

Prologue

Halifax, Nova Scotia, 2008

Mike threw himself backward, his back slamming against the hard stone of the outer wall. In a blur, the vampire was suddenly in front of him. Eyes glowing with anticipation, cat-like fangs exposed in a malicious grin, he thrust with his katana. Mike ground his teeth and grunted. He barely dodged the heart-thrust. The blade felt white-hot as it entered his shoulder, just below the right clavicle.

How in hell did he ever get caught up in this mess? The answer to that was complicated and almost as old as he was.

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1: Kung Fu Samurai

Halifax, Nova Scotia, January 26, 2008

The clang of steel blades rang loud in his ears. Mike kept his eyes just a little out of focus, never quite looking at his opponent attacking with a blunted *katana* or samurai long sword. His adversary wore traditional Japanese gi top with hakama, the loose, skirt-like pants of the samurai, still worn in kendo. Mike wore the sleeveless jing-mo of southern style kung fu, bright red silk, yellow trim, with black silk pants.

Mike was careful to control his speed. He'd been born with unusual reflexes, something in the brain wiring, he supposed. His reactions were fast. Too fast a reaction could hurt this guy. And this guy was a piece of work – all flash and drama. He was a fourth dan black belt, a grade above Mike, but his movements were all power, no finesse.

Mike moved with speed and surgical precision. He knocked the blade to the side with a power move, then became the attacker. He twisted the sword in his hand, back of the blade coming down on a wrist. A powerful flick caught the round guard and sent the opponent's sword across the room.

He whirled in a circular blur, his leg slashing a backward arc. The heel slammed into the cheek of his opponent. Dazed, the man dropped to his knees, clearly trying to retain enough balance not to fall on his face.

Mike stepped. His katana became a high-speed blur that stopped abruptly, just touching his opponent's throat.

A ripple of applause sounded in his ears. The audience was limited – three judges, the dozen competitors, and a few companions or students of the competitors, some potential students and curious members of the public.

Mike walked to a bench where a stocky eighteen-year-old, whose build mirrored Mike's, handed him a towel.

"Nice job, Dad," the boy said. "I doubt if he saw half of what you did, but I know he felt it." The boy grinned in pride. Mike just gave a half smile.

"I'm tired, Sean. Let's get a bite to eat, then we can catch the last ferry."

"Sifu Cameron is once again the victor," a soft, accented voice commented as they were about to leave.

Mike nodded to an elderly Japanese man. "Takimura-Sensei." He took the old man's hand in his.

The old man then turned to Mike's son. "And you, Sean-san, I compliment you on your demonstration. Your father is clearly a good teacher.

"Michael, I analyze your style each time and I now see your secret. You act as if the katana is just an extension of your arm and apply subtle kung-fu moves. It is very unorthodox, yet very effective. I hear you spent a few years in both China and Japan. Who taught you this?"

Mike shrugged. "It just comes naturally to me, I guess. The Japanese masters frowned upon it, but they respect the results. The Masters in Hunan who honoured me with their teaching approved, but had little interest in the sword. It amused my teachers in Tibet, but they were more interested in skills of the mind." He shrugged again.

Takimura smiled. "If you would honour me with a month or so of your time, an hour or two a day, I believe I could award you your chi-dan – your fourth degree. Perhaps along that path, I could gain a better sense of this amazing style of yours."

“You honour me, Takimura-san. May I consider this? I’ve been through much. Teaching is an outlet for me, but more study might not be good right now. I’m still not at peace with some of the events in my life.”

Takimura nodded. “You have grieved long, Michael-san. Speak to me if you feel ready.”

Mike nodded, then gestured for Sean to head for the door.

Mike and Sean were almost the only passengers on the last ferry back to Dartmouth. It was an unusually mild night for January and they rode up top in the open air, enjoying the view of Halifax Harbour.

“Nice change,” Mike commented. “I was wondering if we were ever going to get the January lull. We’ve been inundated with snow.”

“Global warming, my ass,” his son replied.

Mike gave Sean that “watch your language” glare.

His phone made a musical sound, alerting him to missed calls and three voice mails. He’d had the phone’s ringer turned off during the evening’s competition.

“Tony?” he mused. “Tony rarely calls – maybe once a year. Now I have four missed calls and three voice mails.”

He ‘okayed’ the phone to contact his voice mail, punched in his password, and listened. A voice with a cultured British accent urged him to call, sounding more anxious with each message.”

Mike glanced at his watch – nearing midnight. “Surely this can wait ’til morning,” he mused. “It’s too late to call anybody tonight.”

Tony? Mike thought. Calling my cell phone now? He writes, he almost never calls. I didn’t even know he had my cell number.

It was a strange relationship lasting most of his life – the man who’d worked with his father all those years

ago, yet kept in touch with Mike through the years. He smiled, remembering how they met. Even that was strange. How could he forget?

2: The Haunted House

Sydney, Nova Scotia, 1973

Mike Cameron stared at the dark old house and swallowed hard.

“Go on, Mikey” his brother Billy taunted, “I dare you!”

“You go first, if you’re so brave,” Mike challenged.

Billy hesitated. The lanky sixteen-year-old ran at the ancient stone wall, scrambled over the top, and landed hard with a painful grunt.

Mike shook his head. He ran, leapt, caught the wall, pulled higher, then rolled over the top. He landed lightly in the grass, dropping into a crouch.

Even in the dark, he could see the annoyed look of envy on his older brother’s face.

“Make enough noise coming over the top?” Billy taunted.

“Not as much as you when you belly-flopped onto the ground,” Mike shot back.

Billy raised a fist. “Quiet, or I’ll give you a pounding.”

Mike ignored him. In the yard, hoary old oaks, looking like dead, skeletal forms in their autumn nakedness, cast shadows like terrible claws clutching at him. Icy shivers raced up and down his spine.

He glanced around but could no longer see his brother.

“Billy!” he hissed.

“Over here, ya big sissy,” came a taunting reply.

Peering into the darkness, he finally made out Billy’s form crouched near the steps at the back of the house.

“What are you doing?” he demanded, creeping closer.

Billy was only three and a half years older, but he towered seven inches over Mike’s compact, more solid build. And he flaunted his superior age and height like a trophy.

“I’m trying to listen, and it would be a lot easier if you’d be quiet.”

Mike was shocked. Was there a hint of fear in Billy’s voice? He wasn’t going to mention it. He was too busy taking meager comfort from the fact that he wasn’t alone in his terror.

The old Cowell house had been empty for years and had a reputation for being haunted – a place of great evil. Some parents smiled at these stories, but every kid within six blocks of Bentinck Street knew stories of ghost sightings, chains rattling at night, and muffled sounds of screams. The ancient stone edifice was one of the oldest residences in Sydney – some said as old as almost anything in Halifax.

Rumour had it that some stranger had bought the place and, sure enough, lights had been seen on late at night – but only late at night. There was never a sign of life in the day time.

More imaginative kids in the neighborhood had decided that a vampire or an evil warlock had come to live there. Who else would never be about in the daytime, only at night?

Several dares had been passed around. Of course, Billy had been the loudest of the challengers. So now, Billy had taken up the gauntlet. He would enter the house, take some pictures of the inside, then be able to show everyone that he’d done it. Their mother’s Polaroid would even show the date on the pictures.

“I hear something moving, Billy! Let’s get out of here!”

Mike clutched at his brother's jacket sleeve, hoping to encourage him away from the place. But Billy shrugged his arm free.

"No way!" He whispered. "There's no lights. It could just be rats. Besides, if he's really a vampire, do you think he spends the night at home watching TV? 'Course not. He'd be out sucking out someone's blood until before sunrise." He used a Bela Lugosi accent, bared his teeth, and flexed imaginary claws at Mike, hoping to scare him. "Come on."

Sneaking up the steps, Billy flicked open the blade of his Gerber buck knife. It had a deadly-looking serrated edge and a locking blade. The lethal item had been a gift for his last birthday, from their indulgent uncle who seemed to specialize in gifts that made their parents frown. With a deft technique that made Mike's eyes widen, he slid the blade into the door jam, levered against the tongue of the lock, then eased it back, pulling the door open.

"Where did you learn to do that?" Mike demanded.

Billy rolled his eyes.

"About fifty movies and several episodes of *Columbo*," he replied in an acidic tone. "Don't you pay attention to anything."

"I saw it," Mike insisted, "but I didn't know it really worked."

Billy gave him a withering look, then slipped inside.

Mike followed so close that he had to work hard to keep from bumping into his brother.

They seemed to be in what his grandmother called a mud room. Next came the kitchen. The air had the awful stillness of a place that had been closed up for years. There was a tangy, moldy smell that made Mike want to gag.

He would have loved to have said something to his brother in hopes of making him take a picture of the kitchen so they could get out of there, but he was afraid

to speak. He had the eerie feeling that there was someone in the house. He couldn't have explained it – it wasn't anything rational, just a terrible sense of presence. There was something there.

Billy snapped a picture in the kitchen. The small built-in flash fired off a burst of light that illuminated the room like a flash of lightning. One second the room was lit up, then it was a memory, and he was blinded, his night vision gone.

Mike thought his heart would stop. He so desperately wanted to get his brother's attention – tap him on the shoulder or something – and convince him to get out of there. But terror of the presence he was sure he could feel kept him silent. What if Billy told him off and the vampire heard? Surely the creature could already hear his heart pounding. Couldn't vampires do that? Could they smell fear? *No, that's dogs*, he told himself.

A rustling sound told him that his brother was nonchalantly placing the polaroid picture in his jacket pocket.

They were now in a large hall. Mike breathed carefully. There was a hint of a musty smell, but nothing more. Still, vampire lairs were always dusty and full of cobwebs. He was afraid the dust and dirt would make him sneeze. Anyone in the place would hear that.

Billy paused at the bottom of a huge stairway. The faint glow of the street lamps coming through the curtained windows in the foyer exaggerated haunted house look. Archways to the right and left yawned like huge, dark mouths waiting to swallow them. Terrible things, servants of the dark, lurked beyond those openings, he just knew it – *servants of a dark master*, he thought.

As he turned to look toward one of the archways, he bumped a table to one side of the stairs. A porcelain vase toppled.

Mike's shot a hand out, catching it before it could rattle down onto the table or possibly hit the floor and shatter.

Billy aimed the camera at the stair, then flashed another picture. This time Mike's heart did stop. The light of the flash had illuminated a man at the top of the stairs. He was sure of it.

"*Billy!*" he screamed.

Grabbing his brother by the back of his jacket, he pulled hard, then ran for the kitchen and the door they'd left unlocked.

Both boys raced for the back door.

"What do you boys think you're doing?"

The voice was right in front of them! It was impossible!

No, Mike thought, vampires can do that. They can materialize right in front of you, too fast for the eye to follow.

They dashed to the right. There was a door in the shadows. Maybe they could get to the front door and escape.

But the door seemed stuck.

Billy turned the knob hard, throwing himself against the door at the same time.

"No!" the voice commanded, "that's the —"

Billy let out a frightened cry. There was a banging, thumpity-thump sound of him falling down stairs.

Instantly, Mike was seized from behind by the most powerful hands he could imagine. Their father, who'd been a boxer in the navy and liked to race sailboats, had strong hands. But the strength of these hands was as far beyond their father's as their father's strength beyond theirs.

The hands wheeled him about. Eyes that seemed to glow in the dark stared into his.

"Stay put," the voice ordered. There was no disobeying this voice.

A hand seemed to lash out in the dark with amazing speed and accuracy, flicking a light switch. Ancient wooden stairs leading to a cellar were illuminated. The man disappeared, then reappeared almost instantly with Billy in his arms.

“Get the switch to the left of the door,” he ordered. His voice was calm, cool, yet there was a sternness to it. It was the voice of someone who would take charge when others panicked.

Mike found the switch which lit the kitchen. It was astonishingly clean, though very old-fashioned, except for a few modern appliances.

“Wet that cloth and follow me to the parlour.”

Mike did as he was told. It was weird. Somewhere in the back of his mind he was terrified. Somewhere, part of him was screaming silently, “Escape!” But it was as if that part of him was a prisoner in a dungeon. What remained would obey. Even his heart seemed to have stopped pounding.

“In here,” the man said, turning left into one of the dark archways. “The light switch is to the right of the doorway.”

The room came alive with the light of two antique lamps sitting on heavy mahogany tables on each side of a nineteenth century sofa. He watched the man set his brother down. For the first time, as the man carefully set a pillow under Billy’s head, Mike took in details.

He wasn’t as tall as he’d thought – maybe five-foot-ten. His hair was light brown, not quite blonde, and he had a thin mustache. Something about his hair style and manner made him seem like a character from an old movie. His clothes weren’t old at all. He wore expensive trousers and a vest – part of a 3-piece suit – shiny black shoes, and a white shirt with a starched collar. There was no tie and the shirt was open at the neck.

With a blurred motion, he seemed to open the buttons of his vest. He opened four buttons faster than most men might open one.

Mike could see why the vest might have annoyed him. The man had a muscular, athletic chest and a lean waist. How could he even breathe in that vest? But, as the thought came to him, he stared. He couldn't see any evidence that the man breathed at all!

The man turned a handsome face to him, took a breath and said, "Now, let's have that cloth." He smiled and extended his hand toward Mike. He seemed to be staring at Mike's throat.

Mechanically, Mike placed the cloth in the well-manicured hand, and watched in amazement as the man gently wiped Billy's face, then began patting a nasty bump at the corner of Billy's forehead.

"You'll find ice in the icebox in the kitchen," he said, giving Mike a stern nod.

Mike started for the kitchen. Once out of the room, he seemed to come to himself. His heart started pounding. He ran for the back door.

He was almost in the mud room, the door to freedom before him, when the voice seemed to be right behind him.

"The icebox is in the corner."

He wheeled about. It felt like his heart had pounded its way up into his throat so high that he might choke on it.

There was no one there! The man was still in the living room – he called it a parlour. He also called the fridge an icebox. That wasn't so weird, though. His grandmother called it an icebox.

He opened the top, pulled out a tray, and got six cubes. Forcing himself to return to the man in the parlour took all his courage, yet, with every step, it seemed to get easier. The closer he got, the calmer his heart became, the more the frightened part of him

seemed to go back to being that prisoner locked away in a dungeon.

His eyes widened as he approached the man. The latter just smiled and held out his hand for the ice.

“Thanks,” he said, giving him another smile. For the first time, Mike noticed just the hint of a British accent – a bit like that Ashley Wilkes character in that dry old “Gone With the Wind” movie his grandmother always watched whenever it came on TV. He also noticed that he was very pale – not the grey look they liked to give vampires in movies, just the pale look most blonde kids had by the end of winter. The lips looked kind of red against the paleness of the face, but his mouth seemed normal. No sign of fangs.

The man smiled so that his teeth showed. The canines actually seemed thinner than normal. Heck, he knew kids in school with bigger fangs. Again the man’s eyes fell to Mike’s throat.

“That ice will melt if you keep holding onto it.” The smile seemed harmless and gentle.

Mike felt stupid. He gave the man the ice, and watched as he wrapped it in the cloth and placed it gently against his brother’s head.

“Time to wake up, Billy,” the man said.

“How did you –?”

“How did I know his name? Simple, Michael – I heard you both talking.”

“We didn’t talk inside,” Mike insisted.

The man smiled and nodded. “No, you didn’t. But you did rather a lot of loud whispering outside.” He pronounced ‘rather’ sound almost like ‘rother’. “And there’s the fact that I know your father. You’re William Cameron’s boys. You live just down the street.”

Billy let out a groan, his eyelids fluttering.

“That’s it,” the man said, “almost there. You gave yourself a concussion in that fall. Now you need to wake up and stay awake for a bit. That’s it. Now, look at me. Look carefully.”

Billy's eyes opened, looking deep into the stranger's.

"Jolly-good. Now, what's your full name?"

"William James Cameron," Billy said in a dull, hypnotic tone.

"Very good, William. Now tell me, where are you?"

"I'm in your house – the old Cowell house."

"Very good." The man nodded. "You've been shaken up a bit, but everything works. Do you like tea?"

Billy made a half shrug. "It's okay. My gran' likes it."

While he spoke, he wrapped the cool cloth about Billy's right forearm, covering an area that was beginning to show purple bruising, and was a bit swollen.

Turning to Mike, he smiled a winning smile. "And you, Mr. Michael Cameron? Will you drink some tea? William needs to settle his system a bit and tea is good for the nerves. It will also help him stay awake a bit until we're sure there's no vascular damage in his brain. It's well past midnight. Since you've obviously snuck out while your parents were asleep, they aren't likely to miss you for a few hours.

"My name's Tony, by the way. Now, you two sit still while I put the kettle on."

The boys seemed calm as Tony left the room but, as soon as he was gone, both became uneasy.

"We need to get out of here," Billy hissed.

Mike shook his head. "We'd never make it. You saw how he got to the back door ahead of us. And he can read our minds. I'm sure of it."

"So you want to just stay here and be eaten – sucked dry like spider bait? It's your throat he keeps staring at."

Mike shook his head again.

“He could have done that to you and left you in the basement. Instead, he carried you in here and made me get ice for your head. Then he put a compress on your arm. And I think it’s my scar he’s staring at.”

Billy removed the cloth, his eyes widening at the bruise. He wiggled his fingers.

“Is it broken?” Mike asked.

“No,” an ethereal voice said out of the air.

Startled, the boys looked about. They were still alone. Yet, Tony’s voice had sounded as if it were in the room with them.

“How did he do that?” Billy hissed.

“You two have a tendency to whisper in a loud hissing manner,” Tony replied. As before, though he was still in the kitchen, his voice seemed to be in the room with them.

“You’re arm’s not broken, William,” he continued, “but you did bruise it rather badly – bit of a sight, actually. Still, so long as you don’t do anything too strenuous with it for a few days, you’ll be right as rain. By the way, tea’s almost ready. And I just found a tin of biscuits I didn’t even know I had.”

“*Biscuits*,” Billy spat out derisively. “I won’t even eat them when Gran’ makes them at Christmas.”

Mike rolled his eyes. “He means cookies,” he explained. “He’s English.”

“Jolly-good, Michael,” Billy taunted, imitating Tony’s accent. “I say, old boy, did you read that somewhere?”

“At least one of us can read,” Mike quipped. “You Neanderthals barely reached the level of speech.” He stuck his tongue out at his brother. “Until you were born, the scientific community thought Neanderthals were incapable of speech.”

“Careful, *squirt*, Neanderthals can crush book worms.”

They were interrupted by a chuckle from the doorway.

“I say, are you two always like this? I shouldn’t wonder that your mother doesn’t keep a whip and a chair handy.”

“Aw, we just rag each other a lot,” Billy blurted, “It don’t mean nothing.”

“It doesn’t mean anything?” Tony offered.

Mike grinned. Billy started to scowl, then relaxed.

Tony entered, setting a silver tray on the table. On it were a silver tea pot, three ancient cups and saucers, a matching creamer and sugar bowl, and some antique tea spoons. There was also a new-looking rectangular box of assorted cookies.

Mike examined a spoon.

“Hey, is this Georgian?” he asked.

Billy groaned. “Here comes another lesson,” he muttered.

Tony smiled. “Actually the spoons are French, given to me by a lady I met during a mi... well, during a visit to France. They’re from the same time period – about 1780’s, I should think. The pattern is similar to some English work at the time, which would be Georgian, of course..”

“Our Aunt Olive has some Georgian silver, and it looks a bit like this,” Mike said simply.

Tony just nodded. He poured tea and passed a cup and saucer to each of the boys.

“Help yourself to milk and sugar. The milk is powdered – I hope that’s all right. I don’t use enough milk for it to keep. Probably silly to put it in that old creamer but, well, old habits die hard, as they say.”

“Kind of weird getting all this stuff out for us,” Billy announced. He was eyeing Tony with suspicion. “We’re not exactly the Bishop of London or the Duke of Edinburgh. Don’t you have some old mugs?”

Tony’s smile broadened.

“You are my first official – or should I say *unofficial* visitors since I rented this old relic. I don’t get to use this set much, though there was a time –” His

face took on a far away look and seemed to sadden at some thought. "I don't get a lot of visitors. In fact, if it weren't for Welcome Wagon or whoever they are, I wouldn't even have the biscuits. My work keeps me from eating at home, though I do like a bit of tea now and then, even if I can only manage a sip." The last part of the sentence trailed off, as if he were thinking out loud.

"Are you going to kill us?" Billy asked suddenly.

"*Billy!*" Mike hissed.

Tony chuckled. "Why on earth would I want to do that? Besides, I think your father would disapprove."

"Because you're a vampire. Isn't that what vampires do?" Billy asked. There was a defiant air to his tone, somewhere between trying to be brave and trying to force the inevitable.

"And just why do you think I'm a vampire? Your father would gather more evidence before leaping to such an unscientific conclusion."

"What do you know about my father?" Mike demanded.

"He's Detective William Cameron of the local constabulary. Our paths have crossed due to my work. I'm here to assist him with a case, actually."

"Yeah, right," Billy sneered, but Mike cut him off.

"What work?"

"I'm sort a what the Yanks call a profiler. I help the police find certain serial killers by trying to anticipate their behaviour, their reactions to certain things. Seems you have a nasty fellow killing people hereabouts, and I've been asked to lend a hand. I worked a similar case with your father about seven years ago, 'round about the time you got that scar on your neck, Michael. How is that, by the way? It seems to have healed well – your voice seems normal."

"Yeah," Billy taunted, "he has the voice of an angel. Had to dress up with a tie and sing in solo festivals all over the province 'til he got out of it this

year. *There once was a shepherd who lived on his own...*" Billy did a warbling, girlish parody of singing.

Mike felt the blush come to his face.

"I take it that your voice was undamaged by the accident," Tony offered.

Mike shrugged. "I came third once and second twice. The judges' report said I would have come first last time but I forgot the second verse and sang the third twice." He made a grimace. "I got nervous."

Tony nodded. "It takes some experience to grow out of that. Well, your folks wouldn't like you being out at such an hour. I trust you can sneak back in as easily as you snuck out."

Mike unconsciously touched the scar on his neck. All he remembered about it was coming off his two-wheeler the first night he'd ridden without training wheels. He'd fallen against a jagged piece of pipe someone had driven into the ground as part of a wire barrier to keep people off their lawn that spring.

Billy took the Polaroids from his pocket, selected the shot looking up the stairs, and handed it to Tony.

"You don't photograph very well. I didn't notice any mirrors in the house but, if you had one, which I doubt, I bet you don't cast a reflection."

"Actually, I wasn't there when you took the picture." There was an amused glint in Tony's eyes. He seemed to be enjoying the banter. "May I?" He gestured to the camera showing from the pocket of Billy's windbreaker.

Billy handed it to him with reluctance.

"Hmm, you're lucky. I was sure the fall down the stairs would have broken it." He held it out before his face, closed his eyes, and snapped. With a whir, the picture came out of the front, dropping into his hand. He watched as it developed. "Not bad," he commented. "Better than my driver's license usually turns out."

He handed the blurry shot to Mike.

“As for mirrors,” he added, “there’s a large one in the dining room, one in each bedroom, and one in both the upstairs bath and the downstairs power room.”

“You heard my voice and thought I was at the top of the stairs,” he explained. “I came down the back stair to the kitchen. That’s how I cut you off at the back door. Any other evidence?”

“You’re only about during the dark hours, never in daylight.”

“Actually, I’m up and about at various times, but I do most of my work at night. I have an aversion to sunlight and ultraviolet rays.”

“Like a vampire,” Billy insisted.

“Or an albino,” Tony offered.

“Your hair’s too dark for an albino,” Mike countered. “And your eyes are blue-grey. They aren’t pink like an albino.”

“Oh, not you, too,” Tony complained, giving Mike a disappointed look.

Coming around to Tony’s side of the table, Mike spooned some sugar into his tea, then suddenly picked up the shiny silver pot. He struggled with the weight of the full pot, trying to hold it closer to Tony.

“I can see myself in the silver,” he said, then sighed. “I can see you, too.”

Tony showed a hint of a smile. “Does this mean the local constabulary won’t be here at 9:00 am, armed with garlic, holy water, crucifixes, sharp holly stakes, and the parish priest? Don’t you think they’d laugh at you for such an absurd accusation?”

Mike felt chagrined. “I feel stupid. It’s obvious you’re not dangerous.”

“Not dangerous!” Billy argued. “He’s a vampire! Do you think he’s Casper the Friendly Ghost? He kills people to stay alive.”

Mike turned on his brother. “If you read more instead of just watching movies and God forbid, *thought* about what you read – Vlad Dracul was a

monster even as a human. He impaled people on stakes. He had spikes driven into some guys' heads because they wouldn't take their hats off in his castle. An evil man became an evil vampire. So, if a good man got turned, couldn't he become a good vampire? Vampires don't have to be like monsters in the movies."

Tony sat back, watching the boys' faces. Holding the saucer in his left hand, he slowly raising the cup to his lips. He watched the boys argue the point for a couple of minutes, then set his cup and saucer down.

"If I had to pick one of you as my solicitor, I think I'd pick Michael," he offered in a low tone. "But, since we're theorizing, let's try this: What if vampires *were* like people? What if most of them peacefully coexisted with humans, but there were a few, rather like sociopathic humans, who chose to kill – not because they think they need to, but because they like it?"

"Vampires are vampires," Billy insisted.

"Ah," Tony replied. "And dogs are dogs. We should kill them all, in case one decides to bite you."

Billy's eyes narrowed in anger.

"Mikey may read a lot, but I see details just fine, and not just in movies," he declared. "For example, let's see you take a big gulp of that tea. You only poured yourself half a cup. You did it so naturally and picked it up so fast you probably thought we'd assume you had a whole cup, just like us. While we were arguing, you made a lot of motion and display of sipping your tea, then set your cup down. You're hoping that we'll think you started with a full cup and drank half of it. But you started with half a cup and, in spite of all your pretense, you still have half a cup."

Very deliberately, Tony picked up his cup and drank a noisy slurp, then set it down again.

"Better," Billy admitted. "It was almost a teaspoon that time. And you didn't even gag. How long have

you been working at drinking tea like a normal human?"

"What about the polaroid?" Mike countered, looking back at Tony. "He also makes a reflection in the tea pot."

Tony nodded. "You've a sharp, keen mind, Michael. You have remarkable reflexes as well. Quick, accurate movements. I once knew a chap from Hong Kong like that – amazing fellow. Perhaps you should study the martial arts. With your mind and reflexes, I think you'd be good. More important, I think it would be good for you – channel your abilities into something exciting."

He looked at Mike for a reaction.

"I've talked to my dad about it," he admitted. "He's thinking about it, but Billy's not interested."

Tony nodded. "Perhaps I'll mention it to him," Tony suggested. "He needn't assume that William here must take the classes with you."

"But, coming back to this absurdity. If I were a vampire, couldn't I just fix my hypnotic eyes on you, like Bela Lugosi, and make you forget ever seeing me?"

Billy and Mike both nodded, but it was Mike who spoke. "Just like you made me relax when we were in the same room. But, when I left for the kitchen, I was afraid again. The further I was from you, the more my feelings and thoughts were my own."

Tony sighed.

"I can't win," he said. Then, "How's the head, William?"

"Okay."

"No headache? Blurred vision? Ringing in the ears?"

Billy shook his head, the sat up. He shook his head more vigorously. "My head's fine."

"Good," Tony said. "Perhaps there's no concussion after all. In that case, if you two promise to go right

home, and you can get back in the way you got out...” He looked closely at Billy as both boys nodded.

“Very good, then. Off you go. And, should you decide to visit again, please, just ring the doorbell.”

Next evening, just as the sun was disappearing behind the houses across the street, there was a knock at the door.

“I got it,” Mike shouted. As he pulled it open, he stood and stared.

“Hello, Michael,” Tony greeted. Turning, he glanced back through dark sunglasses at the disappearing sun, then stepped into the entry hall. “Hmm,” he whispered. “That’s two cardinal rules for a vampire that I’ve broken. I’m out of my coffin well before dark and I neglected to be invited across the threshold.”

He removed his shades, pocketed them, then looked in the mirror, giving his mustache a slight brush with a finger.

“Nice mirror,” he teased, giving Mike a wink. “Is your father in? We have a meeting at the station tonight and he kindly offered to drive me. I thought, if I came over early, I could broach the suggestion to him about your martial arts lessons.”

3: Attack

Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, January 26, 2008

Mike's reverie was interrupted by the bumping of the ferry against the rubber fenders of the terminal dock. As they exited the terminal, he handed Sean the car keys and his sword in its silk sleeve, then walked down along the landing toward the little city marina.

"Dad, you just bought a new boat," Sean called. "Aren't you done lookin' yet?"

Mike grinned. "One can always look," he said. "I'm just curious to see how many tried to stay in the water. They've got a bubbler system here."

"Okay, I'm comin'. Hold up."

Mike heard the slamming of the back hatch of his Cherokee, followed by the sound of his son jogging after him.

An odd smell assailed his nostrils. He couldn't place it – stale, dirty – a faint but unpleasant odor.

Something nagged at his peripheral awareness – something off to one side moving very fast toward him.

All senses were alert.

"Sean, get back to the car. Get in and lock the door."

Sean ignored the command. "Dad, what is it? Whatever it is, I'm a brown belt, for cryin' out loud. I don't need to hide in the car like a kid."

He never got to argue. It came out of the shadows of a tent-like pavilion at the corner of the boardwalk. A shadowy figure loomed at him, a huge hand lunging at his throat. It looked about six feet tall.

He tried to parry the hand away but it was like slapping at a tree trunk. He drove a front kick into his attacker's groin, then pivoted, driving the same foot into the solar plexus. There were two grunts. Then he was airborne. Leaping, he spun, whipping a reverse roundhouse into the attacker's head.

The attacker staggered, but kept on coming. Charging in, he latched onto Mike's throat, lifting him off the ground with one hand.

Mike was astounded. He was five-foot-eight and solid. He might look like one hundred seventy pounds but he was every bit of one ninety. And this thing lifted him with one hand.

The grip was powerful. His head started to spin.

He thrust his foot into the solar plexus again, then drove a toe kick into the throat.

His attacker made a painful gurgling sound, clutching at his throat with one hand. The force of Mike's kick broke the grip on his throat and propelled him back. He fell to the pavement, rolled backward onto his feet.

What he saw by the light of the pole lamp froze his blood.

"Sean, get away! You can't help!"

The face was ugly, with sharp fangs for canines. The features were brutal, masked by the pain of Mike's defensive attacks.

And it was fast. He'd never encountered an adversary so fast. It took all his speed to dodge attempts to hit or grab at him. And the strength of the thing was terrifying.

Suddenly the attacker drew a weird, wicked-looking knife and slashed.

Mike parried with his right palm, drove his left into the inside of the attacker's elbow, attacking nerves, then tore the knife from the attacker's grasp.

Wheeling, he slashed the blade across the thing's throat. He felt the heavy blade tear through muscle and

cartilage, the tip grating against cervical vertebrae. The head remained attached, but the trachea and esophagus were severed.

The thing clutched at its ruined throat as if to keep in the fast-escaping blood. It glared at him, then fell to its knees. The look in its eyes was feral. Then it began to struggle to its feet.

Mike felt a rare surge of panic. Stepping in, he drove the blade into the thing's throat so that it severed the spine. Finally the life left the thing's eyes and it sank to the pavement.

Sean hugged his father and Mike returned it one-handed, keeping his bloody right arm away from his son.

"You okay, Dad?" Sean asked in a subdued voice.

Mike nodded. "Shaken, I guess. That thing isn't supposed to exist outside of movies. I told you to go to the car."

Sean ignored the reprimand. "Is it really a vampire, Dad?"

Mike didn't answer right away. "I don't know," he said finally. "It was impossibly strong and has the teeth."

He flipped open his phone and called 911. "How do I report this?" he asked himself.

A police car pulled up and two officers got out, hands on their sidearms. One cop was older. They assessed the scene and put handcuffs on both Mike and Sean.

Squatting next to the body, the older cop called out, "Go easy on those two. Look at this." He pulled back the corpse's lips to expose long sharp teeth, like those of a large cat.

They were getting Mike and his son into the back seat of the patrol car when an unmarked car pulled up.

“Jeeze,” the younger officer hissed, “I was expecting CID but it’s the inspector himself, even before Forensics could get here!”

The inspector was tall, balding, stern of expression. As his eyes caught Mike’s, a ghost of a smile appeared. Another detective got out of the car, pulled on latex gloves, and went over to the body of Mike’s attacker.

“Lose the cuffs, officer,” the inspector said.

The senior patrol officer looked puzzled, but complied.

As soon as Mike’s hands were free, the inspector shook his hand. “Been a long time, Mike. How’s your dad doing?”

“Inspector MacDonald,” Mike acknowledged. “Dad’s doing as well as can be expected. SeaView’s a good place. I wanted to take him in with me, especially after I got my new place finished, but the doctor wanted him under more steady supervision.”

“Lung cancer is no picnic. And Mike, you used to call me ‘Pete’ before you went away all those years ago,” the inspector reminded him. “Christ, Mike, I’m your godfather. I went with your dad to see you in a couple of tournaments. God, you were fast. By the looks of things, you’re still one fast, dangerous son of a bitch.”

He turned to a young uniformed officer and said, “Officer, why don’t you duck over to Tim Horton’s and get us all some coffee. Take young Mr. Cameron with you. Here.” He handed the younger cop a twenty.

“I’m not under arrest?” Mike asked.

The inspector blew out a heavy sigh. “This is a mess Mike – no, not you, though your experience tonight is part of a bigger mess. We’ve been dealing with these kind of attacks for almost three weeks. At first the guy seemed to get around – rather a broad hunting ground. A week ago, we had two attacks, about the same time, similar MO, happening far enough apart to require two assailants. Three nights ago, there were

three at about the same time, too far apart not to be three perps. Each one looked like some whacko pretending to be a vampire.

“We brought in a specialist as a consultant – an actual English Lord, if you can believe that. Works with Interpol and police departments have used him in the past. He worked with your father and I, back when you were a kid. He talked to me about wanting to have you help him.”

He looked cautiously at Mike.

Mike gave brief, ironic chuckle. “So Tony really is Lord Anthony Dewhurst. I guess I know why he’s been trying to call me. We’ve kind of kept in touch.” He shook his head. “I can’t imagine what help I can be.”

“Take a look, Mike.” MacDonald gestured toward the body. “You’ve already been a help.” He shook his head as if he couldn’t believe what he was seeing - or didn’t want to believe. “Back then, early seventies, your father and I were partners. When Lord Dewhurst came on the scene, he and your father did a lot of work without me. It was like they were trying to shut me and other detectives out. I could see maybe the other cops, but I was his partner. I guess I resented it.” He sighed. “Now I know why he kept me from learning all the facts – facts that were kept from the public, even kept out of the files. I wish I could have remained shut out. Mike, just how strong and fast was this guy?”

Mike felt a shiver run down his spine. All the talk had put up an insulating wall from the events of less than an hour ago. Just having the two cops arrive had been a comfort. The question yanked him right back into the reality of what he’d just experienced.

“Too fast and too strong,” Mike said.

MacDonald seemed to repress a shudder. “When you were nineteen, Mike, you were like a freak of nature. I remember a tournament at the Forum. You were too fast to follow. You still that fast?”

Mike thought about it. "Arthritis makes my hands feel stiff some mornings, and I don't feel so fast. I'm forty-seven, Pete, forty-eight in August, – but yes. I must have slowed some but most times in combat practice it feels like I'm still that fast."

"Yet you think this guy was too fast."

Mike nodded. "I can still bench press three hundred pounds. This guy had a grip like a vice and impossible arm strength. He's big but he's sloppy big. He's no Arnold Schwarzenegger. Yet he picked me up with one hand."

"Inspector," the other detective called.

"That's detective constable Legendre. He's good – science major, like you."

As MacDonald walked over to the body, Mike followed.

"No wallet," the detective said, "but I've got a note in Russian. The printing is crude and uneducated. I can't read Russian, but I know Cyrillic when I see it." He pulled out a zipper baggie and slipped the note into it, flat, then handed it to the inspector.

The inspector glanced at the note.

"André, this is Mike Cameron, Inspector Will Cameron's son." Then, to Mike he added, "Detective Legendre doesn't like to wait for Forensic Identification and carries half a dozen baggies of various sizes."

At that moment, a compact Cadillac pulled up. The man who got out was tall, maybe sixty years of age. He was well groomed and his clothes were expensive and of European tailoring.

"Sorry I'm late," he said in an Oxford accent. "They've excavated part of Ochterloney Street."

Mike wheeled about and stared.

"Hello, Michael. It's been almost thirty years – perhaps if I'd sent photos with my letters..."

"Tony? It's not possible. You look about ten years older and it's been about thirty."

“Be that as it may, Michael, ’t’is I, none the less.”

“Well, I’ll be damned!” Mike blurted. He stepped forward and gave the other a resounding hug. “Still working with the police, I see. I gather you’re still with Interpol. Man you must be seventy, eighty, even! How do you do it?”

“Careful attention to my diet,” Tony quipped with a smile.

“What’s going on, Tony? This guy attacked me out of no where, as if he was laying in ambush. He was fast – way too fast, and strong like he was on steroids. He’s got fangs like a vampire and smells funny. Don’t tell me it’s a psycho with roid rage.”

“We need your help, Mike. There’s no way to ease into this – have to just dive in off the deep end.”

“Was that thing that attacked me really a ...”

MacDonald cleared his throat in a loud manner. “We’ve got one or more psychotic serial killers with a bizarre fetish, going around killing people, trying to act like vampires. The last thing we need it a lot of panic and people buying crosses and garlic.

“You’re an amazing man, Mike: BSc in Biology and Math from Acadia, BEd from Dalhousie, level two instructor in Wing Chun and Bak Sil Lum Kung Fu, third degree black belt in Shotokan Karate, and a master’s ranking in swordsmanship.” The inspector paused, flipping through a leather-bound notebook. “Let’s see. You also have a 25-ton captain’s license from Bermuda and did twelve ocean crossings. What happened with that? You suddenly moved back ashore.”

“She died,” Mike snapped. “Her name was Susan. It was melanoma – nothing they could do. We used what time she had to do something we’d loved doing together. We hit a derelict shipping container, got picked up by a freighter. She took a turn for the worst.”

“Now you’ve come home, returned to teaching, after a fashion, and bought a smaller boat.”

Michael shrugged. "Life goes on."

"You came home," MacDonald repeated. "After she died, you taught martial arts in the Bahamas for a bit. You moved to the States, tried to write, got published, had a disastrous relationship, then came home, bought a house and another boat, and started a new Kung Fu school. And you have a new publisher."

Mike shifted his glance to Tony. "What's going on? I got attacked by a vampire, and the inspector of Criminal Operations doesn't seem surprised. I was forced to kill my attacker and everyone's just taking it in stride. Now I'm listening to my personal history like I'm under a microscope."

"Keep your voice down," MacDonald insisted, looking about as if to see if anyone heard.

"He's not the first one I've dealt with, Michael," Tony said. "Perhaps you recall the case in Sydney that your father and I were working on all those years ago."

"At first we thought there was just one," the inspector said. "Then it looked like two, then three. Lord Dewhurst believes there may be more."

"Lord Dewhurst?" Mike queried, staring at Tony.

Tony nodded. "I don't use the title much, except when it helps grease certain bureaucratic wheels. We can talk about it later."

Mike raised an eyebrow but held his tongue.

"Anything useful on the body?" Tony inquired.

"Can you read Russian?" MacDonald asked. He handed Tony the bagged note.

"Cheap notebook paper, written in pencil, crude penmanship."

"Right-handed, used a number two pencil, and not well-educated by the penmanship," Legendre added. He left the body and joined them.

Tony nodded. "The latter is confirmed by several misspellings, "Cherokee," for one."

"Cherokee?" Mike interrupted, "I drive a Jeep Cherokee."

A look of alarm appeared in Tony's eyes. "Red? A Grand Cherokee Limited?"

Mike nodded.

"You read Russian," MacDonald cut in. "Damn it, man, what does the damn thing say? Read it!"

"Sorry, old chap. It says, and I quote, "five-foot-eight, muscular build, greying dark hair, blue-grey eyes. Drives a 1999 red Jeep Cherokee Limited, license plate NYC 635."

Mike felt an even colder chill shoot through him. "Why me?" he demanded.

Tony sighed. "My fault, Michael. I think someone knows why I'm here and that I was trying to get in touch with you. My guess is that either my cell phone or home phone has been compromised or else someone has found a way to intercept my e-mails."

"With the right spy-ware, the latter is the easiest," Mike said.

"I've discussed you with the inspector, here, and I'm in constant touch with a colleague in London. Nigel will be coming over in a few days. We've discussed your talents and how you might be of help to us. I guess I painted a rather dramatic picture, enough for someone to try to remove you from the playing field before I could even ask you to join the team."

"Team?"

The inspector cleared his throat. With a glance at Legendre, he led Mike away, lowering his voice.

"Mike," he began awkwardly, "this can't get out. We can't even let the rest of the department know. My God, man, can you imagine the panic? I'm trying to keep the police as much out of this as possible. If even a tenth of the legends are true, the police are helpless. We can't shoot them; they just heal. Lord Dewhurst has an uncanny talent for finding these monsters, but we need someone who can destroy them. They're strong and they're fast. We need someone of your ability, someone we can trust."

“Let’s face it, Michael,” Tony chimed in, “it’s not as if we can arrest these chaps and give them their day in court.”

Mike nodded slowly. “I can just hear the judge: You are here by sentenced to a stake through the heart, decapitation, and having your mouth stuffed with garlic.”

“Actually,” Tony said, “a stake through the heart only incapacitates. Severing the ventral root, as you did, is the best method. Removing the heart is also good, but more time-consuming. If the vampire can remove the stake from his heart, it will heal and he’s back in business in a few days, all-be-it weakened. Fortunately I’m acquainted with the night ME and he knows to separate the head from the body. If the knife is removed, the spinal nerve tissue could regenerate enough to reattach.”

“That’s not possible,” Mike objected. “Trust me, my degree was medical biology. Major nerve tissue like the spinal cord does not regenerate.”

“Not in humans, no,” Tony replied, “but the regenerative capabilities of vampires are more amazing than those of a lizard. Cut off a lizard’s tail and he grows a new one, fully functional, sensory and motor nerves included.”

“So the coroner is in on this, too?”

Tony nodded. “The night ME is well acquainted with the situation.” He turned to MacDonald and added, “Perhaps this would be a good place to leave the official part of this, Inspector,” Tony suggested. “And, the more I think of it, the more I fear bad luck between here and the ME’s office. Excuse me.”

Tony went over to where Legendre was standing by the body, and seemed to stare into his face.

Mike watched in amazement as the detective took an extra pair of latex gloves out of his pocket, handed them to Tony, then turned and stared at the harbour. Tony donned the gloves, took hold of the huge knife in

the throat of the corpse, and levered down – first to the right, then he removed the blade, reinserted it, and levered down the other way until the head was severed. He laid the knife on the chest and pulled the head several inches away from the body.

As Tony returned, the inspector let out a sigh. “Now I have to figure out how to explain that to the Forensics boys. A knife in the throat is self-defense. Cutting the head off is hard to explain.”

“I’ll have a chat with them,” Tony said. “Here they come now, behind that patrol vehicle.”

“At least that means the coffee’s here, too.” MacDonald turned to Mike and said, “I’ve got your statement. There’ll be a copy at the Dartmouth Station, in the Spicer Building, behind the hospital. It’ll be at the front desk tomorrow. Just drop in and sign it. Forensic Identification will want photos of your hands and arms. You have a few bruises that are clearly defensive wounds, and you’ve got bruising about the throat. It makes it easier to rubber stamp this as self-defense, though Lord Tony may have just complicated that.”

The patrol car pulled up, followed by a van labeled “Forensic Identification Unit.”

Sean brought coffee to his dad, eyeing Tony with curiosity.

“Sean, this is Lord Anthony Dewhurst,” Mike said. “Tony, this is my son, Sean.”

Tony smiled and shook Sean’s hand. “A pleasure to meet you, Sean. Your father’s mentioned you a lot in his letters over the years. And your grandfather speaks very highly of you.”

“You the guy who sends Dad books all the time? They’re great. I’ve read some of them myself.”

Tony smiled. “Excuse me a moment.”

He walked over to the forensic team just getting out of the van, and seemed to get their attention so completely that the conversation was one-sided. “Make

sure you bag the head separately,” Mike heard Tony say to the lead CSI.

“Bring that camera over here before you photograph the body,” the inspector called out. “Mike, we can probably get into Alderney Gate out of the cold for a torso shot. You’ll have to take your shirt off.”

Mike handed his coffee to Sean, removed his Helly Hansen sailing jacket, then peeled off his turtleneck. The photographer gave a whistle, apparently due to the many scars on Mike’s arms and upper torso.

“Been in a lot of knife fights?” he asked.

“Sword training,” Mike said. “Usually the blades are dulled. Sometimes they’re not.”

Mike was just pulling on his sweater and jacket when MacDonald said, “That’s all I need. Peters, get rid of that photographer or at least move him far enough away that he can’t get anything too detailed.” The constable nodded and moved toward the press photographer just outside the cordoned area, snapping away with a digital Nikon.

“Damned police scanners,” the inspector muttered.

Mike ground his teeth. “I don’t need this.”

Tony said, “If you can drop Sean at home, I’ll follow, then take you for a drink somewhere. We need to talk – aside from catching up.”

Mike sighed and nodded slowly.

“He’s got his license. He could drive himself home, but I’d rather he didn’t. I expect he’s a bit more shaken by this than he knows. Okay, Tony. I could do with some scotch right about now.”