

The Old College Try

by Michael Dean

Chapter 1: A Strange Meeting

Morgan Harkness looked up from the computer as the young woman entered his office. It was nearly midnight and her arrival was unexpected. Working nights usually cut down on the distractions and allowed him to focus on the tasks that needed done.

He had two weeks to go until the start of the fall semester and still had things to finish for the class he would be teaching. The main part of the syllabus was done. The main part of the schedule was complete showing what topics would be covered each week. He had six of the twelve assignments ready for the lab manual. He just needed to complete six more and everything would be in place and he could send the book off to the copy store for students to buy and post the complete schedule on the class page.

Morgan felt right at home sitting in his windowless office in the basement of the Computer Science building. Sitting behind a computer screen or in a lab working on electronic was where he belonged. He did not, however, enjoy the teaching side of earning a doctorate. While he did recognize the importance and saw it as a way to give back to those who followed him, the difficulties in scheduling classes made teaching a chore, as did dealing with the inanities of students. Like coming in two weeks before the semester started.

Though she had attempted to do so stealthily, he had heard her coming down the hall and opening the door. She was thin and pale and looked too young to be one of his students, but one could never tell these days. He turned to face her across the desk.

"My office hours don't start until the semester begins," he began. "The syllabus is online and the full class schedule will be online as soon as I complete it. If the registrar won't open a section for you, neither will I," he said, preempting the four most common student concerns before the semester began.

"The Duke orders that you should present yourself within the next fortnight so that you may pledge your loyalty to him and continue to live within his domain," the young woman stated simply.

"He's not a duke," Morgan replied. "Titles of nobility are not recognized in this country. I owe him nothing."

"He once was. And he controls this city in regard to the Kin, and that means he can call himself whatever he pleases. It also means that you owe him what he says you owe him. He is the recognized ruler of this domain and is allowed to set the requirements to reside therein."

"I owe him nothing. If he leaves me alone, then I will leave him alone."

"That is not how it works," she said.

"That's how it damned well better work. You can tell your master to ignore me and he will be ignored in kind. I just want to go to school and earn my degree."

"Your degree is meaningless. You owe him your pledge and your tithe, as he requests. You are hunting in his forest."

"This is not some damned Robin Hood story. This is not his forest and I am not hunting here."

"Regardless, you owe him an oath and a tithe."

"Just go. Tell your master that I desire nothing from him other than to be left alone and if he does so then he will get the same in return."

"You will come to regret that," she said as she turned to leave.

"I doubt it," he replied to her back as she left the room.

Morgan sighed and turned back to the computer.

Chapter 2: Morgan's Interview

(Three Months Ago)

Morgan paused before the office door and looked at the nameplate: Dr. David Taylor. He always felt a small bit of trepidation before an interview after all these years, regardless of how well he knew he could perform. After a slight pause, he knocked.

"Come in!" came the call from inside.

Morgan could hear the chair creak as the occupant rose from it and the sound of shoes on the carpet as Dr. Taylor came out from behind a desk. Morgan opened the door and put a smile on his face.

"Morgan Harkness," he said to the man in the room as he entered. "Nice to meet you, Sir."

Morgan extended a hand to shake, but the man stopped dead in his tracks still two steps away from him.

"My God," Dr. Taylor said, "it's like seeing a ghost. You are the spitting image of your father in his twenties."

"You knew my father?" Morgan asked, stepping forward to finally complete the handshake.

"Yes. We were at University together. We went our separate ways after graduation, though."

Dr. Taylor motioned to a chair in front of the desk and Morgan sat down as the professor returned to his chair behind the cluttered desk.

"I will say I was surprised to get an email from him after all these years, and as a reference for his son, no less. I didn't even know that Mark had a son. Do you have--?"

Morgan cut off the question before it was finished.

"Yes, I have porphyria just like my father. In fact, my grandfather had it, too. It seems to be sex-linked in our family."

"I'm sorry to hear that. Your dad had a bit of a struggle as an undergrad dealing with that. When the ADA act was finally passed, it definitely helped him make it through at the end."

"It has helped me, also. I am hoping to have all my sections late so that they at least get out after dark. It would be better if they started after the sun when down, but I can bundle up to arrive on time, if necessary. I can hold office hours after dark, also. The real key on that is if the classrooms assigned to the classes I would teach are in the same building as my office and without windows."

"That's something that I'm sure can be done. The graduate college is very good about working with students. I reviewed your proposal and it looks all in order. You wrote that you already have additional funding lined up?"

"Yes. Several companies are interested in my research area and willing to fund my research with grants. A teaching stipend should cover my living expenses while the grants will cover my research expenses. "

"Excellent!" Dr. Taylor said. "Are you anything like your father?"

"In what way?"

"Mark was driven to succeed. He never let anything stand in his way."

"In that case, I am exactly like him, sir."

"Data security is a large and well-trod field. Are you sure that is where you want to focus?"

"That's an area that has always interested me, sir. But I think I have stumbled on an encryption algorithm that improving encryption and decryption speed and efficiency while increasing security. Of course all this will require hours of testing and attempts to break it. "

"Of course. And by using our new supercomputer you can get that done faster."

"About nine months to gather the initial data versus forty-two months on a normal system. Then time to analyze the data and prepare the paper."

"Well, if you are just like your dad, I'm sure you can't wait to get started."

Dr. Taylor signed a paper lying on his desk and handed it to Morgan.

"Turn this in to the office. I expect meetings at least monthly and then weekly the closer you get to completing your thesis. Talk to the secretary in the Dean's office to schedule those. In your application to the graduate college, be sure to tell them that I have accepted you as a doctoral student and

let the department head know about your condition so the committee can make accommodations in office and classroom assignments as well as scheduling. And welcome on board."

He stood up and shook Morgan's hand again.

"Is there anything else I can help you with, Morgan?"

"Nothing I can think of."

"Well then, I need to get home to my wife," Dr. Taylor said as he moved over to the office door and opened it. "She has been holding dinner for me so you and I could meet late. We would like to have you over for dinner some time, Morgan. I would love to hear about you father's life after we parted. I've read his published papers, of course. Even been on the peer review committee for a few of them. I can tell you a few adventures when he was in school that he might not have mentioned to you. Maybe next week?"

Morgan followed the professor over to the door and exited the office, turning to face his new faculty advisor once he had done so.

"I'm not sure. I have several food allergies and have to be very careful. I usually prepare everything myself to be on the safe side."

"I understand. Your father had the same problem. I don't know how he ever met a woman as closeted as he was."

"Well, when those things happen it is like it was meant to be. My mother always said it was like storming a castle just getting close to him but was worth it in the end. I just hope that I am as lucky as he was and meet someone as special to me as my mom is to him."

"Well then, we will have to do something," Dr. Taylor said, "even if we can't share a meal. I do like to have all my grad students over at least once a semester. Think about it?"

"Of course. You have a good evening, sir."

"And you also, Morgan. Glad to have you as part of my team and have a safe trip home."

Dr. Taylor closed the door and Morgan turned and walked down the hallway to the elevator. He looked at his watch. Time to go out and get a bite to eat, he thought.

Chapter 3: Office Hours

(Fall Semester, Week One)

"Make sure you log in to your lab account sometime before the next class session. We do not have an actual project due, but there is a short assignment that will guide you through the process of writing and submitting your work. I will have the completion list next week. Remember that lab projects are sixty percent of your grade. You cannot pass without them. Any other questions?"

Morgan looked out at the thirty-four students in this section of his class arranged in a semi-circle across five levels. Each seat had a computer and monitor, but could easily see the presentation board at the front. None of the students said anything or raised a hand. He looked at the clock on the back wall. Five minutes past nine. The sun had been down for over half an hour.

"OK then. We are done a little early and everyone is free to go, but don't count on this every week. We have a lot of material to cover this semester. Good luck to you all."

The students rose and gathered their notes and bags before filing out of the classroom. Morgan stood beside the presentation table at the front of the room and watched them go. His Monday-Wednesday-Friday class was much better, being able to space the three hours of class out across the week. The Tuesday and Thursday sections did the entire three hours in a single night and were not as easy to handle.

As the last of the students filed out, Morgan picked up his materials and climbed the stairs to the exit. There was actually a wheelchair accessible entrance to the classroom at the bottom level where the presentation desk stood, but it opened out into the first floor foyer, which

had two banks of doors and several windows. Even though it was after dark, Morgan still avoided this route by years of habit.

The second floor door to the classroom opened next to the stairwells and elevator, both of which led directly to the basement and Morgan's office. The stairs also had windows, however, and was best avoided. Morgan took the elevator down.

The elevators doors opened to an intersection leading straight ahead a short distance to the other side of the building and a long hallway to the right which ran the length of this side of the building.. His office lay near the far end of that hallway and a similar intersection that was part of the rectangular track of hallways that circled the basement.

Morgan stepped off the elevator and turned to make the long walk to his office. Standing near his office door were two muscular young men. He paused and adjusted his leather satchel as he appraised the men. They both wore jeans and polo shirts. He resumed his trek.

Footsteps sounded behind him. Two individuals in tennis shoes came from the other long hallway and followed him about twenty feet behind. Morgan did not turn around, but was certain they were with the other two. As he drew closer he could see the logo on their shirts of local fraternity known for the athletes who pledged. They stood about ten feet beyond his office.

"My office hours are on Monday unless you make an appointment," Morgan addressed the men as he pulled out keys to unlock his office.

"We are not here to meet with you," said one of the young men that had followed behind him. "We are here to TAKE you to a meeting."

"I told the last person the Duke sent that I was not interested. Did she not pass that message on?"

Office door unlocked, Morgan entered the room and turned on the lights. He sat his satchel on the desk and removed two books, which he replaced on the bookshelf next to the desk. The two followers entered the office and the other two stood just outside the door.

"That message was relayed. It is not acceptable. The Duke sent us to bring you to meet with him. There is no acceptable response other than to come with us."

Morgan looked at the speaker. He stood three inches over six feet and wore the same shirt that the other three wore. The shirts fit tightly over the four young men's muscular torsos. The man next to him was slightly shorter. One of the men outside the door was shorter and one was taller, but both were as muscular.

"What if I resist? Are you prepared to physically restrain me?"

"We are aware of your abilities, but we are not without our own. The four of us were specifically chosen for our speed, agility, and strength to out match you. If you attempt to resist, you might suffer significant injury in the process. It would be easier for all concerned if you simply come with us willingly."

Morgan looked at the four again. They stood, faces impassive, but in a stance ready to react to whatever he did. He relaxed and let his shoulders drop slightly. He picked up his satchel and slung it on his shoulder. He took a coat and several other clothing articles off the coat hook and arranged them over his left arm as the four watched.

"Fine, if I must tell the Duke in person, so be it. Lead on, McDuff."

"Who's McDuff?" the speaker for the four asked.

"You are, big boy. I'm going with you willingly. You win."

The shorter of the two outside the office spoke for the first time. "I think he's the beer guy from The Simpsons."

The other slapped his shoulder. "That's Duff-man," he said.

Morgan sighed. "The fall of the American Educational System," he said in a low voice.

Morgan exited the office and the four men formed a square around him. They took the elevator up to the first floor. There they went across the lobby to the doors on the far side and exited next to the staff parking lot.

The four stopped at a black 1972 Cadillac Fleetwood Brougham with heavily tinted windows that was parked in the handicapped space closest to the door. The one that Morgan thought of as "the Speaker," since he did most of the talking, stopped at the driver's door and reached for the handle. Tallguy went around the front of the car. Shorty (still a head taller than Morgan) stopped behind Morgan and the one with no nickname reached for the handle of the driver's side back door.

"You ride in back with Jim and Doug," The Speaker said.

"No," Morgan said. He pointed at Tallguy, "*He* can ride in back with Jim and Doug. I'll take shotgun. Or better yet, I'll drive my own car and follow you."

"Those were not our instructions," Speaker said.

"Look, I'm coming with you somewhat willingly. There's no need to force me into a car. One of you can even ride with me if you want."

Speaker seemed to consider this for a moment, then he nodded. He looked at Shorty and then nodded in Morgan's direction. Shorty shrugged and motioned Morgan out toward the parking lot. Morgan led him to a light green Prius, which he unlocked and opened the back hatch from thirty feet away with his fob. Morgan deposited his protective outer clothes in the back and closed the hatch. He went around and took the driver's seat.

"So tell me, are you Jim or Doug?" Morgan asked his companion as he maneuvered out of the parking space and toward the lot exit.

"Doug," was the curt reply.

The Cadillac was waiting on the street, parked at the curb to the right of the exit as Morgan stopped at the stop sign. It pulled away and Morgan turned right and followed.

Chapter 4: Mark's Interview

(Spring 1993)

Mark walked down the long hallway of the North wing of the Engineering building. As he approached the office, it came into view through the open door. Everything was perfectly, neatly, organized and arranged. As he stepped in front of the door he could see the desk, which was mostly bare except for a legal pad in a leather folder, a pen set with a nameplate that read Dr. Charles Donaldson. A plain wooden chair sat in front of the desk and a man in his late forties sat in a large leather chair behind the desk.

"Are you Harkness?" the man behind the desk asked.

"Yes, sir," Mark answered.

"Well, don't just stand there gawking like a freshman! Get in here and shut the door!"

Mark did as he was bid. As he turned back into the office from shutting the door, the man behind the desk pointed to the uncomfortable chair on Mark's side. Mark sat.

"Why we have to have this meeting at nine o'clock at night is beyond me, but the Dean ordered me to schedule it, so let's get it going."

"I have porphyria, sir." Mark said.

"Fear of what?"

"Porphyria. It's a blood disorder that makes me very sensitive to sunlight. Just a small exposure can cause third degree burns, sir. It can even be enough to kill me."

"Like a vampire?"

Mark winced at the comment. "Yes, sir. Like a vampire. It has even been called the Vampire Disease. "

"So why in the world do you want to do research and work on a doctorate? Shouldn't you just be in a hospital somewhere?"

"Well, first I need to have an income just like everyone else. And I would like to have a good income. But, I also want to make the world a better place. Plus, because they passed the American's with Disabilities Act three years ago and that requires schools to make accommodations for me. Like holding this meeting at nine o'clock so I can wait until the sun is down to attend. This has given me more opportunities than I ever had before."

What followed was the most grueling hour of Mark's life. Dr. Donaldson made notes during Mark's description of porphyria and his struggles in school. He continued to make notes the entire interview, filling over a dozen pages. He went over every aspect of Mark's academic career, questioning just about every part of it.

Dr. Donaldson began by pulling a paper out of the pocket in the portfolio.

"I see here that you completed high school at home. Was there a reason for that?"

"Yes. Because of my condition it was very difficult and dangerous for me to attend school in person during the day. Private schools would not accept me and the public school chose to not make any accommodations. They said there was nothing they could do and suggested sending me to an institution. My mother chose to educate me herself.

"So why should I trust these marks?" Dr. Donaldson asked.

"As you can see, I scored exceptionally well on the SAT with no score lower than eighty-fifty percentile. That should confirm my high school grades."

"Yes. But that brings another question to mind. It took you three tries to pass a basic math class. Why?"

"I did perfectly fine on the assignments and quizzes, but the midterm and final were fifty percent of the grade and neither of the first two instructors would let me take the exams after dark or in a sunless room. Both times I was given zeroes on the exams and failed the class. It took the ADA passing to force those instructors to accommodate my disease so that I could pass the class. Rather than a detriment, I feel that shows my determination and drive to succeed."

Dr. Donaldson continued to question the courses he took as an undergrad, especially the electives and upper division courses that counted towards his Master's degree and allowed him to finish on time, despite the delays early on. After forty minutes, he finally turned to Mark's thesis proposal.

"So what is this network security idea you are proposing?"

"You are aware of the release earlier this year of Mosaic?"

"Of course."

"So I have applied to be part of a team at the Nation Center for Supercomputing Application working on securing communications on the internet. Specifically, they are trying to improve and update the transport layer security protocol currently in use as well as be able to retrofit it to pre-existing networks."

Dr. Donaldson began to quiz him on very specific aspects of his encryption and transfer protocols, pointing out two errors in his initial plan. After twenty minutes of the most intense and technical question and answer Mark had ever experienced, Dr. Donaldson finally smiled.

"Mr. Harkness, I find you to be an exceptional student who has overcome great hardship to get where you are. I see nearly limitless potential in you."

Dr. Donaldson removed a paper that had been inserted between the pages of the legal pad and wrote some notes on it. Then he signed it.

"I am happy to accept you my student, but you may find me a difficult taskmaster as your advisor. I can assure you, however, that I will invest as much in you as you do in yourself. Are you prepared for this?"

"Yes sir, I am."

"When will you apply to the Graduate College?"

"I have already filled everything out and was just waiting to see if you would accept me. I will add that and have it dropped off tomorrow."

"Good. See that you take care of it first thing."

"Yes sir."

"And then call the department office and speak to them about an office and classes. I will give them a heads up first thing in the morning so they should be expecting your call."

Dr. Donaldson stood and came around the desk. He shook Mark's hand and clapped him on the back.

"Then I will see you bright and early Monday morning," he said.

"Um, no sir. I will need to do my work after sunset to better avoid injury."

"Oh, that's right. Your condition. Make that dark and late Monday night, then?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good. I will, of course, be dropping by the lab or your office on a regular basis for updates. Keep good notes along the way, young man."

"Yes sir."

Dr. Donaldson ushered Mark out the door bid him good night. Mark walked back the way he came, but with much lighter steps and without the trepidation that had dogged him on the way in. This was going to be a good project.

Chapter 5: Uncomfortable Negotiations

The two cars headed north across the campus, the Cadillac leading the Toyota. When reached the edge and the east/west street that ran alongside the University, they turned west. They passed through a neighborhood filled with older homes on small lots that were now mostly rental houses catering to short-term faculty and students. They turned north at the next major thoroughfare rather than continuing into the retail district. After passing by some warehouses, they entered a more rural area with large lots, stands of trees, and large expensive houses.

During the drive, Morgan tried to make conversation with Doug. All he received to his questions were single word responses to each. Texas. Houston. Football. Scholarship. Money. He finally gave up and rode the last few minutes in silence.

After a fifteen minute drive, the Cadillac turned into a driveway flanked by two ancient oak trees. The drive wound up to a large house on a slight hill. The drive came in from the left side of the house and split in two. Both paths curved around a grass section with a fountain in the middle and met at the other side to form an oval. The Cadillac took the left path and parked in front of the porch.

Morgan took the right fork and circled around the fountain to park on the Cadillac's right side near the rear of the car. He now had a clear path out if he needed it, although he would have to go around the car to enter it.

The five men exited the two vehicles. Speaker moved directly up the stairs to the porch and headed for the door. The other three waited until Morgan came around the back of his car and fell in with him, forming a triangle around him to direct him to the house. Before Speaker could reach the door it opened. A pale man in his sixties or seventies stood just inside the doorway.

"The Master is expecting you, Daylan. Please take your guest to the main dining room."

"Thank you, Jonathan," Daylan, formerly known in Morgan's head as Speaker, said. He then turned to the four men following him.

"This way, Mr. Harkness," he said before joining the others by completing the square round Morgan.

The men walked through the door and into a large foyer. The ceiling was two floors tall and a large and ornate chandelier hung in the middle over a compass rose in the tiled floor. There was a door to the left and one to the right. Staircases curved up from each side to a second floor landing directly across from the front door. Underneath the landing was double door.

Daylan led the group to the door on the right, which he opened. It led into a sitting room. Without pausing, he continued on through the sitting room and through a double sliding door to his left. This led them in to a large dining room dominated by a long table with six chairs to the left and to the right and one chair at each end. At the far end sat a man who appeared to be in his early forties. Standing next to him was a young girl and sitting to his left was bespeckled man about Morgan's age.

"I need to take care of some business, Nadia. Go play with your brothers and sisters and when I get done I will come see you."

"Yes, papa," she said, pronouncing it pup-paw. She skipped off through the doors behind the man.

"Mr. Harkness. I am Duke Philip and you are a playing a very dangerous game."

"I don't play games."

"And neither do I. The Kin recognize my claim. I am the authority in this domain. I control it. If you wish to stay here, you must follow my rules. Swear your allegiance to me and pay a tithe of what you earn while in my domain. That is all I demand."

"No." Morgan said.

"No? You do not know with whom you are dealing." The Duke looked at the man next to him. "Franklin?"

The man to his left consulted a paper.

"Morgan Harkness. Or should I call you Gordan William Harkness?"

"I go by Morgan now."

"Very well, Morgan then. You currently have eleven bank accounts. Two savings accounts and one checking account under the name of Morgan William Harkness. Four numbered overseas accounts. A checking and savings account in an Illinois bank under the name of Mark William Harkness that is currently being used by someone on Vancouver Island in British Columbia...."

"My father always dreamed of retiring there," Morgan interrupted.

"Yes...." Franklin said very slowly. "There is also a checking and savings account in a Hawaiian bank which is currently being used by someone in French Polynesia...."

"My grandfather always loved the warm, tropical nights," Morgan interrupted again.

This time Franklin just looked at him for a long pause before continuing.

"You also have three investment accounts, one under each of those names, that pays out monthly dividends to the appropriate checking accounts. Your current net worth is approximately seventeen point two million. You will be receiving four hundred and sixty-five

thousand in grant funds and thirty-one thousand in stipends for teaching. Did I leave anything out?"

"No, I think that about covers it," Morgan said. He tried to keep his face impassive. While this accountant or whatever was good, he had missed six other accounts and an additional twenty million in funds.

"So you see," the Duke said, "We know all about you. I do not care what you already have unless you continue to be disruptive and I must assess a penalty. You owe forty-nine point six thousand in tithe. Normally I allow my subjects to pay that off over time as they are paid, but given your wealth and the current situation, you must now pay that upfront."

"No."

"No?" Duke Philip asked.

"You are nobody to me. You have done nothing for me. You deserve nothing from me. I will neither swear nor pay."

"I am Duke Philip of Farnham, the acknowledged ruler of this domain. I alone allow you to live here. I alone allow you to live. Daylan, take him downstairs."

The four young men tried to grab Morgan. This time, he fought back. While he might have prevailed against one or two, his assessment at the office had been correct and the fact that there were four against one determined the outcome. They were almost as fast and almost as strong as Morgan and the four of them eventually took him down, although they all received damage and Jim's arm was broken.

They carried Morgan down to the basement and tied him to a chair. They removed three leather bags filled with lead shot from a toolbox in the corner and began to beat Morgan. They

were slow and methodical, spending several hours working him over. He was bloody and battered, but still defiant. Duke Philip came in at the end.

"Ready to swear your fealty?"

"No," Morgan said, spitting on the Duke's shoes.

"Have you heard of the Yakuza, Morgan?"

Morgan did not respond.

The Duke motioned to Daylan, who retrieved an item from the toolbox.

When a Yakuza member has done something wrong, they must show their lord that they are sorry. Are you sorry yet, Morgan?"

Morgan still did not respond. The Duke nodded toward Morgan and Daylan stepped forward with a pair of bolt cutters.

"They show remorse for their failure by cutting off a finger. The greater the offense, the larger the piece and the more important the finger. But perhaps the effect and cause can be reversed so that you will feel remorse."

The Duke held up his left hand and wiggled his pinky finger. Daylan stepped forward and put the bolt cutters in place. Morgan screamed.

Chapter 6: Robert's Interview

(Spring 1960)

"I want to thank you again, Dr. Graham." Robert said. "Too many of my professors have been unwilling to meet with me or even entertain taking me on as a student because of my condition."

"I must admit, Mr. Harkness, that I, too, was hesitant. Your condition makes working with you very difficult. I can see why so many others might think that you are not worth the trouble. But I wanted to give you a fair evaluation, so I looked at your undergraduate work. You took several advanced classes while an undergrad and excelled in them. You even had a paper published as a junior. One of your instructors described you as a 'natural electrical engineer.' So tell me what makes you so good."

"My father was Gordon Harkness. He was a student of Dr. Charles Steinmetz. I grew up around his work, setting up experiments and recording data. I watched him work so often, it's almost as if I did the research myself."

"What about the paper you had published?"

"We had to do original research for the class. I saw a pen that used light to draw on a screen. They were using it to play tic-tac-toe. I thought that it might be able to control other things like writing notes or even drawing art. The problem was it could only make white lines on a black and white background. We developed a screen that could detect the location of a stylus without relying on light from it. Our paper discussed how this might then be used to display colors on a screen capable of it."

"Your early work shows promise. So tell me, how many professors have you spoken with about being your dissertation advisor?"

"You are the first, sir." Robert said, looking directly at Dr. Graham.

"Truthfully? And how many did you attempt to speak to that refused to talk to you?"

Robert sighed and hung his head. "Seventeen," he said. "Not one of them would speak with me."

"Which schools did you try at?"

"MIT. Stanford. UC Berkeley. Cal Tech. University of Texas."

"And you got no responses?"

"Mostly I received polite refusals like 'I am not taking on any more doctoral students at this time.' although there were two that outright said that my medical condition made it impossible to educate me."

"And yet you persist."

"I want to learn. I want to improve myself. My father works in a factory and, while he makes enough for my family and to send me to college, he hates his job. I want a good job, but I want to love what I do as well. If managing my condition is too much trouble...If I am too much trouble...then I will just keep looking until someone gives me a chance."

"Are you finished?" Dr. Graham asked.

"Yes, sir." Robert said, rising. "I will see myself out. Thank you for your time and I will not waste any more of it."

"Sit down, young man. It's my turn to talk."

Robert sat back down.

"Listen," Dr. Graham said, "my time is mine to waste, or invest, as I see fit. Now that you've met me, I'm sure you realize that I have had to fight for everything I have. My life has

been a struggle. Entire schools have refused me entry simply because of the color of my skin, as if that had some connection to the functioning of my brain."

"You have already accomplished much in your life to have obtained a Master's degree. That is much more than most people will do without having your handicap. You have huge potential, but I had to be sure that you would persevere. I do not want to waste my time if you are simply going to give up when the road ahead becomes more difficult."

"If you give me a chance, sir, I promise you that I will not quit."

"Of that I am certain, young man. But there is also another matter about which I need to know. Hardship makes two kinds of men, Mr. Harkness. The first kind is those who, having experienced it, strive to help those who follow to avoid it. The second kind seeks to inflict that hardship in some way on others. I seek to divine which sort of person are you, Mr. Harkness?"

"Since you seem to be willing to give me a chance, I must conclude that you are the former, Dr. Graham. Am I correct?"

"I certainly try to be."

"Then I also suspect that you want me to say that I, too, am the former. It would be easy to say so and leave it at that. While I try to be that sort, sir, I must also confess that I find it very hard and the urge to strike out against those who impeded me and make my life more difficult than it must be is great indeed."

"I never said that it was an easy course to take. But would you strike out at someone who has not harmed you? A waitress or shoe shine boy?"

"Of course not! That would be horrible."

"And if you could have revenge on those who have placed those obstacles and denied you opportunity at an education—any revenge at all—what would that revenge be?"

"To achieve what they denied me. To beat them at the own game and make the discoveries before them and relegate their names to be lost to history."

"Well, Mr. Harkness, I think you might just have that opportunity. I show great promise and I believe you would be a grand addition to my lab team. I will inform the department office on Monday that I have accepted you as a doctoral student and you will be joining my team. Contact them for an office assignment. Also let the registrar know that you have been accepted by an advisor and if they give you any problems, let me know. Do you have any questions?"

"No, sir. You won't regret giving me this opportunity. I will try to be the best student you have ever had."

"I don't believe I will. You will have to work very hard to be my best student, but I will be happy if you are the best student you can be. Always remember where you came from and what it took to get wherever you are at that point in your life."

Robert left Dr. Graham's office with a renewed sense of hope for the future.

Chapter 7: Recoup, Regroup, and Riposte

Doug got out of Morgan's car. It was now parked in the first unmarked space closest to the Computer Science building. The black Cadillac was stopped directly behind it. The sky overhead was beginning to brighten with the dawn.

Tallguy and Jim got out of the Cadillac and pulled Morgan out of the back seat. They carried him over to his car and dumped him in the back. Then they moved to the front and rear tires on the driver's side, pulled out pocket knives, and pierced the sides of the tires. Air hissed out as they moved to the other side and repeated the process. Then they put the knives away and returned to their car. Doug leaned in.

"You have about fifteen minutes until sunrise. The building might give you a few more minutes but you don't want to tarry. The Duke wants us to remind you that you now owe him two million dollars as well as your oath. You have one week to return to his house and pay or leave the domain. Choose wisely."

It was the most Doug had said all night. He got into the back seat of the Cadillac and the four men sped off.

Morgan struggled to keep focus. The burning pain of the tiny stumps that remained of his pinky and ring fingers on his left hand actually helped him focus. He opened the door and climbed out of the car. As he tried to take a step, he fell to the ground and the asphalt dug into his hands, sending the pain of his fingers to a new level. Unable to stand, he began to crawl the forty feet to the doors.

By the time Morgan reached the doors, the sun was above the horizon, but the botany building was blocking it. The building was only two stories and would only hold back the light for so long. Once the sun came over that building, the light would pour through the six doors

and windows above them that occupied the far side of the lobby. Morgan needed to be in the elevator before that happened.

He pushed himself to crawl as fast as he could and managed to take a few steps up the stairs just inside the doors by holding to the bannister. Two more steps and then back to crawling. He used the trash can next to the elevators to pull himself up and call for the car.

When he finally reached the safety of the basement, he took stock of his situation. He needed rest but he desperately needed to eat. Without time or the strength to go out for something, he would have to do something he abhorred. He would have to steal something to eat from one or more of his fellow grad students who shared the basement with him. He could see no other way, so he resigned himself to doing what he had to and paying them back later. He would also pay the Duke back for reducing him to this.

After three meals, Morgan was feeling better, but still needed rest. He went to his office and went to his computer. He looked up for an on-site mechanic service and contracted with Mike the Mobile Mechanic to replace the four ruined tires and charged it to his checking account. Then he laid down on the cot hiding behind the shoji that divided the room and slept.

When his alarm went off, he struggled more than normal to rise. The pain and stiffness had improved with the meals and rest, but it was still there and he was still famished. He very much wanted to skip class and, while it might have been an option when he was purely a student, it was not acceptable to him now that he was the instructor.

Morgan cleaned up as much as possible in the restroom. He washed the dried blood off his face and arms using paper towels. It was most difficult washing it out of his hair, but when he had reached a point that he considered acceptable, he combed his hair and moved on. Second, he returned to his office and wrapped his left hand in a gauze bandage, using extra gauze to

camouflage the fact that two of the fingers were now just stubs. Finally, he changed into his emergency set of clothing that he kept in his desk. The clothes he had been wearing went into a shopping bag and he would throw them away when he had a chance. Now, he was presentable and just in time to make it to class.

"Professor? What happened?"

As soon as he stepped into the room, the questions began. He let the "professor" comment slide. He had already corrected two other students this week that he was not a professor, but did not feel like spending the energy necessary today.

"I was making ramen last night and burned my hand. It looks worse than it is because I am so bad at doing a bandage."

"Do you want me to redo it for you?" asked one of his students. "My mom is a nurse."

"No, thank you, Sam," Morgan answered. "I put a bandage on it so I could make it to class tonight and not worry about making it worse. After I get done I'll take it off and let it heal. Just ignore it for tonight. Is everybody ready?"

The members of this class nodded or voiced assent.

"Good. Then let's get started."

Once class was over, Morgan went out to his car to find it had four new tires on it. The mobile mechanic had done his job. His first order of business now was to assuage the hunger he felt and find a meal or two or four. Then more rest. He had work to do this weekend.

Chapter 8: Gordon's Turn

(Spring 1920)

Gordon stuck his head in the door of the dorm room. Henry was sitting on the bed and Ernie was in the chair, his feet up on the desk.

"I got it!" he called to them.

Ernie sat up, the front legs of the chair landing with a solid thump.

"You got it?" Henry asked?

"I got it!" Gordon replied.

Ernie let out a war whoop and stood up. This brought several of the other students out into the hall. Jay stepped up next to Gordon.

"What's all the hub-bub, bub?" he asked.

Before Gordon could answer, Ernie cut it in. "He got it! Our little grind is going to be a P-H-D!"

"You got an advisor?" Jay asked.

"Not just any advisor," Gordon said. "I got Dr. Steinmetz! Can you believe it? Steinmetz. He said he was impressed with how I had managed to pull myself up. He promised I would be Herr Doctor Gordon Harkness when he got done with me."

"We need to celebrate!" Ernie said.

"Gin and janes?" Gordon asked.

"You know what we need to do?" Jay asked. When the other three shook their heads, he continued. "We need to catch the train into the City. I know about a joint that has great girls, wonderful jazz, and serves Canadian. I've been waiting for the right time for us to go. This seems like it."

"That's three hours away!" Henry protested.

"But it would be a grand adventure," Jay responded, "and I'm told they have a great jazz piano player. They call him Quick Eddie because his fingers are so fast on the keys."

"Why don't we leave it up to Gordon? It's his good fortune we are celebrating. Would you rather stay here and deal with the dorm curfew, or take a trip into the city?"

"Let's do it!" Gordon said. "Life is short and you only live once. We made it through the Great War so while we are alive, let's live a little!"

The four young men dressed up and packed small overnight bags. They boarded a train just before three in the afternoon and were in New York City a little after six. The first thing they did was to find a hotel room for the night. Then a meal and it was off to the club.

Following the directions Jay had been given, they looked for a particular theater on forty-second street.

"Is the blind tiger act over?" Jay asked.

"No, they have yet to go on." The ticket girl said and handed over 4 orange tickets.

The young men went into the theater lobby and handed the tickets to the lobby attendant.

"Go through those doors on the left," he said. "Knock on the door that says 'Theater personnel only' four times and give the password. Then knock twice more."

The young men did as they were told. The door opened and man ushered them in and instructed them to go down the hall and through the door. When they went through the door at the far end, it opened into the jazz club. They were greeted by the sound of energetic jazz and a young lady who welcomed them to Club Forty-two.

To their left, against the far wall, was a bar. Straight in front of them was a dance floor where several couples danced, mostly in pairs. The dance floor was surrounded by tables and

booths with people sitting and drinking in between dances. Straight in front of them on the other side of the dance floor and next to the bar was a stage, on which was the source of the music. A drummer, a bass player, a saxophonist, and a trumpeter were on stage while a piano sat to its immediate right. A short, thin man wearing a denim jacket was banging away at the keys like an hyperkinetic monkey.

The young men moved over to the bar and ordered drinks. Jay instructed the bartender that Gordon's jack was not any good that night since they were celebrating. The young woman a few feet away picked up on the conversation and walked over to the group. She wore a black tube dress that was cut at her knees, a feathered boa and a headband around her curly bob cut hair.

"What are you celebrating, boys?" she asked.

"Gordon here just got accepted as a student for one of the most important scientists in electrical engineering," Ernie said. "The man is a wizard, so I guess that makes Gordo a wizard;s apprentice!"

The woman introduced herself as Alice and asked Gordon if he would like to dance with her. The two of them went out on the dance floor. After their third dance, a man come out to the microphone on stage and announced that Quick Eddie and the Ossified Owls would be taking a break. Alice and Gordon sat with Jay, Ernie, and Henry. One by one Gordon's friends wandered off to find dates, leaving him and Alice to talk and pet unobtrusively.

When Gordon and Alice hit the dance floor again, they were approached by another young lady. She had black hair cut in an Egyptian bob and covered in pink cloche hat. Her skin was pale and her lips bright red. She was dressed in the typical fringed dress of the flapper but it, too was pink in color and ended a handbreadth above her knee. She introduced herself as

Delphine and asked to dance with Gordon. Alice agreed and sat out while Del and Gordon danced. The three danced the Charleston together and then sat out one enjoying their drinks and the company.

After several more dances and another round of drinks sitting with the two young ladies, Gordon rose to retrieve another round from the bar. Alice and Del stood with him.

"I have a suggestion," Del said. "Why don't the three of us go back to my place? I have something a friend brought over from Paris last week, a bottle of absinthe. If you have never tried it, you really should. It is amazing."

"I'm not sure," Alice said. "I don't usually go home with people I meet at the club."

"Don't be such a wet blanked," Del said. She leaned in to Alice and planted her lips on Alice's. At first Alice stiffened, but after a few seconds she relaxed and put her arms around Del. Gordon could tell that Alice had opened her mouth and the two ladies were French kissing. It was almost a full minute later before the two broke apart.

"Sure," Alice said. "I'll be the bee's knees."

After this, what more could Gordon do but go along?

The three left the club and walked a couple of blocks to Del's place. It was a one room apartment in the basement of an old brownstone. Del set three glasses on the table in the kitchen area and poured some green liquid in each. She set a flat, spoon-like utensil across the top of each and placed a sugar cube thereon. Then she retrieved a bottle of water with an oil dripper in it from the ice box. She poured a small amount of water on each cube and waited a moment, then repeated the process, watching the glasses. When the clear green liquid had turned a cloudy she set the bottle down.

"Now stir in the rest of the sugar and try it," she said.

They drank and all agreed that the Absinthe was amazing. Del repeated the ritual and they all drank again.

Alice and Del began kissing. Alice took Del's hat off and flung it aside. Del rose and Alice rose with her. Del slipped the straps of Alice's dress off her shoulders and Alice let it fall to the floor. Gordon poured himself a strait shot of absinthe and quickly downed it, so focused on the spectacle in front of him that he did feel the burn of the alcohol going down. He set the glass down a little hard and brought the attention of the two ladies to himself.

Del broke the kiss and moved over to Gordon. Alice followed and started kissing him and removing his shirt while Del took off his hat and tossed it across the room. Gordon's senses began to swim and the room tilted and bent out of shape. Del removed his shoes and socks and stood up straight, allowing her dress to fall to the floor also.

The two ladies pulled him from his chair. They must have led him over to the bed because, although he didn't remember moving from the chair, he found himself lying on the bed with two women on top of him kissing. The world skewed again and now he could taste their voices. He could hear the colors of room. He could feel the voices of the two young ladies.

Alice must have starting crying because he could feel her warm tears falling on his chest. Soon she rolled off of him and Del leaned down and began licking the tears off his skin. Gordon must have passed out because he didn't remember anything after that until he could hear Del calling him.

"Gordon? Gordon?! Listen to me. Do you want to live?"

"Yeah," Gordon muttered.

"Do you want to live, Gordon? Forever and ever?"

"Yeah," Gordon was able to croak out.

"Then drink this." she said.

She brought a glass to his lips. The water was warm. And thick.

Gordon's perception skewed and the water tasted salty and earthy.

"It's not water," he thought. "Milk." he finally concluded.

That was when he realized that he was not drinking from a glass. He was suckling. He must be suckling the milk from Del's breast. "But they had not been big enough for her to be feeding a baby," he thought. "How could...?"

Before he could finish the thought his senses suddenly snapped back into normal focus. The water/milk had a metallic taste. He had hold of Del's wrist and he was drinking her blood. he pulled back, but he could also feel a desire to continue and craving for the blood.

"How do you feel?" Del asked.

"I don't know. What did you do?"

Gordon looked around. They were still in Del's room on her bed. Alice lay next to them.

"You are now on of the Nightkin," she said.

"Nightkin?"

"You call us vampires. I have given you the gift of eternal life. You shall not grow old. You shall not die unless beheaded or exposed to sunlight for too long. Wounds will heal and you will be forever young, and you will have time to accomplish whatever you want. And we can be together forever."

"What about her?" Gordon asked.

"She refused the gift. She is dead."

"You killed her?"

"People die. They are food to us. Do you mourn the cow after eating your steak?

"But cows don't think. They are just dumb animals."

"The same is true for most people. You will get used to it. Besides, you don't have to kill when you feed. You can take just some blood. Of course you need to feed on several people like that to make a full meal and you can't feed on the same ones more than once a week without weakening them too much. But it can be done."

"Why did you do this to me?"

"Because I like you, silly. I liked her, too, but she refused the gift. Oh well. You can still do the things you wanted. You can go to school and get that degree, but you must do it at night. You can still eat and drink normal food; you just get no benefit from it other than the taste. You can't get drunk, which is balled up, and drugs don't do anything either, but you also can't end up in a family way, giving or receiving, which is great. Oh, and that means no clap or French pox, either. You'll get used to it. It didn't take me long."

"How long have you been like this?"

"Not even a year. Met this English noble over in Paris and he gave me the gift last year. Best thing that ever happened to me. He has been playing father and son for two hundred years, keeping the title and money. With the time you will have, you can become rich. Stay down here with me today and we can talk. We don't need to sleep during the day; we just need to stay out of the sunlight. I'll tell you everything Philip told me."

Chapter 9: Masterful Revenge

Morgan worked a little computer magic and went to visit a hospital where he picked up twelve units of whole blood. He took one out of the cooler and drank it on the way back to campus, which made him feel better. While he could sustain himself on animal blood, something that Delphine had told him, he needed human blood for recovery and regeneration. Upon returning to his office, he put the rest of his take-out in the small refrigerator in the corner.

He began as any good student does—with research. He began by looking up the house they had taken him to using an online map. This gave him its address. Then, using the address, he was able to find the name of the current owner on publicly available records. The county records office had not changed the default login and password to their database from development, and he was able to access the full records for the property and learn its entire history.

The house was originally built in 1870 by Joshua York. He and his lived there until 1936 when the property was purchased by one Philip Poole, Duke of Farnham. The property was passed on to his nephew, also named Philip Poole, in 1967. In 2009 the property was passed to another nephew, also named Philip Poole, who was the current owner. Morgan accessed census records by using a username and password he had used many years prior that was still in the system and found that the original Philip Poole had emigrated from England the year the house was purchased. According to the last census there were only two individuals residing at the address. Mr. Poole, and Mr. Jonathan Dent, his butler

After many hours of digging, Morgan had a complete, and fictitious, history of the current Philip Poole, great nephew of Philip Poole, the last Duke of Farnham. Morgan thought it likely grated on the Duke's vanity to have to give up the title, but he knew it would have been

very difficult to fake a child rather than a more distant relative. This likely led him to using his full name each time the house was passed on.

The young Philip Poole was educated at a, now closed, boarding school in France. Morgan knew that it was unlikely the Duke had ever attended that school or even been to the city, but that didn't matter for what he had planned. He accessed the court records database and inserted records between 1993 and 1996 for convictions on general juvenile mischief such as vandalism and shoplifting with fines paid by the parents. He added convictions for breaking and entering in 1996 and burglary in 1998.

He accessed the police department's database and put records for each of the conviction as well as several unsolved cases at the same time. From 1998 to 2001 he inserted records for break-ins that involved assaults on the occupants of the house, including minors. He spaced them out over time—one per month on average for the three years—all unsolved. He included descriptions of the perpetrator that fit Philip Poole. He then anonymously sent a tip to the French police regarding where their suspect on those crimes was living.

Further research provided him a remarkable gift. Records showed that Philip Poole owned a black 1972 Cadillac that had been given to him in his uncle's will. Searching through surveillance footage databases with a vehicle recognition program found hundreds of images of the Duke's car. Grouping those hits by location he noticed a pattern and found multiple instances of the car at bus and train stations picking up young people. Morgan was certain that this was the Duke enticing runaways and keeping them in the house like a herd of cattle to feed upon whenever he desired. This information was packaged up and sent to the FBI.

Philip found a total of four bank accounts for Philip Poole. One account was in London and paid to maintain the family property in Farnham. He found a checking account in New York

that was the most active of accounts and seemed to be used for current living expenses. He also located two accounts in Switzerland that were, supposedly, safe from prying eyes.

The final nail in the Duke's coffin was also a gift, so to speak. Morgan's cell phone had been taken by the Duke's men. When attempting to access the Duke's Wi-Fi network, he noticed that his cell phone was present and connected to a computer on the network in what Morgan assumed was an attempt to access his phone's data. The sensitive information on that device was protected so thoroughly that Morgan had utter confidence it could not be broken by anything short of a government agency, but it left the Duke's network vulnerable to it being an entry point. Morgan was able to easily access his cell phone through its mobile network and then infiltrate the Duke's network without the need to go through the Dukes ISP. This relieved him of much of the work of covering his tracks.

He took control of the Duke's computer and inserted a tor browser, making it appear to have been installed six months prior. He then inserted browsing data to appear as if the user was searching for murder-for-hire. Finally, he actually contracted with three hit men to kill three of the Kin elders, specifying either large caliber headshots or decapitation as the method and paid for them with money transfers from the Duke's accounts. While Morgan doubted that such contracts would be successful, he did not mourn for either the elders involved or the humans who would do such work.

Morgan removed the last traces of his work and logged off the computer. He sat back and finished the last of the blood bag he had been drinking. He looked around at the empty IV bags and then looked at the clock. He had been working on this special project for thirty-six hours straight. He crawled into his cot and went to sleep.

Chapter 10: The Fall

Morgan awoke late Sunday evening, about eleven o'clock. He logged back in took back control of the Duke's computer. He used the Duke's checking account to purchase four one-way tickets to Perpignan, France. The authorities would see this as an attempt to run to Andorra and escape extradition. He scheduled the tickets for this coming Friday. Then he exited and shut down.

He picked up the office phone and called his cell. He had to do it three times before someone answered.

"Hello?" a voice said tentatively.

"Hi!" Morgan said cheerfully. "I lost my cell phone on Friday and it looks like you found it. You are such a life-saver; you don't know how badly I need it. Where can I meet you and get it back? I'll give you a reward for finding it."

"Mr. Harkness, this is Doug."

"Doug from the Duke?"

"Yes."

"Oh, well in that case, please let the Duke know that I must have my cell phone to access my bank accounts. I cannot pay him the tithe or the fine without it."

"I will tell him and see about getting it back to you."

"Thank you, Doug. Please bring it by my office."

Morgan went to his refrigerator, but he had consumed all the human blood during his marathon session. He looked at the clock, sighed and sat back down at the computer to work on the lab assignment completion list for Monday's class. He was pleasantly surprised to find that all of the students in that section had already completed the assignment. He made sure they were

all in order and moved on to Tuesday's class. He was checking Thursday's students off the list when there was a knock at the door.

He rose and unlocked the door. Doug stood there. Wordlessly, the young man handed him his phone.

"Your fingers! They grew back."

"Yeah. That tends to happen when you hurt a vampire."

"Oh! I didn't know. The Duke never said anything about it."

"Well, he was not worried about causing permanent injury, just the pain that went with it. It was his way of showing how serious the matter is to him."

"So should I tell the Duke that you are ready to pay?"

"I will bring my laptop by early Friday morning after the banks have opened in Switzerland and we can transfer the funds. If the Duke has any problems, he can call me."

"I will let him know," Doug said. "I am glad your fingers grew back and I'm sorry about the torture. You really are doing the right thing you know."

"I'm sure." Morgan said. "Look, I need to get some things done for class tomorrow, so if you don't mind, I need to get back to work."

"Sure. Sorry. Bye." Doug said, back to one word sentences.

Morgan closed the door, returned to the computer, and finished the Thursday list. This gave Doug enough time to leave campus.

Morgan then left his office and returned home. He entered the garage through the unlocked door and opened the refrigerator he had inside there to find that standing delivery for Saturday had been made and the gallon of pork blood had been placed in there as requested. He took it into the kitchen and drank the entire gallon. A new one would be arriving tomorrow so he

did not need to save any. A little light reading to relax from the past weekend and then he could sleep in his own bed on Monday.

Monday and Tuesday nights passed without anything remarkable. Wednesday, however, he was awoken by a notification on his phone from his new app. He opened the notification and read the story.

Local Man, officers Killed in Morning Police Raid

The FBI Human Trafficking Task Force, consisting of members from federal, state, county, and local law enforcement, executed a search warrant on the residence of wealthy local recluse Philip Poole and attempted to serve an arrest warrant on Poole himself in the morning hours just after dawn today. Three people were arrested and thirty-five individuals, including two dozen minors, were rescued from captivity. Some victims has been held as long as twenty-five years. In an attempt to avoid apprehension Mr. Poole assaulted the officers trying to arrest him, killing two with a knife before other officers responded with lethal force. Mr. Poole was pronounced dead at the scene. His associates face thirty-five counts of kidnapping and human trafficking as well as money laundering and other financial crimes.

Morgan smiled but it quickly turned into a frown. His revenge was working, but he had hoped the Duke would be dragged out into the light. Given a shooting death in the house, the body would have been removed from the scene in a body bag and not exposed to the sun. It is likely that the damage would repair and he would revive, maybe even as early as tonight.

Morgan started up his computer and tried to access the state coroner's system, but the login and password that worked on many government systems did not let him in this time. He picked up his phone and after making some adjustments to an app, he called the coroner's office

"State Coroner's office," the voice answered.

"This is Randy Sanders with the state technology office. To whom am I speaking?"

"This is Danielle."

"I have a problem, Danielle. I have a work order based on a maintenance request from your office, but the request was not attached. Do you know what the request was about?"

"Sure. Word has been asking for a re-install every time we use it. We have to wait several minutes each time we want to open a document."

"I am fairly certain I can fix that right now for you, if you would like." Morgan offered.

"Can you? That would be wonderful!"

"I need to get your login and password."

"But we're not supposed to give those out." Danielle said.

"Yes, you absolutely right," Morgan said. Then he set the hook. "And I shouldn't have even asked. I will return this work order as 'unable to complete' and we should get out there to look at the problem in a month or two."

"A month or two?" Danielle asked.

"Yes. I will put a rush on it for you."

Danielle gave him her information.

"Just so you can be sure I am not doing anything nefarious, you can watch on the screen as I fix this."

Morgan described to her the process he was going through to fix her problem, while on a second screen that she could not see he searched for and found Poole's autopsy record. The autopsy had been completed but was waiting finalizing. Morgan set the flags to indicate that the body was OK to be released. Then he completed the repair and opened Word cleanly.

"There. All fixed. Now I want you to change your password right now. OK? That way you will know I can't use your information to access the system again."

"Yes."

"Good. Have a great day, Danielle. Good bye."

"You too, Randy. Bye."

After he hung up on Danielle, he called a service and arranged to have the remains picked up and cremated that afternoon. Problem solved, he went back to sleep.

The scandal raised eyes for a few days, especially the mishandling of the perpetrator's body after the incident, but life soon returned to normal. Until mid-October when Morgan was approached by a young vampire who represented the council of elders and was informed that he had been chosen as new ruler of the domain in the Duke's absence. Morgan was reluctant to take on that role, but the messenger told him that if he did not, another kin would be sent to take over control of the domain. This convinced Morgan to accept and told the messenger to let the elders know that he would give it the old college try.