

## 1: Journey Out of Darkness

Woodlawn United Church, Dartmouth, NS

Saturday, Aug. 29, 2008, 7:05 pm

**M**ike and Carrie stood on the steps of the church, surrounded by smiling well-wishers. The photographer was clearing a space in front of them so she could get pictures.

That's when Mike sensed the presence – a feeling he knew so well – that foreign wall of the vampire mind. Not Tony, not Jonathan, not Radu.

There was no time to react. It was all instantaneous: the awareness, the spitting sound that only he, Tony, Jonathan, and Radu might have heard. Then there was the fiery pain in his chest, the hot wet feel of blood being pumped out of him by the beating of his own heart, a beating that was already slowing to a stop. Then blackness.

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Vibration. A dull rumbling. A wailing sound – mechanical, not a human or animal sound. These were the sensations that intruded into the blackness. Confinement – something held his arms and legs from moving. He opened his eyes. He was in the back of a moving vehicle, strapped to something like a small bed – a gurney – yes, that's what it was called. An overwhelming feeling of thirst – blood. He needed blood. There was a bag of blood hanging above him, flowing through a tube into his arm. No good – it

would help, but he really needed to ingest it. The need was all consuming.

Two men in white outfits were monitoring him. One smiled. He could see the pulse in his neck, throbbing to the beat of his heart. He could hear the heartbeat; even hear the blood coursing through the man's arteries and veins. Thirst too strong. He needed to get away from these men before the thirst made him kill them for their blood.

The vehicle was slowing, passing under something. He surged with his arms, snapping the restraints across his chest, and sat up. He broke the restraints across his legs, snatched up a bunch of blood pouches, and hurled himself against the door. It burst open and he was out – out into dazzling sunlight. It was low in the sky. He could stand it if he looked away.

Yelling behind him – the men in the ambulance hadn't seen him move. Of course they hadn't. They were human. They couldn't see him move, he moved too fast for their eyes. He looked around. Nowhere to go, nowhere to hide. Up? He looked up at the part of the building that projected out, forming a shelter across two lanes in front of the main entrance. The roof was high but not too high. He ran a few steps, leaped, caught the edge, and hurled himself past the lip and onto the gravel top, then disappeared to the back of the roof.

An IV was still hanging from his arm. He tore it out and watched as the tiny puncture closed. He felt his chest. He remembered pain there, but the pain was gone now. There was blood beginning to dry on his tuxedo shirt, but there was no wound, just a tender spot a little left of his sternum. A rib had been damaged, but that was healing, too.

Near the rear of the building was a small access hutch with a door. He sat with his back to it, the hutch between him and the slowly setting sun. He heard vehicles screeching to a stop in front of the hospital, people getting out, excited voices. Two voices caught his attention. One was cultured, English – yes, that was the word, English. Something about that voice gave him a warm, comfortable feeling.

Another voice – it would have been a beautiful, musical voice, but there was so much fear and stress in its tones. It was female. The voice made his heart beat faster and gave him a funny feeling in his stomach. He looked at his left hand. An ornate gold ring was on one finger – a Celtic eternity knot. Yes, he liked things that were Celtic. The ring was from someone very special – that voice again – that female voice. It made his eyes feel wet.

He had to block out the voices. It was too much, too confusing. Blood. He tore at one of the blood pouches. It was hard to tear. As if to help, his two upper canine teeth became longer, sharper. They tore into the pouch, letting the blood run into his mouth. He leaned back, closed his eyes, and drank. At first it made his head spin, then that feeling eased. He felt a lot better. The soft area where there used to be pain in his chest began to feel stronger. There was a tingling in his back, too. He tossed the drained bag to one side and closed his eyes. Too much, too soon. He needed more rest.

It was dark when he opened his eyes. He went to the edge of the roof. People were walking by, talking. More people got off a bus, some got on. He knew they were different from him. They were human. He wasn't – he used to be, but he wasn't anymore. They'd be afraid of him if he saw him now.

He looked at the bags of blood. He had three left. He could feel the healing inside him. The thirst returned. He knew this feeling might make some people feel desperate, panicked in their need to feed. He frowned and made a face. Discipline. He wasn't going to let this annoying feeling control him. The mind had to maintain control. Someone had taught him that so very long ago.

Someone had taught him about drinking blood sparingly, too. Who had that been? The sound of the English voice came into his head. Yes. He'd met him years ago. He'd been a child, but the Englishman had been older than his father. His father – a cop, a detective. This Englishman was a kind of cop, too. Drops of blood. Why was that important? Pain in his neck. He'd fallen off his bike. Yes, he'd torn his neck on a steel pipe that someone had hammered into the ground and strung with wire. The Englishman had put drops of blood into his torn throat to stop the bleeding in there. Scar – Scarlet – Scarlet Pimpernel – no, that wasn't it, but it had something to do with that. Anthony. Yes, that was it. Anthony Dewhurst. Lord Anthony Dewhurst – Tony.

Tony helped them find bad people – *my kind*, he thought. *Some of my kind are evil. They kill humans for their blood. There's no need to do that. Blood comes in bags like these. Why kill for it? Because they like the killing. They like feeling stronger than the weaker humans. They regard people as food. Some regard them as a commodity to be captured and sold to others.*

He remembered killing some of these evil types. *Vampires. We're called vampires. Yes, I killed Chernov. He was a nasty, evil vampire. He lived off not just the blood, but the fear. He had friends – Petrenko, Chekinovich, Vollinkoff, and Bondarenko. I killed*

*them. I had to. They were trying to kill me, kill others. And Soutzos. He'd tried to lay a trap for Tony, but it wasn't Tony he was after; he was after me. Well, not me, now, me from before – Yakura. Yes. I'd been a samurai, the son of a daimyo.*

*How I'd loved those days – learning to master the intricacies of Kung Fu from a Shaolin priest from China, staying with my father. And the old sword master – Yagyū? Yes, it was such a simple life. I served the shogun, like my father. That's who I am; I'm a samurai.*

He frowned. Not *a* samurai, I'm *Samurai*. Yes. But it's not a shogun that I serve; it's my people, my country – CSIS – Charbonneau.

Images poured in. Charbonneau helping him tie up the boat at the dock.

A deep sigh – how he loved sailing that boat – loved – loved – blonde hair, green eyes, dazzling smile – she's a healer, a nurse – Carrie. He loved Carrie. *Being Samurai isn't what makes me happiest, it's being with Carrie – being – Michael. Yes, I'm Michael, Carrie's Michael.*

He looked again at the ring on his finger. Carrie had put that ring there.

Oh, God, no! What had he become?

He took off in a blur, leaped from the roof, running at blinding speed, running from his thoughts, but his thoughts followed him. He ran until the sun was showing in the eastern sky. There – an old house, windows boarded up. There's a sign. They're going to fix the house, but not today. It's Sunday. He got in through a basement window, found a dark spot in the middle of the basement, and hid from the light.

*Come on, sleep, damn it! Forget. Forget the fear, the pain, the changes, the loss. Loss? I'm still alive.*

*But you're not human; you're a vampire.* It was like two different voices in his head, arguing.

Why wouldn't sleep come? Kamensky claimed to pass out the moment the sun came up. Jason, Jonathan's fledgling could barely function around dusk. Surely he'd be the same.

He could feel some pain where his rib was healing. He could feel his fangs against his lower lip. Healing was taking a lot out of him. The running had also drained him of energy. He bit into another blood pouch and drained it. That was better. He felt his heart settle. It wasn't pounding any more – down to about forty beats per minute.

It was after ten o'clock before he began to fade. The last thing he heard was church bells. Wedding bells?

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Mike's eyes snapped open. Where was he? Who was he? It took a moment. He was Michael, Carrie's husband – Carrie. Tears formed. Poor Carrie. Was he still her Michael? Could he pass among humans the way Tony did?

He looked around the old basement, remembering where he'd gone to ground – somehow, as a vampire, that phrase was unsettling. There was an old mirror half covered by a sheet. He uncovered it and examined it in the light coming through the window he'd uncovered. Not bad unless one looked really close. His shirt had soaked up most of the blood. None of it showed through his vest and jacket. What had soaked into the lining of his vest didn't show through the silver brocade. The bullet hole through the jacket showed, mostly in the back. In the dark or dim light nothing was too noticeable.

He felt his pockets – wallet in the back, and a folder – his face on a CSIS ID. He nodded, remembering. Code-name *Samurai*. The wallet held more ID, cards, and cash. No photos. There was something in his front right pocket. He took out the item and pressed a button. A globe appeared with a picture of a button labeled “slide to unlock.” He did, revealing several icons. He nodded. It was his iPhone. Someone had given it to him – in Afghanistan. Yes – Sam Larkin, CIA. He pressed the photo icon, then clicked a folder labeled “Carrie.” There she was. Memory prodded him and he used his finger to flick the photo to the side, showing the next one. Carrie. There were the tears again.

He couldn’t bring himself to call anyone. *Hi, it’s me, back from the dead. I used to be alive. Now I’m a monster – a vampire.*

He drank a pouch of blood. That’s what monsters do; they drink your blood. It calmed him. His watch said four o’clock. He pressed the music icon and held the phone to his ear, listening to a collection of country songs, stuff Carrie had picked. There was a time when he would have said it wasn’t his music. Not today. It was her music.

He didn’t know how long he’d been listening. It was getting dark. He climbed out the window and started walking. He had no idea where he was going. He wasn’t even sure where he was. He avoided people at first. Then he stopped avoiding them. The few people he passed didn’t seem to notice him. He decided to take a risk. He entered a Tim Horton’s, walked right up to the counter.

“Yes, sir?” the young woman said. She smiled, waiting for him to order.

*One O-positive to go*, he thought. It made him smile.

“Earl Grey tea, black,” he said.

“Will that be all?”

He nodded, handed her a five, pocketed the change, and sat with his tea.

*If Tony can do this*, he thought, *I can at least try*.

He gagged on the first sip but refused to give up. He finally swallowed a fair mouthful. He barely made it to the washroom in time to vomit in the toilet. Well, not really vomit – it was just pure tea.

He left and walked down the street, still sipping his tea. In the tiniest sips he could keep it down. Then it got harder – too much tea in his stomach. He gave up and tossed the cup in the trash. He sat on a bench in a bus shelter and watched people go by. Time to walk again. He plodded along slowly.

“Yo, dude.”

He looked about. Two white kids and one black kid, mid teens, dressed like street punks.

“Yo, dude, how ’bout some change?”

“How ’bout your wallet?” another said. It was the black kid.

“Hey, dude, how ’bout your watch and your wallet?” That was the third kid.

He turned and faced them, his face expressionless. “Boys, you should play somewhere else and play nice. Stay out of trouble. You just make your parents’ lives tougher, you know.”

The larger of the white kids flicked open a knife. “Hey, dude, you ain’t my guidance councilor.”

“No, and I sure don’t envy him his job,” Mike said. “Now put that knife away before someone gets hurt.”

“You’re the one who’s gonna get hurt if you don’t hand over your watch and wallet, dude.”

Mike moved in a blur, snatched the knife out of the kid's hand, then picked him up by the front of his shirt. The other two looked about to move on him. He threw the knife so that it landed deeply imbedded in a telephone pole, missing the black kid's head by maybe two millimeters. He held the first kid out at arm's length, then slowly lowered him to the ground.

"You really don't want play with me tonight, boys. It won't end well."

He became a blur that stopped nose to nose with the black kid and gave him a shove that launched him ten feet backward to sprawl on his backside in the dirt.

"Go home," he said.

They took off, running.

He smiled to himself, glad that he hadn't had to hurt them, then struck the handle of the knife so that it snapped off, leaving the blade buried in the pole.

He felt drained again but ignored it.

As he wandered, lights got brighter. Where was he? Then he recognized Portland Street and Penhorn Mall, what was left of it, across the street. He crossed over and kept walking. The dull emptiness in his chest began to ease, the sense of depression fading. It was midnight. On he went, one foot in front of the other. He was just walking and letting pieces fall into place in his brain, in his heart.

*You knew this was coming, he reminded himself. You and Carrie talked about this. She said she could handle it. Handle it? I can't even handle it. How can she? She needs you. She doesn't need this.*

Then he remembered another voice, a vampire named Radu. "This beautiful lady can see the truth of who you are and what you are, as do your friends here. You should have faith in that when you doubt your faith in yourself," he had said.

He argued it back and forth for over an hour. He plunked down on a park bench. Ducks were swimming in a little pond. The drained feeling got worse. He could feel his fangs growing again. He took out his last blood pack, tore it open, and drained it. Better.

He glanced at the building next to the park. It was the church. He walked over as nonchalantly as if he hadn't been shot there yesterday. The front steps were cordoned off with crime scene tape. So was a section across the street where the car had sped away. He knelt and looked at the trace of blood on the steps, barely three or four ounces, but it was his blood. So many people had been here to see Carrie and him get married. What were they thinking now? What was she thinking?

He sat down on the steps. *Screw the crime scene tape. This is my crime, anyway.*

He heard the soft sound of crying. It was distant – the gentle sound of an exhausted soul sobbing.

It was two-thirty. He wandered in the direction of the sobs, knowing where it would lead, knowing who was crying. His steps seemed to drag as he made his way up the street. He stopped and stared at the house for a long time. Uncertain what to do, he walked around to the back, went up the steps, and sat on a patio chair on the deck. He and Carrie had picked out these chairs and the matching table.

He wasn't there long before he heard a familiar yowling at the door. There was movement in the house. Mike's pulse quickened and he almost lost his nerve. He forced himself to remain in the chair.

The door opened and she stepped out. He could see her as clearly as if it were broad daylight, even though a cloud was obscuring the moon. She paused, uncertainty written plain on her face. Her negligee was

black with red trim. She'd joked about not letting him see it until the honeymoon.

Kato's hesitation was different from Carrie's. He shot past her, then paused to hiss at him. *He smells the vampire*, Mike thought. Kato kept sniffing, then leaped into his lap. The purr sounded like the rumble of an engine to him. There were those damn tears again. He petted the Siamese until he settled.

He watched as Carrie gave a cry of joy and ran toward him, stopping just a few feet away. He knew she couldn't see him the way he could see her – no human eyes could. And she didn't have Kato's sense of smell. Then the cloud hiding the moon drifted away and the moonlight hit his face like a spotlight, forcing him to lower his eyelids. He couldn't imagine what he must look like. Yes, he could, but it was an image created by fear that exaggerated every aspect of his appearance to its worst possible limit.

"I was afraid to come," he said simply. "For a long time I was so confused – lost might be a better word. I didn't know who or what I was. I knew that someone had tried to kill me. I spent the night on rooftops, watching people go by. I'd stolen blood from that truck I was in – I guess it was an EMS vehicle. The hunger was almost painful, but I didn't know how long the blood would last, so I tried not to use it. I know now what agony Kamensky went through last winter. I saw so much blood passing by below me, there for the taking, but this voice in my head kept telling me 'no'. They were human, something I used to be. I used to work to protect them from my kind – the kind I am now. The more I thought about it, the more I knew I had to make the blood last.

"I remembered someone telling me a lot about this. Then I remembered his name – Tony. I remembered

other things, too. I remembered killing my kind – foul, evil creatures who preyed on humans, whether as a food source or as a commodity they could capture and sell. I remembered Yakura, the person I was in another life, and something clicked. I remembered our first sail together, before Charbonneau dragged me back into CSIS. I remembered saying, “Once a samurai, always a samurai.” That’s really who and what I am, isn’t it? I knew that was who I was happiest being – well, that’s who I thought I was happiest being. Then I remembered blonde hair, a toothy smile, and sparkling eyes. I remembered planning for the future, magical days on the water in a sailboat, magical nights holding each other and talking. I remembered you. I remembered your name, Carrie. I remembered how much I love you and how just being with you was the best feeling I could possibly imagine. I remembered being with you, being your Michael, and I knew that *that* was who I was happiest being.”

He set Kato down on the deck, came to his feet, and waited, smiling. He could feel the wetness of his tears on his face and it made him feel stupid.

Then Carrie was in his arms. The warmth of her was like a tonic. He could hear the pounding of her heart; feel the blood rushing through her arteries and veins, the pulse in the arms about him, the pulse in her neck against his chest.

“You missed our wedding night,” she said, then laughed. It was the laugh of someone who’d been under too much stress and finally found a release. The relief in her voice sent a thrill through him.

“I’m truly sorry,” was all he could think to say at first. Then, trying for humour, he added, “I could say it’s not my fault. I didn’t ask for that bullet through the heart.”

“Tony will be desperate to hear from you. Jonathan and Radu were searching for you. Tim is helping Legendre track down the car. He’s in Naval Investigations now; he got the post. He took pictures of the tire tracks with his cell phone. Bill will need to know, and Sean – my God, Michael, you should have heard Sean telling your story last night. You see the differences but he’s so like you in so many ways.”

Sean. Yes, his son. There was so much confusion in his head, in his memories. It was as if the vampire had to slowly learn what the human had known. Yet, deep down, he knew he was still Michael, just as he was still Yakura. But now there was another entity. From things Tony had said, he knew this feeling would fade and he would simply be Michael again, with Yakura’s memories still in there.

He held her close, wanting it to never end. Then another wave of dizziness struck. The biologist in him knew that the virus taking over his body, changing his tissues, changing his DNA, was using up a lot of energy. No wonder fledgling vampires could be dangerous and become irrevocably feral if not guided. He needed more blood.

Fearing to hold Carrie any longer, he pulled another chair over next to his and beckoned for her to sit. He tried to ease himself into the chair but the vertigo took control and he fell into the seat. *Now that was graceful*, he thought.

“Are you okay?” The fear in her voice cut through him. He could feel Carrie’s panic as if it were his own. Humour. Could he make her smile enough to ease the fear?

“I’d kill for a drink,” he said, then, “No, that’s not true. I realized last night that I’d never kill just for a

drink. However..." He could feel his fangs trying to lengthen.

"Tony's bottle is in the wine fridge," she said. "It's about three-quarters full. It's O-positive."

"Perfect," he said, "just perfect." Tony usually used O because it was the universal donor, but O-positive was Mike's actual blood type.

Carrie came back with one of her large 16-ounce iced-tea glasses, a wedding gift. She'd registered it because she loved the pitcher that came with them. He marveled at how stoically she held out the glass to him. She usually averted her glance when Tony drank.

The aroma of it – the iron and copper of the hemoglobin – his fangs lengthened against his will. As Mike sipped – he wanted so badly to gulp it, but knew that would frighten Carrie – he felt the warmth flow through him. He wondered if this was what drug users felt like. He could feel his fangs easing back to normal human length.

"Now that's the Michael I remember." Her tone was teasing, her face smiling. "But you still owe me a wedding night," she said, as she sat down on the chair beside him.

He ran his hand over hers. Despite his lingering fears, he was suddenly sure that, even in the heat of passion, Carrie would not be in any danger.

He smiled. "Since I still owe you a wedding night, I need to get cleaned up and change out of these clothes. I won't be long, so, if you could wait for me out here on the deck, that would be great."

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Carrie's imagination was starting to drift when all of a sudden the screen door opened. *This must be Michael*, she thought, *but it's only been a few minutes*

*since he left.* Indeed it was her husband, Michael. Her eyes widened when she saw her love, her new husband. He was heartbreakingly handsome in black silk pajama bottoms, no shirt. His chest seemed more muscular than she remembered, as if any excess flesh had been stripped away; and there was a look of passion in his eyes. He was breathtaking. The goosebumps started to form on her arms and she felt butterflies in her stomach as he walked closer. She felt tears forming, happy tears that tricked down her face. Michael held her face in his hands, kissing her tears. From somewhere in the house, romantic violin music played. Carrie felt like she was under a spell.

He took a deep breath. "You have no idea what you smell like to me," he declared. "I can't even describe it. It's a sweetness, something unique to you, not from any perfume. If we were separated for a hundred years, I'd still know that fragrance." He picked her up in his arms, gazed into her eyes and said, "Are you ready for your wedding night?"

"I'm ready if you are." It came out in a whisper. She was so intoxicated from looking at him that her breath felt rapid and shallow.

"I guess my first duty is to carry you over the threshold." His eyes locked into hers as he carried her through the doorway towards the master bedroom. She felt like she was floating through the air as they headed down the hall. As they entered the bedroom she couldn't believe her eyes. It was beautifully lit with many candles, and rose petals were scattered all over the floor and bed.

"Where did you get the roses?" she gasped.

He chuckled. "If the neighbours mention their rose bushes being raided at 2:00 am, you know nothing about it."

He carried her to the bed and set her down. Taking her face in his hands, he said, "You are the love of my life. You complete me in ways you will never understand. Meeting each other was destiny. We truly are soul mates. I will love you beyond death."

Carrie was speechless, tears streaming down her face.

"Don't cry," Mike said.

But Carrie couldn't help herself. "I just never believed I could be this happy. I love you so much."

They began kissing each other, touching each other tenderly. Mike slipped Carrie's negligee off and dropped it to the floor. He stood there for a moment, just looking at her, as if for the first time. Slipping his pajama bottoms off, he picked up Carrie and laid her gently on the bed. He stared at her again.

"My beautiful Carrie," he sighed. "I can't believe you're mine."

Their lips locked. Carrie felt lost in the depths of passion and knew it was the same for him. Then Mike began to kiss from her lips to her neck, down to her breasts, continuing down her legs and up her thighs. Everything in his demeanour said that he wanted desperately to satisfy her. It made her want to laugh; the thought of him not satisfying her seemed so absurd. Their lovemaking was unlike anything she experienced before. Something in his eyes spoke to her soul, and she knew that they were partners for life.

## 2: Fatal Mistake

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**I**f a human can become exhausted enough to sleep during the day, why can't a vampire who's been through the wringer need some sleep at night? Mike thought. Lying there on his back next to Carrie, he knew he was drifting off and just let it happen. Eventually the dream overtook him. He hadn't dreamt of being Yakura since Tony had hypnotized him, putting him in touch with his past life.

*He lies on his back on a tatami mat. It can't be a bridal chamber; he and Akiko were never wed. Yet he knows it is she who dozes next to him. His head rests on a traditional wooden neck-rest.*

*Something is wrong – very wrong.*

*He can't move. His arms, his legs – all are like lead appendages that cannot respond to his will; only his eyes.*

*He forces his eyes to the right until his peripheral vision can take in Akiko. She lies covered in a red silk cloth, with red silk ribbons splaying out from it, a red ribbon lying across her throat.*

*No – not red silk – blood. The red is blood.*

*He feels something hard and cold just millimeters from his chest.*

*There's the whining snarl of an animal from nearby.*

*He surges like a madman against the force that holds him, struggling furiously to break free.*

Mike's eyes snapped open. A dark figure was leaning over the bed, leaning over Carrie. In his right hand was a silenced automatic, almost touching Mike's chest, prepared to shoot him should he move. Somewhere nearby Kato was in the midst of a snarling and hissing fit.

Mike moved fast. He grabbed the gun, twisting the wrist. As he dropped the weapon to the floor, he thrust his palm into the shoulder of the intruder, knocking him backward into Mike's desk. He launched himself out of bed and at the stranger. They grappled, coming up hard against Mike's dresser. Mike struck away all attempts by the intruder to get a grip on him, striking at major nerve centers as he did so.

The attacker hissed, showing vampire fangs, then rumbled a fierce growl that reverberated like a leopard's. Before Mike knew what he was doing, he'd answered in kind, his snarl every bit as deep, every bit as loud. The attacker's eyes went wide in shock.

Mike took advantage of the moment and forced his mind into the intruder's head, hoping to gain control, but hit the all-too-familiar wall. The vampire thought in foreign language.

Kato leaped from Mike's dresser onto the attacker's face, about to sink fangs and claws into the assailant fighting with his beloved master.

"NO!" Mike bellowed and, snatching him by the scruff of his neck, flung him from the room before he could be infected by vampire blood.

The vampire tried to push him back, teeth trying for his throat. Mike drove a left cat's paw blow into the vampire's throat and heard the windpipe collapse, then brought his right fist down in a hammer blow against the intruder's upper lip. Blood exploded from the lip

and gum, bone cracked, and the fangs broke away, driven inward.

Mike pivoted left and hurled the vampire against his desk, coming down on the creature with his own weight. There was a staccato *crack* from the lower spine. Mike drove his fists into the lower ribs. Feeling them snap, he continued to strike, driving the shards into vital organs, then hurled the vampire into the hall.

Kato let out a screaming snarl and leaped out of the way.

The vampire crashed into the doorframe of Sean's bedroom just as the door was opening.

Sean looked sleepy-eyed, confused. "What's all the noise? Dad? DAD!"

"Katana!" Mike ordered.

Sean looked confused for a second, then turned and seized the production replica katana off his desk. He held it out by the scabbard, the hilt toward Mike.

Mike pummeled the vampire's ribs again, using the shards of broken bone to mangle the vampire's internal organs, then slammed him to the floor. The creature lay there, seemingly helpless, then struggled to rise.

Mike tore Sean's katana free of the scabbard. It wasn't combat grade, but the edge was still sharp. He swung an oblique cut. It was difficult in the confined space of the hallway, but it was enough. The blade sliced into the neck and imbedded in the opposite shoulder blade.

He leaned against the wall, recovering his breath, and held the sword out for Sean to take it, then snatched up Kato when he started to sniff at the blood.

Sean let the blade drop to the floor and grabbed his father in a hug, tears flowing down his face. "You're alive," he whispered, as if he feared to believe it.

Mike nodded. "I was going to let you sleep until morning," he explained. "Easy, you're squishing Kato. At this point he might claw you."

Sean glanced at the dead vampire. "No wonder!" Then, "Wow, Dad, you look different!"

"Different?"

"Yeah, different – a bit more pale – harder, mostly. You feel like your muscles are way harder and you look like you lost weight – well, with the hardened muscles, maybe you gained some. Actually, you look kind of like Stallone in the second Rambo movie. You also look – I don't know – younger."

He made a dismissive smirk. *I knew a movie would get connected at some point*, he thought, and gave Sean a playful push in the direction of the main bathroom. "Go on, grab an old sheet from the linen cupboard and wrap him in it," Mike said, setting Kato down near the bedroom door. "Be sure to wrap some in that wound so the two parts of the spinal cord can't touch. I need to check on Carrie."

Kato ran after him, as if he feared being left alone with the dead vampire. He leaped up on the bed and settled next to Carrie, looking anxiously at her.

"I know, buddy," Mike said. "I'm worried, too."

Carrie was still staring at the ceiling, her eyes vacant.

Mike grabbed his LED light from his desk. Her pupils responded to light. Pulse and heart rate were slightly elevated, as was her respiration. He tapped her face, knowing it would have no effect, then forced his mind into hers.

It was like entering a shadowy cave. He knew she was back there in the shadows somewhere, hiding, or sent there in retreat. Then he found her. It was a bit like taking her by the hand and leading her back to sunlight.

Focus returned to her eyes and she gasped, coming upright in the bed. Seeing Michael, she threw her arms about him and sobbed.

“I just had the most awful nightmare,” she said, and then froze. Mike followed her gaze. Sean had just gotten the corpse of the vampire wrapped in the sheet and was trying to wipe blood from the wall and floor.

“It’ll take a special cleaner, which will take some of the paint off,” Mike said. “So, since we’ll have to repaint anyway, just see what you can manage with the hardwood.”

“That monster was in my mind, telling me what he was going to do to you,” she sobbed.

Mike checked her throat. It was just a shallow gash, really not much more than a deep scratch. *I must have torn him away from her just as he was starting to bite*, he thought. He got alcohol and cleaned the area, following up with peroxide just to make sure. He had no idea how much virus might be in a bite or if alcohol or peroxide would kill it. It then occurred to him that, since the bite alone never produced a vampire, it required a much larger quantity of the virus. But just the thought of any part of that monster polluting her skin enraged him.

“I think he was looking for you,” Mike said.

Carrie shook her head. “No, he told me quite clearly with his thoughts that he was after you. He didn’t think you’d wake up before he was finished with me.”

“That’s one stupid vampire,” Sean declared. “Imagine thinking he could attack my dad in his sleep. Imagine thinking a vampire would actually be asleep at 4:30 in the morning.”

Mike started to nod. “I *was* asleep; but you’re right, Sean,” Mike said. “However, he wasn’t stupid,

just misinformed. Mihilache never knew about Tony and Jonathan's blood in me. I don't think he noticed my vampire traits until it was too late. He was shocked that I could move fast enough to catch him. This one was also shocked at my speed and strength. He was expecting a human, one still recovering from a gunshot wound, even if it was being described as a shallow one."

He glanced at the clock – almost 5:00.

"I need to call Tony," he said.