

**Thursday, 10:30 PM**

**“The bodies were found strewn in this very alley. While police had the area cleaned up fairly quickly, a palpable sense of dread fills the streets. The police are initiating a curfew for the night. – This is Chloe Clark for Channel 10. Boston.”**

Thunder resounds through the alley. Soon, flashes of lightning follow and briefly, for less than a second, the alley is bathed in a clear light removing all shadows and anything that was otherwise left to the imagination. Four girls lay dead in the dirt and broken glass of the alley. Their naked bodies doing little to distract the reporters, photographers and police from the reason why they are all gathered in the rain under spinning blue lights and the murmur of voices from radios condensing the scene into a series of numbers, letters, and codes. Each girl was drained of their blood. Their now pale flesh rising and splitting around multitudes of stab wounds on their legs, backs, feet, sides, neck, chest, stomach and in one case, face.

The wounds were not fresh. The bodies were dumped like used tea bags in the alley.

Mercy Johnson braced herself for a final photograph of the girls. Meat puppets piled upon each other in a poor man’s version of the holocaust. Mercy puts her camera away and turns her back on the pile of bodies. A burly unshaven man in a fedora and trench coat walks up to her, his large brown eyes absorb the scene as he takes a puff from his pipe. “Mercy Johnson?”

Mercy looks up the man, the rain falling on her starts to get in the way of her vision. She wipes her brow and brings her hand over her head and around to the back of her neck in an effort to stave off the water, her closely cropped short red hair offering little help in the effort. “I’m Mercy.”

The man puts out a chubby hand toward her. “Mason. Special Operations.” They shake hands. “You done with the pictures?”

Mercy had done enough of these impromptu gigs to know the protocol. She carefully takes the film out of her camera and hands it over to Mason. “Yeah, here they are. I’ll pick up the check in the morning. Sandy sick or something?”

Mason stuffs the roll of film into his pocket and returns his attention to his pipe. “No, she’s fine. When she heard about this one she decided she didn’t want to be on the scene. She has a daughter about their age, the whole thing freaked her. So, she suggested forensics contact you. This stuff don’t bother you, huh?”

“Hell yes it does. The bodies not as much as the thought that somewhere there’s some bastard getting off on all of this.”

“I like your style Johnson. We’re going to get this guy.”

Mercy packs her camera into her small backpack and slings it over her shoulder. “One can hope. Have a good night, Detective. I won’t.”

The walk away from the scene of the crime felt better than Mercy would have thought. Mercy’s work with forensics often had her photographing bloated corpses on beaches and bug infested bodies in dumpsters . . . but this, this creeped her out. What happened to the blood?

# Tales of the New Slayers

## Blood Rain

**Back up . . .**

**Thursday, 8:12 PM.**

**“Some of the girls identified matched identities of missing persons from New York state and as far north as Ossipee New Hampshire and everything in between.”**

Feather’s head slammed into the tombstone so hard that he sees chunks of the rock fly to the ground. The girl who had him by the neck meant business and it didn’t seem as if he was going to get away clean without telling her something. But he had already taken sides and woe be to the vampire that takes a Slayer’s side.

Raine held feather by the collar and slapped him twice, hard enough that her hand print would be on his cheeks for hours, had he been alive to begin with.” Who is doing this feather? It isn’t a vamp, but it has all of you running scared. That’s my job description.”

Feather laughs uneasily. “This is out of your league slayer.”

Raine raises a fist back and into the air, “Batter up!” Feather sees his undead life flash before his eyes and winces before the fist makes a return trip to his face. The slayer was wailing on him as if it were personal. Then, he hears a slight “thwoop” and the girls’ fist quickly retreats to the back of her neck.

“Huh?! Ouch!”

Raine falls on the ground hard. Feather stands up and kicks her in the ribs a couple of times as part of some awkward dance. "Toldya!"

From behind a crypt, a thin, tall man dressed in a white suit steps into view. Groggily Raine looks up at his pale visage, not vampire pale, but sickly pale. His blue eyes and white hair give off a glow, an effect of the moonlight she thinks. Then, as she hears the first rumblings of thunder in the distance . . . the world turns black.

"You know what to do, Feather. Take her."

**Thursday, 9:00 PM**

**"Investigators are exhausting all possible avenues to get to the bottom of this carnage on parade. This is Ted Sisko for Channel 6. Peabody."**

Jacqueline was concerned. The others in the room could tell because she had been tapping her pencils on her desk to the point where Chinese water torture would have been preferable. Where was Raine? Her tough little slayer was often as difficult to rein in as she was effective against the creatures of the night, but usually, she was on time. Unfortunately, since the events that turned her father into a convalescent, Raine had been pushing herself dangerously. She had taken to going on patrol alone, more often and for longer periods of time.

Delia messed about on her laptop, looking at news reports of missing girls in the Farmingham area, her military issue radio sat next to the computer. "Maybe she found something."

Trim, sat in front of Jacqueline's small television set eating a bag of cheese crackers. On the screen, yet another reporter was on the scene of yet another discovery of bodies. Young girls found naked and thrown away like yesterday's trash. "She would have called. She has a radio. She would have called or radio'd, right?"

Kate, sat in front of a map of New England. In front of her a sharpie marker floated over the map, occasionally dropping down to the map, making a mark and rising magically again above it. Her telekinetic powers were known to everyone in the room and it was refreshing to use them without being thought of as weird. "That last report makes it fifteen bodies found in the last twenty four hours."

Willey stood at the door. Despite her vain concern for being associated with this certified lot of weirdos, somehow she felt better being here than anywhere else at this time. Her recent physical changes caused her to be sensitive to the weirder side of Sears and though like Delia she felt she could be of help to Raine, she deferred to Jacqueline's judgment. "We've all been stuck here for the last five hours. Who cares about the curfew!"

Delia closes her computer. "The police don't want any kids out right now. We're better help here than in jail for the night. However, they're still getting flooded with

missing persons calls. Everyone is panicking and those news reports are doing nothing but making it worse. There are some things that civilians should just not be made privy to until the investigations, attacks, incursions what have you are done.”

“Spoken like a true military brat. I’m not a girl, and this has me scared of going out in the dark.” Trim says from the couch.

“I’d be scared, I think your breasts are bigger than mine.” Delia retorts.

“Ah, so this is where stress brings us to. Insulting my body parts. I must say I’m at a disadvantage cause YOU NEVER SHOW ANY OF YOURS!”

“Now now kids, this whole situation has us all spooked. At first I thought it was a matter of human evil. A ripper of some sort. A matter best left to local authorities, but the lack of blood in the bodies brought it to my attention. Raine started her patrol on time at 6:00 PM, we lost contact with her shortly before eight. Even with her recent... gusto . . . she always checks in on patrols. There is a supernatural agenda here at work.” Jacqueline was clearly concerned.

Delia picks up her radio, vainly assuring that it still was on. “I still wish we were with her. Why aren’t we with her? “

“Because we need the research done, and quite frankly there are times when you slow her down. As for Willey, despite Raine’s knack for survival. I need to assure that one of them lives through this. ” Jacqueline was really upset, it was affecting her cool, her manners.

Delia didn’t let it bother her. She had suspected that there was more to Raine after the first two adventures they shared where Raine pulled some stunts that were beyond anything in a military manual. As clumsy as the moves sometimes were, the power behind them was unmistakable. Raine could hold her own in a fight . . . quite possibly with the incredible Hulk. Regardless, they had become friends and Delia preferred to be at the side of her friends when they needed her. Besides, Raine had strategic weaknesses that Delia excelled at. As for Willey, she was new to the group and Delia was still not convinced that she took any of this seriously.

“Hey! Hey!” Trim was so excited he committed the unthinkable, he stood up and spilled some of his crackers on the floor. He pointed frantically at the TV Screen. “I think we found her!”

From the screen a dapper reporter spills the news in the same manner as one would hear a sports commentary. “The young leather clad girl apparently took on five assailants at once in this Dorchester alley and lived to tell the tale. Unfortunately, as our cameras arrived she took off into the darkness leaving us only with these eye witness reports.”

A Man in his fifties appears on screen, making full use of his fifteen minutes of fame. “Well, everything was really fast, she had long dark hair and rode in on a motorcycle to help a girl that the creeps were accosting. Thing is, we watched the fight and the assailants seemed to disappear as she was fighting them. Poof, like some magic act. The girl ran away, and then the tough one, she got back on her motorcycle and took off. It was a sight to see, like some sort of Jackie Chan movie!”

Kate loses her concentration and the sharpie falls to the ground. Trim and Delia give each other a high five. “That’s our girl!”

Jacqueline takes a deep breath . . . “That’s my girl – what are you doing in Boston?”

#### **Thursday, 9:10 PM**

**“This evening law enforcement officials have invoked a mandatory curfew for all children under the age of eighteen as they seek out the perpetrators . . .”**

Technically, Roland didn’t think of himself as being under eighteen. However, he knew that it would be a bother to explain that to the police. He dug into his black jacket in the hopes that in one of his random excursions into the classrooms of Farmingham High a pen would have made its way into his pockets past the cigarettes and matches.

For once, luck was on his side. He grinned as he brought the pen up from its hiding place. It was black.

Behind him, he hears the sound of his hosts, two new vamps in town he met at the Vault. They put up with him for this sidetrip to the cemetery, but they were getting antsy, Slayers haunted cemeteries. They were all going to a party, the kind of party only vamps would get pleasure from.

“We have to get out of sight. Things are going to start soon. – it’s going to be quite the show!”

Roland quickly jots down a note on a tattered cigarette pack “Just one stop guys and I’ll join you. Can’t pass on a free meal.” His face crinkles into a horrid visage likened to his companions. “We’ll take my truck.”

#### **Thursday, 9:10 PM**

**“This sort of thing usually announces itself early in an individual’s life. I’m sure that once the perpetrator is caught, we will learn of yet another sorrowful childhood . . .”**

Raine’s return to consciousness brings with it sounds of horrific screams of panic, fear and dread. If she didn’t know better she could have assumed that there was a film

company casting a horror film in town and that every cheerleader was in attendance hoping to be the next scream queen.

Raine opens her eyes and finds herself strapped to two poles. She is face down looking at the floor, her hands are tied firmly behind her back with poles positioned under her arms and her whole torso and legs tied several times over. To make matters sweeter her legs were tied to each of the poles as well. Like a pig to slaughter, she was carried by two men. In front of her, the vampire called Feather, and behind her, someone she sensed was stronger and larger than Feather.

She determines that she is in some sort of chamber. Moonlight filtered through a huge tinted skylight. The place was huge, and the darkness didn't allow for her to see where it ended. Funny, she didn't recall Farmingham having mansions of any sort. Especially an intricately decorated setting more befit of a museum than a household. Lot's of stainless steel and bright colors periodically revealed themselves in the moonlit hall. She wondered briefly if they were still in Farmingham at all . . . then, when they entered the chamber in full, she saw the cages and heard the screams clearly.

Six cages. Five cages circled around a pit with the sixth in the center; lower and right over the center of the pit itself. The sixth cage was empty, but the screams, the screams came from the other five cages. As her grogginess faded, Raine noted that there was blood dripping from each of the five cages, the bottoms of the cages were funnel shaped with multiple holes arranged to allow blood to drip through and down into the pit.

Raine counted four young girls in each of the five surrounding cages, not much older than herself and some younger. They had been stripped nude and were pressed together tightly in the cages. The cages were configured in such a way that the girls were trapped within an inner cage, then four wings anchored to the top of the cage and held by what seemed to be mechanical arms were open, giving the cages the look of some sort of flower. Raine hears the sound of a generator going off and suddenly, the wings on one of the cages closes. The inside of each of the wings had a selection of spikes protruding out and into the cages. When the wings closed, there was little chance of the girls in the cages avoiding the spikes.

That would explain the blood dripping down, and the screams, and the recent rash of bodies found throughout New England.

Someone noticed Raine was awake. A sharp pain to the back of her head, returned her to the land of darkness. Perhaps she thought briefly, they were doing her a favor.

**Thursday, 9:15 PM**

**“It's like some sort of Stephen King Novel gone wild! You're stuck at home, everything is closed early and you're tired of the news of doom on every channel. Keep it tuned to WSTK 'The Stake' and listen to our curfew long marathon of Black Sabbath! . . . “**

Kamiko had trailed the body count to Boston. She thought briefly it might have been the work of one of her many adversaries, but nothing made sense, nothing fit their style.

She had just rescued a waitress trying to get home from out of the rain as quickly as possible. Going through that particular alley was a mistake. Fortunately, Kamiko had arrived in time to dust the vampires and save the day. She checks her fuel meter and revs her motorcycle. Any good warrior knows when to seek allies, and she had one, somewhere in a town called Farmingham.

From their brief conversations, Kamiko expected to surprise Raine by showing up on one of her patrols. Instead the surprise was on her. The town was tense, as if a collective frightening had settled like a blanket over it. Yet, no Raine. No slayer out making the world safe for the pathetic species known as man. On the thought that Raine might be staying home tonight, Kamiko easily found MacEnroe motors on the furthest north side of Farmingham's main street.

She parked her cycle across the street and took her helmet off. A red jeep pulls in to the MacEnroe Motors driveway. A woman with short red hair, several piercings on her eyebrow, nose and ears comes out of the jeep and hesitates briefly, looking at the building. She wore a short brown leather jacket, and brown leather jeans, apparently patched up with several different grades of leather. A black scarf, purely for looks was wrapped around her neck and the ends of it reached her thighs. She locks the jeep with the now familiar titter of electronic alarm systems, then walks up to the front door beside the garage and opens the door with her own key.

It's wasn't Raine. This woman was taller, older and Kamiko didn't think that Raine would go for the close cropped hair. Raine liked long hair. Kamiko smiled to herself, despite the short time she and Raine spent together, and despite her own wishes, Kamiko had not been able to keep Raine out of her thoughts. Perhaps it was the safety of a relationship where there was no question of the loyalties of the other person, perhaps the attractiveness of someone who was more like herself. A slayer, unsure of her place in the world of the living, and unsure of how long she would be there. It made Kamiko wonder how many slayers would turn to lesbians, . . . if nothing else just for the company.

She revved her bike and continued her trek up and down the Farmingham streets. Raine will turn up somewhere.

**Thursday, 9:30 PM**

**“This brings to mind the Son of Sam killings in New York. However, this culprit seems to have help. This may be the concerted effort of several individuals.” . . . “But what about the blood, Jim?” . . . “The blood?”.**

Mercy walks past the garage and upstairs to the apartment that had recently become her new home. She still had not finished moving in and living between two addresses was making her more tired than she cared to admit. She puts her keys down on the kitchen counter and walks to Danny's room. From the doorway she looks in on him as he sleeps comfortably oblivious to the world and the TV that was left on for his benefit.

She picks up the remote from Danny's bedside table and turns the TV off.

The attic stairs were down, indicating that Raine was once again off on her own somewhere doing whatever teenagers do these days to forget their problems at home. Mercy knew that Raine was involved in something out of the ordinary for a girl her age, but she didn't want to pry. At least not yet. The time will come, and whether she likes it or not Raine will have to deal with Mercy becoming her more a part of her life.

Mercy's thoughts drift to the events of the last few weeks . . .

*"Mercy...something's happened . . . to dad." Mercy imagined Raine holding the phone, with tears flowing.*

*"Take it easy, honey. What happened . . ."*

*"The doctors say he's sick, Alzheimer's disease."*

*Mercy paused, the thought of Danny going through the effects of Alzheimer's shattered her image of him. He was always a constant in her life. "How bad? Raine . . .What stage?"*

*The usually confidant girl on the other side was starting to lose it. "I don't know. . . he can't do dishes, cook, gets angry easy . . . the doctor's say he needs supervision. It's bad Mercy, we could lose the garage, he drained our savings recently and we're going to need a nurse and . . . SHIT MERCY I need you. Please!"*

Mercy's thoughts are interrupted by the ring of her cellular phone. "Mercy."

The voice on the other end was methodical. Mercy was needed to fill in for Sandy Alfonso, a photographer with forensics in Boston. "Sure, sure," Mercy looks at the unpacking she has to do . . . "No, no problem. I have nothing better to do."

**Thursday, 9:50 PM**

**"The weather continues to blast us with thunder and lightning tonight. Looks like we have to give up the ghost on that one, but let's look into tomorrow's forecast . . ."**



The phone rang and all activity in Jacqueline's home came to a stop. Jacqueline picked up the line. "Raine?"

"Bathory. All the things on the news, interrupting my shows . . . it's Bathory, Erzebet Bathory."

"Uh thank you . . . I . . ." Jacqueline moves the receiver away from her ear as the person on the other side gets going into an unintermittible diatribe. She turns to the group eagerly looking on. "Um . . . Trim, it's your grandmother. I think she'd like to speak to you. Delia, take a moment won't you and look up Erzebet Bathory. Hungarian I recall. Cross Reference her with Dracula."

Delia quickly starts to Google. "Dracula? She had something to do with Dracula?"

Jaqueline walks up to her weapon's cabinet. "Willey, bring me those red books on top of the corner bookcase. Erzebet had nothing to do with Dracula, Delia. . . . it is quite likely, she was the monster who inspired that miserable sideshow man."

**Thursday, 10:00 PM**

**'I think the media is blowing this out of proportion. It's Farmingham for God's sakes.'**

Raine can see and hear what is going on, but she is unable to move. She feels a chill, and her head is spinning like when she filled up on rum cake on her father's birthday. The adults liked it enough, so she snuck several good sized portions for herself. It tasted good, . . . then the liquor set in. She remembered her father helping her to bed because she was too dizzy. He left her room and she heard him scolding his friends . . . "You were supposed to use extract! Not straight rum!"

Her dizziness gave in to the laughter from the other room and finally to sleep. She wished she was asleep now and that all of this was a dream. A really bad Einstein on dope dream.

"Awake now, slayer?"

She had heard that voice before. It was the pale man in white. She saw him standing about ten feet below her. He was at the side of the pit. The pit that swirled with blood. Around him stood several vampires, all of them with their true faces showing, and fang-fested smiles glaring at her naked body like Colgate commercials from hell.

Waitamminute . . . naked?

She was naked, it wasn't part of a dream, and she was in a cage. More specifically, the center cage in the configuration she noted earlier. Around her, the five other cages hung, but there were no screams, just pained whimpers, moans and murmured long forgotten prayers. The girls in the other cages had gashes and stabs all over their bodies. Blood dripped from wound to wound from girl to girl, down hips, legs, toes and eventually through drains in the cages and down into the pool below. Raine lowered her head to avoid looking at the girls. It worked, she was able to move. The affects of whatever it was that she had been drugged with were running out. She attempted to say something along the lines of "Get yourself a copy of Hustler and a room you sick . . ." . . . but it came out as "..err."

"Now now, slayer. Save your strength, perhaps you'll have enough for some final words later. Trust me, the occasion for them will be forthcoming."

One of the vampires turns to the man in white. "Ferenc . . . she's good. That cage, it might not be able to hold her. I've seen her . . ."

The man turns to the concerned villain. "Yes, but that was when she had those wonderful Slayer abilities." Ferenc looks up at Raine, she returns his glare through half open eyes. "Hmm, such a nubile lass, but slayer? I think not." He raises a tranquilizer gun. "and if she is better than we thought, I have another."

Raine hears a door open and shut behind her, then a willowy and sultry female voice laced with a Hungarian accent chimes in. "Ferenc my love, this one's favors catch your fancy? She's so . . . thin, hardly enough there to endure your advances for long."

Yuck.

Ferenc turns his gaze away from Raine and opens his arms to greet the new visitor. Raine sees her, a lovely curvaceous woman in her early twenties, with red hair tied in a bun. She wore a robe that left little to the imagination . . . but this woman didn't have to count on imagination, she seemed to have it all. She had beauty beyond imagination and a shimmering aura of exquisiteness.

"Tell me, if she is no longer a slayer, what good does that do me?"

"Do not worry yourself dearest Erzebet. Her slayer powers are gone, but within her still flows the blood of a slayer. The compound is temporary. A gift stolen from the damned Watchers."

Erzebet doffs her robe and gently steps into the blood pit as she undoes her hair and lets it fall beyond her shoulders. Fresh blood flows onto her hair, face and shoulders as she begins to douse herself in the gory reservoir. Blood streams through her already red hair and rolls over her creamy flesh. Erzebet forgets that she has an audience as she bathes in the pour of blood, giggling with excitement like a young girl enjoying a summer dip in a backyard pool.

The shadows shift, Raine hears more movement. The chamber becomes full with the presence of vampires. Raine tries to open her eyes fully, 'so this is where you've all gone' she thinks to herself. Below her, the chamber has become packed with the undead legion, she could not see the floor, only vampires in tens, twenties, hundreds, thousands; surrounding the blood bath.

Ferenc raises his hands in the air. "Now my fellows, our word is our bond. After my love has had her fill of your towns most faultless and pure, and bathed in the blood of your slayer . . . then we will be gone and you will take part in a sanguinary feast! Fresh blood, powerful blood, and no more slayer!"

Raine hears the sound of generators kicking in. Around her, the gears controlling the spiked wings of each cage start to turn. Darkness begins to envelope her as the wings close in and the steel spikes make their unstoppable passage through the cage and toward her. Around her she hears the agitated screams of the other captives. She winces as the first spike introduces itself by penetrating deeply into her left shoulder, soon, the cage becomes a darkened coffin, and as spikes pierce her skin, scrape bone and slither beneath muscle . . . Raine's screams join the chorus.

**Thursday, 11:15 PM**

**"Once again, if you do not have to be out in the streets . . . stay in. Let the authorities do their job."**

The ride back from Boston was getting shorter every time, but it was still a hassle for Mercy to be on the road so much. Soon she thought, she'd be moved entirely to Farmingham and would have all the time in the world . . . to watch grass grow.

To make matters worse, Raine had not shown up at home, and tonight of all nights, Mercy felt compelled to look for her. As she drives by the Cemetary she spots Raine's motorcycle and someone beside it. It wasn't Raine.

The note was written on a cigarette wrapper and hastily dropped beside the bike. Kamiko was agitated that she had come all this way only to have to return south. However, at least now she had a destination, and a purpose. She looked around, allowing her senses to kick into high gear. Yet, nothing. No vampires anywhere. The motorcycle was definitely Raine's. The fiery black and red designs were burned into Kamiko's memory. Their battle against Kazau's gangsters was still fresh on her mind. She hears a voice behind her.

"That bike doesn't belong to you, honey."

Kamiko's instincts kick in, she is prepared to fight . . . but then she recognizes the red headed woman who had visited Raine's home earlier. "I am a friend of Raine's. I've been looking for her."

The other woman relaxes. "I'm Mercy Johnson. From the distance I thought you were her and I came out here to give you a good scolding. I figure Raine might be at Delia's house, you know the place?"

Kamiko extends her hand out to let Mercy look at the cigarette pack. "No. But I do not think she is there."

Mercy looks at the note. "Dammit."

She drops the note and starts running back toward the street. "You look like you can handle yourself in a fight . . . if you want to help Raine, get your ass in gear honey. We've got to fly!"

**Thursday, 11:25 PM**

**"Authorities are extending the search to surrounding towns and cities . . ."**

"According to the various recorded reports, in 1600 Erzebet's husband Count Ferenc died in battle. However, we have reference to occult activities performed by the 'Black Hero of Hungary' . . . a nickname he earned in his many battles, happening well after his supposed death."

Jacqueline looks at her audience, they know the look and all of them are attentive. She continues. "It was after his death that his wife, Erzebet really got on with the atrocities that later would be her legacy. Having discovered accidentally that spreading the blood of a young servant girl on herself would restore her beauty, Erzebet took it to the next level. Her efforts to maintain her youth and beauty resulted in the death of more than six hundred young girls in Hungary. Her subsequent capture by authorities was prompted when she moved on from servant girls to nobility."

Willey looked physically disturbed. She was still not accustomed to this sort of tale as the others were. Delia wanted something to fight, Kate feared what was ahead but was ready to help, and Trim wanted something to eat.

Just as her cell phone rings, Willey asks "Did the blood actually work? "

"For her it did. Our researchers speculate that Erzebet had become a channel for Sanguinaries . . . blood demons. It is possible that her recovered youth was part and parcel to the care and feeding of the Sanguinaries."

Trim was intrigued. "Is that another word for vampires? Vampires are kinda like blood demons, right?"

“No. Sanguinaries are far worse. Vampires feed on blood, Sanguinaries become the blood and absorb souls when available, leaving a hollow shell behind. Rumour has it that the Count paid off Erzebet’s prison guards and arranged for her death. Once the demon of Hungary was declared dead, the couple went into hiding, perhaps gaining immortality thru the Sanguinaries. If Erzebet is in Farmingham, there is going to be a blood bath the likes of which have never ever been documented in this country.”

Willey stepped forward . . .”Guys, I just got a call from Raine’s new mom . . . Raine is going to need us. Research mode is over .”

**Thursday, 11:30 PM**

***“No new developments . . . stay tuned. We will interrupt scheduled programming with updates as they happen.”***

Raine suppressed another scream as she heard the cage wings open and felt several spikes sliding out of her body. The pain was equaled only to the relief of having the spikes out of her. She could literally feel her body starting to heal immediately. It was a sign that whatever had taken her slayer abilities away was getting out of her system.

Like butterflies in her stomach, Raine feels a strange, powerful but familiar sensation. A sensation that Jacqueline kept trying to teach her to hone, a innate awareness of vampires . . . only Raine felt it now in spades, as if the ability had been pumped up with steroids. Raine took a deep breath and was suddenly more aware of her surroundings, body and emotions than she ever was. There were vampires in the room, hundreds if not thousands. The cage she was in looked flimsy, her head was already starting to determine what her plan of attack would be. The slayer was back.

Erzebet delicately steps out of the blood pool. She steps up next to Ferenc who puts her robe over her shoulders. “How was it my love?”

“Sensational, Ferenc, sensational.”

Ferenc turns to the legion of vampires. “My fellows, we are done. We promised a feast, and so shall it come to pass. The ladies will be bled once more, the pool and their bodies we leave to your discretion. Thank you for your assistance. The slayer is yours.”

Raine watched as Ferenc and Erzebet cut through the throng of bloodsuckers like a knife through butter. Then she heard the gears start up again and the spiked wings of the cages started their deadly descent once more. Raine kicked the bars of the cage in front of her and they came open, some dropping into the pool, others bent and twisted. In any case, enough for Raine to get out.

From below, a Vampire points upward . . . “the slayer,.. she’s—“ Their warning was cut short by a sudden punch to the gut. The vampire doubles over, then is surprised when the tip of a wooden spike appears in front of him, sticking out of his chest. Soon, the world gets grainy and he knows he has become dust.

Roland quickly slides the stake back into his jacket and tries to fit in with his “kind” again. He didn’t think that Raine had it in her to take out this many vampires at one time, but he figured it would be fun to help her try.

Raine dives from her cage down into the pool of blood. Despite her quick healing, her own wounds continue to add to the bath of blood. As she tries to swim up to the surface she feels hands reaching out for her, grabbing at her legs and arms. Upon breaking the surface she sees that pool of blood has started to take individual and distinct forms. Blood rises from the pool and takes on the forms of many women. It didn’t take Raine but a beat to recognize that the forms were of the victims that contributed to the pool. As around her blood starts to coalesce into more human forms, writhing and reaching to get out and touch the living, Raine forces her way through and reaches the side of the pool.

Despite their numbers, vampires hesitate at the edge of the pool, giving Raine some distance. Nude, bleeding and soaked in blood . . . the Farmingham Slayer looked more savage and threatening to them than ever. Some stood passively by as the blood creatures approached them.

Raine stayed on the floor for a few seconds to regain herself. Then she heard screaming, the hollow empty wheeze of a vampire. She looked up and saw the vampires start to run, they were panicking, making piles upon each other in their effort to get away from the pool. To her right she spotted Feather. He was held by one of the blood forms, he returned Raine’s glare with pleading, frightened eyes. “Help me!”

Then Raine heard the cackling sound of tinfoil being scrunched up as Feather started to dehydrate in front of her. Blood pushed through his body and funneled through every pore and opening, his eyes, nose, mouth . . . Feather’s body looked like a strainer with blood pouring out of every opening and into the blood demon holding him. Every bit of blood that Feather had in him from his various victims was now gone, and feather had become a shriveled corpse. Not dust, just a corpse. The blood demon then split into two human forms, one like the original, and the other looking like a blood sculpture of Feather.

Around Raine, the din of screams and yells was punctuated by shriveled vampire raisins falling to the ground. She springs up to her feet just as a blood formed arm reaches out for her from the pool. Rising out of the pool, Raine sees a blood form image of herself. Not surprising she thought, enough of her blood had fallen into the pool. She kicks the blood built doppelganger back into the pool. “Not today.”

Another hand reaches for her, she lashes out and is surprised when her hand is stopped short, landing squarely in Roland’s open hand. He seemed as surprised as she was that he deflected her punch. “Roland?”

He caresses his bruised hand. "I was thinking Calvary myself. Oww!" He takes off his trench coat and hands it to her. She takes it willingly and covers herself. "Thanks." Behind him she sees a blood demon move toward him. "Get down!"

Roland dives to the ground and Raine spin kicks the demon away. She reaches down for Roland. "C'mon let's get out of here."

Suddenly, the chamber is bathed in light. Raine finally gets a good look at her surroundings. She sees Trim on a second level jumping up and down gleefully next to a power box. "We're in a mall!?"

The mall seemed to be in the process of being rebuilt. Powerlines dangles, staging was set everywhere for the workers to do their part to impair the minds of America's youthful consumers. They stood in what potentially was going to be a food court of some sort, the blood pit was a hole in the center, possibly another level in development or a basement level of some sort.

Cutting a path toward her she sees Jacqueline leading Willey and Delia as they kick, pummel, punch, stab and jab their way through the undead mob. Jacqueline spots Raine and yells. "Raine! Get away from that pool!"

Jacqueline sometimes had a talent for the obvious, but in this case, Raine had no interest in fighting a blood demon version of herself. "What are these things?"

Now surrounded by Jacqueline, Willey, Delia and Roland, Raine was starting to feel normal again. This is where she belongs. Jacqueline starts leading the pack out of the mall. "They are Sanguinaries. Aside from Slayers, they are the only known predators of vampires. They are quite rare. When they absorb the blood of a living being, they also absorb parts of their memory and souls. With vampires, it's much cleaner, just the blood and life force."

Willey punches a Sanguinary and regrets it immediately. The creature holds on and she starts to feel her veins bubble as blood tries to burst out of them and make it's way to the demon. Yet, she is able to push it back. Sometimes it's good to be a slayer. Jacqueline noticed the small melee. "Sanguinaries cannot absorb slayers, your souls run too deep and your healing is too strong."

Raine thinks of all the blood she lost, even as the wounds seem to be all but gone. When she lost the blood, she was not at her full slayer abilities . . . if at all. She figured she'd mention her blood clone to Jacqueline after they made their way out of the mall. A proposition that was becoming more difficult by the second. Bodies of shriveled vampires and living ones fighting for their lives barred the way out.

In the distance, Raine and Willey heard a stuttering sound, then the sound was joined by a flash of light zipping through the huge round skylight over the still being built food court that had doubled for Erzebet's chamber and pool. Suddenly, an explosion

rocks the building and the skylight shatters into millions of shards, all spiraling down onto the hordes below. Kate quickly uses her telekinetic ability to push the shards away from them. Around them, vampires running in fear from the Sanguinaries, now had shards of glass embedded in their backs, heads, legs and shoulders. The scene was a bad one. The stuttering sound grew louder and then, hovering above the newly devastated skylight and shining bright lights into the mall, Raine saw a helicopter. A ladder dropped down in their vicinity. Not asking any questions, the group quickly took to the climb.

The copter started to rise and lift them above the fray below. Raine looked up and saw Mercy piloting the copter, then she saw Kamiko at the side of the copter helping the group get in off the ladder. Then she blacked out.

### **Friday, 8:00 AM**

*“Police in Woburn claim this to be the work of some freakish cult. The final body count has not been determined, but apparently most of the bodies found were older, shall we say, not fresh. . . now to sports.”*

When her eyes opened, Raine felt like Dorothy finally getting her wish and tapping her shoes. Above her stood Mercy and Kamiko. Raine felt a warm compress on her feet, and a tube up her nose.

“Where. . .”

“You’re in the hospital, honey. Lots of blood loss will do that to a girl. You’re lucky, most of the others didn’t make it.” Mercy spoke as she checked on some of the machines around Raine’s bed.

“Kam!?”

Kamiko puts her hand on Raine’s. “I was in town. Thought I’d visit Canada.” Raine takes in Kamiko’s smile. She hoped that the next time they met, it would be under better circumstances. “Sure beats vamps on bikes doing drive-bys huh?”

Kamiko’s smile grows. “Thousands of vampires running from a pool of blood demons beats a drive-by. You win. . .”

Mercy joins Kamiko beside the bed. “Listen Honey, the paperwork isn’t over, but I will be your legal guardian soon. To celebrate I invited Kamiko to stay with us for the week. She can use some cleaning up and we can use some help moving. When you can eat, we’ll get in some Chinese and I’ll show you a few tricks with chop sticks.”

“I’d like that.”



“Yeah, well don’t make me come after you again with a helicopter, and dynamite sticks . . . let’s stick to the basic parent scenarios okay. Those will be enough of a bitch for me. You got that?”

Raine smiles, closes her eyes, . .

And dreams of home.