the Professor had lived under had seemed somewhat fitting to her as

she grabbed her equipment. Sarah hadn't cared if the Professor stayed where he was, or left, because she finally understood what was going on.

She had a clear target.

Undead to return to the grave.

A loved one to save.

Loved one?

The dark haired woman angrily shoved that thought aside for another time, and concentrated on getting to the park as quickly as possible. A minor spell, whispered as she barreled down the street, guaranteed that she wouldn't be pulled over for speeding or any other traffic infraction.

She had an answer where all the undead had gone to during the past few months at least.

Gabriel had, somehow, managed to gather himself a small army.

How nice.

With a screech of breaks a cab skidded to a stop as she cut straight through the last intersection, making her own path into the park through the end of the T intersection. The Magister had an impression of several skeletons, and even a zombie or two, caught in the sudden glare of the SUV's headlights, before she ran them over. A vicious grin curling her lips as she heard the crunches of bone even over the rattle of tree limbs slapping and scrapping along the sides of her truck.

The hunt was on, and fire burned through her viens, as it had every Magister since the beginning of time.

Where the trees got too thick she parked, slamming the door into the face of a ghoul trying to close in on her. A flash bang went sailing out the open passenger side window, even as she cleared her own door with a floating grace. The sword came up and around, taking the ghoul's head from it, even as the grenade exploded, turning the night to day behind her. Several skeletons too close to the glare simply disintegrated, and a zombie burst into flames.

"GWYN!"

Her yell cut through the trees, even as her sword sliced through air, removing another zombie from her path. She slipped from shadow to shadow, wrapping them about her, as she headed deeper into the park. Her senses blazed with the number of undead around, and blue fire ran the length of her blade. With her right hand she wielded her sword, cutting down anything that came between her and her destination, with her left she channeled magic. A pale blue sphere sprang into being around her, protecting her from the occasional thrown objects some of the more powerful undead hurled at her.

She could see the shape of the bridge ahead of her, just beyond another copse of trees, when the vampire stepped out of the shadows. That she was a vampire there was no doubt, that the werewolves clustered around here were under her control was also not in doubt.

"Magister, I've waited for this moment."

Sarah had no idea who this thing was, and she didn't care. All the Magister knew was that the Vamp was between her and Gwyn. The blue wreathed sword came up and she never even slowed her paces as she stalked towards the group.

"Hope you enjoy your last few moments then."

There was a commotion behind them, somewhere in the park things were screaming and bursts of magic were wiping undead from the face of the earth. None of which even slowed down the former Arch Angel. Gwyn was forced to lay down in the middle of the pentagram, the ever present demons, for she knew them as such now, keeping her motionless.

"You are about to start the new world, Gwyndolinn."

She spat at him, struggling vainly against the claws holding her down.

"What are you doing Gabriel?"

If she could delay him, maybe Sarah could reach them in time. The hope must have shown in her eyes, for the dark haired arch angel grinned as he drew a blade from thin air. It was longer than the one the Magister wielded, and black flames flickered along its edges.

"I wouldn't hold out hope for your Magister, little sister. She's fighting every undead that I could recruit for the past five months right now. Think she's that good? I'd be willing to bet she might be, but how long do you think it will take her to get through all those dead bodies?"

The blade came up and around, she could see it only as a perfect absence of light against the clear night sky above. He was only a silhouette against that same sky as well, the amulet glowed with a malevolent light, Gwyn could feel the boundaries between worlds start to fade. All it would take would be a blood sacrifice to open the gate.

Her blood.

"Your insane Gabriel."

"Do you know what hell is, Gwyn? It's not being roasted alive, it's being locked away from God. From a perfect all consuming love. Frankly, I'd rather go up with the entire planet than go back there."

Sarah, I wish I'd gotten to kiss you one more time.

The blade came up and around, and she closed her eyes, knowing the end was upon her.

Metal clanged against metal and Gwyn's eyes shot open as the end didn't happen. Gabriel snarled at the old man who had appeared besides him, the flaming sword he too held crossed with Gabriel's.

"I warned you to leave Davyd!"

The Professor smiled, and for the first time since she'd met him, the old man did not look old. His back was straight instead of hunched over and the lines had disappeared from his face.

"And I told you I serve our God."

It happened quickly, almost too fast for her to follow. Gabriel's sword came up and around aimed at the Professor's side. Instead of countering though, the former old man turned towards her. She had the impression of a smile upon his face as he too lashed out. His sword did not bite into Gabriel though, it carved a path through the two demons holding down her right side.

"Stop him little sister."

Then Gabriel's sword had finished its path, and the headless body crumpled next to her. The sword falling with a rattle to the pavers just inches from her own suddenly free hand.

So natural for her fingers to curl around the hilt.

So natural for her to use it to strike at the two demons still holding down her left side, while the other two were still reeling from the wounds the Professor had caused.

Then she was up and backing away from them, frantic to get off the bridge and away from the baleful red lines painted upon the pavers.

"Stop her!"

Gabriel's yell only hastened her flight.

A half dozen werewolves lay dead around the now bloodied clearing as Sarah dropped the empty stake thrower. She had no more silver stakes to load into it, so it was useless. The small headset she still wore remained stubbornly quiet and she wondered what the hell was taking Eric so long.

"Come on, that the best you got?"

Her side ached from the mostly healed wound, and she was covered in small cuts and bruises. None of the werewolves had managed to bite her though, which was good news, since she didn't feel like becoming a werewolf herself. The vampire laughed, a high lilting sound that crawled underneath the Magister's skin and left her wanting to warm herself.

"Your slowing down Magister, how long before one of them gets through. Only a matter of time, and you don't have that much to spare do you."

Unfortunately the Vamp was right, and the Magister snarled. She was about to launch herself at the vamp and the surviving werewolves when a voice spoke up in her ear.

"Hey, kiddo, you down there?"

The snarl turned into a smile and she saluted the vampire with her blade, then pointed towards each of the werewolves with its tip.

"What are you doing, Magister?"

"It's just you and me now, Vamp."

She laughed again, enlarged canines flashing in the moonlight.

"What, you think my pets are just going to disappear?"

"That's exactly what I think. Eric, take care of the pets will you?"

"Who are you speaking..."

The rest of her sentence was drowned out by the sharp crack of the heavy sniper rifle. Eric was set up in one of the taller apartment buildings across from the entrance of the park. The first bullet took the werewolf in the head, the silver bullet blowing the creature apart.

"My Uncle, he's a very good shot."

By the time she reached the stunned vamp the last of her werewolves was laying on it's side, streaming blood flowing from the wound in it's side.

"I think he's very good, don't you?"

"Damn you Magister!"

The bloodsucker flung herself at Sarah, who smiled thinly. This was not the first vampire she had ever crossed paths with, and except for the occasional smart one, they were rather predictable. Against most people a charging vampire would probably succeed, against a magister, it was futile.

She held out her hand, palm towards the rushing vampire and whispered.

Magic flared brilliant in the clearing, and flames engulfed the undead woman as she neared Sarah. The screaming was unhuman, and Sarah counted it as an act of mercy as her sword took the vampire's head from her shoulders.

"Took you long enough."

"Sorry, had a few things to pick up. Gwyn's running towards you right now, Gabriel's gaining on her though. She's picked up a sword somewhere. I'll keep the other goons off your back."

The crack of the sniper rifle didn't even slow, as Eric began picking off the zombies and ghouls left in the area. Clearing a path for the Magister as she ran straight towards the bridge.

"Gwyn!"

The pale woman was running towards her, a sword the Magister had never seen clasped in her right hand, its length wreathed in brilliant white flames. Behind her, running in odd leaping lunges, was Gabriel. The Ark Angel carried his own blade, but where as Gwyn's was wreathed in brilliant white flames, his was as dark as a starless night. They were perfect opposites, and for the first time she believed the Professor's words.

"Your mine Gabriel."

Gwyn skidded to a stop next to the Magister, blue eyes wide and frightened, but holding a new strength to them that the taller woman had not seen before.

"He has more demons with him, Sarah."

She saw no demons, not a surprise since she hadn't seen them at Marina's house.

"You killed her didn't you?"

The approaching Ark Angel slowed to a walk, and his smile was as cold as the vampires.

"I needed her to tell me where my little sister had fled to."

"Gwyn?"

The blonde woman's voice was shaky but she was staying right by Sarah's side.

"Yes?"

"You can see the demons right?"

"Yes."

"Can you kill them?"

The pale woman hesitated at that for a moment, then nodded.

"Yes."

"Good."

Sarah lunged forwards, her blade leading the way, intent on wiping the smirk from Gabriel's face. He met her halfway and sparks showered them both from where their swords crossed.

"You're just a talking monkey, Magister. You really think you can beat me?"

He shoved and Sarah went tumbling backwards. The Magister had a surprised second of flight before hitting the dirt a good dozen feet away from where she'd been. The Ark Angel was stronger than she'd expected. She got to her feet just in time to meet his next attack, and hissed in pain as his blade slammed down against hers. Out of the corner of her eye she could see Gwyn whirling and slashing at what looked like mid air.

Another slash and her right arm went numb from the shoulder down as she blocked Gabriel's attack. With a grunt she managed to get a bit of breathing room, and avoid being sent flying again.

"You can't even stand up to me, what chance do you think you have, Magister?"

He was an excellent swordsman, and with a strength the equal of three men little could face him sword to sword. A Magister's strength did not only come from her ability to use a sword though.

"Because I'm smarter than you, Gabriel."

Her left fist blazed with magic, and keeping his sword wide, she punched him in the face. His head snapped back and the scent of burned flesh filled the air.

"Now I'm going to make your death painful, Magister."

Gwyn would have helped Sarah out. If she could have.

Right now she had her own problems. She might not have been facing an angry Ark Angel, but the four demons were plenty dangerous on their own. Memories continued to flood back, only serving to distract her. The first two demons fell quickly to her blade, the two that the Professor/Davyd had wounded. They'd been nearly dead anyway, and it hadn't taken much to finish them off.

The other two were a different story.

One of the two hissed at her, and she only barely ducked under a claw swipe. The second was right there to press the attack, but she managed to fling herself up under another, and slash at the first one. She did little more than scratch its scales, but the thing drew back away from the flaming sword she wielded with a scream that would have shattered windows.

"Gwyn, you alright?"

Sarah yelled above the noise of her own blade clashing with Gabriel's.

"Just peachy!"

She would have grinned at that answer, if she hadn't been busy trying to keep from being cut down. Instead, the best the Magister could do was quirk a brow and block another of the Ark Angel's attacks. Her arms were starting to tire, and she knew she couldn't keep it up for much longer. Soon he was going to be able to bat aside her sword, and it would be over. She doubted her magics would help against whatever it was that Gabriel was now.

Gwyn slid up under one of the large creatures, the claws of the second tearing into the turf behind her. Her sword jabbed upwards, and she kept right on moving, slitting the demon open. A part of her almost faltered as she remembered using that exact same maneuver before, but there was no time for memories now, only reactions.

Sarah couldn't feel her right arm, her body ached in dozens of places, and she knew she was slowing down. More flares of magic managed to drive Gabriel back, but she couldn't keep that up forever either. The Ark Angel wasn't tiring at all as far as she could tell. Her options were starting to get limited.

"Eric, need some help here..."

She wheezed, briefly driving Gabriel back onto the defensive.

"Sorry kiddo."

The sound of a pistol being fired came over the headset.

"Got a bit of a roach problem."

Not what the Magister had been hoping to hear.

"Give it up Magister, just hand over your little Gwyn and I won't even kill you."

She noted that Gabriel wasn't even breathing hard, another reason she wanted to drive her fist through his face.

"Go to Hell."

"Heaven, at least get the zip code right."

Over his shoulder she could see Gwyn, dodging and feinting with a beast that was invisible to her. She knew, in her gut, what would happen if she didn't stop Gabriel. He would kill her, sacrifice her to open his gate to hell and wipe humanity from the face of the planet. Her family would do their best, but with an army of invisible soldiers they would fail, they would die protecting the rest of the world, but they would die.

I shouldn't have stopped kissing her.

The thought was crystal clear as she stepped into Gabriel's next swing. It is said that the best swordsman in the world does not fear the second best, or even the third, he fears the worst, for they do not react as expected. Sarah was far from being the worst in the world, but as Gabriel's sword crunched through her side he looked at her in surprise.

Her timing had to be perfect, for there would be no second chances, ever again.

Even before the pain reached her mind her left hand gripped the hilt of his sword, ignoring the burning and holding him close as she drove the tip of her own sword upwards into his heart. Somewhere in the distance she heard Gwyn screaming her name, but as the blood welled up past her lips she managed to spit one last time at the dying Ark Angel. They both sank to their knees, anchored together by their swords, and Sarah had the pleasure of watching the light fade from Gabriel's eyes first.

Then darkness claimed her, and her body fell to the side lifeless.

The First Day

Gwyn clung to the body, tears flowing unchecked down her face. Behind her lay three demons, and what was left of Gabriel. The Ark Angel lay unmoving, his face turned up towards the starry sky above.

"Sarah, no..."

Her shoulders heaved as her small frame was wracked with sobs. Eric's pace was slow and pained as he approached, both fearing and knowing what he would find. With Gabriel's death the leash on the undead had broken and those that had remained were fleeing.

Silently he crouched down, he'd seen enough death in his time to know that his niece's soul no longer inhabited the body clutched by the naked woman. He bowed his head, feeling the sting of tears.

"It's not her time."

Gwyn's voice startled him, there was pain and loss in her voice, but there was a strength to it that

the old man had never heard before.

"I'll bring her back, Eric. I swear."

Then, before he even had time to understand what she meant to do, white light lit up the park.

She couldn't remember ever seeing such a beautiful day. The sun was warm on her skin, and the grass upon which she sat was green and lush. A willow tree swayed gently in the breeze on the bank of the nearby pond. Bird songs filled the air.

It was the most peace that the Magister had ever felt.

The dark haired woman closed her eyes, lay back on the grass and smiled. It was so nice to not have to worry about...

Her thoughts strayed, and she wasn't quite certain what it was that she should have been worrying about. Certainly there was something, no, someone she had been trying to help.

Her brow furrowed in thought as she tried to figure it out, then smoothed out as the peacefulness of the day wiped away any worries.

"It's very nice here."

Her smile grew and she opened her eyes to the vision sitting next to her on that soft grass.

That's who I was worried about.

Gwyn, her name was Gwyn, and Sarah smiled for her. The smaller woman seemed to glow from within, and the smile she received in return was brilliant.

"Yes it is. I'm glad you're here."

Smaller fingers laced with hers, and a warm body snuggled alongside hers. Gentle lips pressed to her skin and Sarah groaned. Gwyn whispered into her ear as her fingers loosened clothing.

"I'm glad I found you, Sarah Mordicai."

Then there was no more time for words, as lips pressed against hers and clothes were quickly tossed aside. Fingers stroked warm flesh, and tongues tasted one another. Smooth legs tangled together and they arched towards one another, each trying to get closer to the other.

It seemed to Sarah that wings folded about them both, but she was never sure.

They made love for an eternity there, learning and tracing one another's bodies. Each worshipping the other, and taking pleasure in just being together.

When the summer afternoon started into the beginnings of twilight they lay together. Naked bodies curled around one another, and Gwyn sighed in contentment, her head resting on Sarah's chest. Long fingers stroked her hair, and Sarah grinned at the feel of her breath whispering across her skin.

"You'll have to go soon love."

Gwyn's words jerked her out of the doze she'd been slipping into and she looked down towards the angel she held in her arms in confusion.

"Go where?"

"Home."

"I am home Gwyn."

The smaller woman shook her head and raised herself just enough to kiss Sarah on the lips. Slowly, taking her time to remember the feel of there lips together.

"No Sarah, your not. It isn't your time."

"What? What do you mean not my time?"

Gwyn traced her lips with gently finger tips and smiled.

"Not your time love."

The Magister understood, a part of her did anyway, and she swallowed against the sudden understanding.

"You'll come back with me?"

She'd tried to phrase it as a statement, but it had come out as a question instead.

"I don't know."

"Promise me you'll try Gwyn?"

The golden haired woman smiled, hugging Sarah as tightly as she could, and nodding.

"I promise. But if I can't..."

This time it was Sarah's fingers that touched her lips, stopping her from going on.

"Don't. I will see you."

Watery blue eyes peered up at her.

"Shhh little one."

"Goodbye Sarah."

Sarah raised the cup of coffee and took a small sip. She was watching the sunrise from the living room windows, and trying not to think of a small woman who had haunted her thoughts for three weeks now.

"Sarah, I'm going to the store."

She grunted noncommittally, not turning from the view. She didn't miss the concerned look he sent her, but like every other time since she'd come back to herself in the park, she refused to talk about it. The door closed behind him and Sarah closed her eyes against a flash of pain.

I miss you Gwyn.

Despite her time in, wherever that was, with the smaller woman and Gwyn's promise to try to follow her, there had been no sign of her. For the first few days Sarah had hoped that she would come at any moment. Then as the weeks passed she'd started to doubt, and fear, that she would never see her again while she was alive. The nights were hard now, harder than she'd ever realized they could be.

There were bright spots of course, Eric's rotting disease had been completely cured it seemed. The incidence of undead had returned to more normal levels, and her nights had been fairly busy.

Not busy enough to keep her from thinking and remembering though.

The sound of the doorbell drew her towards the front door, and she sighed.

"Yeah, I'm coming Eric, did you forget your keys again?"

The person standing hesitantly in the doorway was not Eric though. Sarah froze, watching her, hoping she wasn't dreaming again.

"Gwyn?"

The blonde nodded, grinning.

"Gwyn!"

Sarah wasn't sure who moved first but suddenly she was holding the smaller woman, kissing her until she thought that she'd pass out from sheer pleasure or lack of oxygen. Somehow she managed to get them both to the couch before they collapsed on the floor. Eric silently closed the door, and left for a very long drive.

"You're here."

Gwyn smiled, resting her head on the shoulder of the taller woman, nodding.

"I'm here."

Sarah swallowed, desperately wanting to know the answer to her next question, but scared of what the answer might be.

"Can you stay?"

It came out as a whisper.

"As long as you want me."

"What happened?"

Gwyn shifted and once more they were both lost in a kiss that stretched over several minutes before she answered.

"I had to meet with a few of the higher ups, things had to be discussed."

Sarah licked her lips, not sure if she liked the sound of that.

"Like what?"

"You mostly."

Mischievously blue eyes sparkled at her, then Gwyn yelped as Sarah tickled her side.

"Ok! Ok! I give!"

Laughing, herself, Sarah hugged the smaller woman tight, her happiness a sudden counterpart to the gloom that had weighed down on her mind for the past few weeks.

"Talk then, Gwyn."

Snuggling back down, the angel continued.

"I'm being assigned as the city's permanent angel."

"And?"

Gwyn took a deep breath, loving the smell of the woman she was pressed up against.

"And I'm pretty much replacing the Professor. I'll get to help you sometimes, but, love, I won't be able to help you all the time. You think we can do that?"

Sarah was certain that would cause them problems in the future, but for now she didn't care.

"I think we can figure something out my love."

Gwyn stilled, and for a second Sarah had the horrible feeling she'd said something wrong.

"Say that again."

"What?"

"Say you love me."

"I'll do even better."

"Oh really?"

"I'll show you."

Which she proceeded to do.

The End
