

## Homecoming

“So,” Jeff began, as his wife walked back into the bedroom from the bathroom, “What do you think?”

“It’s good to be home,” Veronica said with a smile, as she began removing her clothes, one tantalizing piece at a time. “I was getting tired of being on the road so long. Ten years is far too long to be away. Even with the occasional brief returns. No more road trips for at least a year. And, now that we’re home, I can move like a vampire again, without the inherent lack of grace we pretend for the world at large.” Still removing clothing, she demonstrated what she meant with a smoothly sensuous little dance.

“That wasn’t exactly what I had in mind, but now that you mention it, it is rather nice to be able to move like ourselves again. And speaking of movement, that’s a very artful little dance you’re doing.”

“Oh?” she asked with a raised eyebrow. “Do you like it?” She curved a leg so that the last of her clothing slid gracefully down that leg to the floor.

“You know how I feel about art,” he told her, grinning seductively. “Looking great is a good place to start, but true art is a hands-on experience.”

Still moving with what a human would describe as an unearthly grace, she leaned over and began making a circle in the maroon satin sheets with a fingertip. “You talk about art,” she whispered with a provocative look and voice, “But I think the time for looking and talking is past. “Come on lover, show me the real thing.”

Moving slowly but with the grace of a hunting cat, he slid across the bed. They embraced with a fierce passion. It might surprise some people that the two of them had been married for over eighty years. After making love, they lay deeply contented in each other’s arms.

Some time later, Jeff quietly asked, “What did you think about the town?”

Rolling around slightly so she could watch his face, she considered the question a moment before answering, “I think we were very lucky in a number of ways. None of the people watching us turned hostile. That means that those in charge of the various families might be people we can work with in the future.”

“You did an excellent job picking out our contact,” Jeff complimented her. “I don’t think we could have done any better. Even if we did almost get him killed.”

“But we didn’t,” she replied with a smile. After a moment the smile faded a bit, “That young man is destined for trouble.”

“How do you mean?” he asked.

“He’s one of those people with an unusually strong aura. Fate loves a strong aura. If he doesn’t learn to control it a bit, it will not only continue to attract other supernaturals to him, he will also leave himself open to a number of advanced attacks. Attacks that there’s no possible way he could defend himself against yet. However, with a little luck that won’t be a problem for years to come. If ever.”

“Hmm?” he mused. “That sounds a bit wishful. Still, I suppose his aura and a handful of natural charm explains why I took to him so quickly. I also had the impression that he was much more talented at bodyshifting than others his age. Especially after the attack. Of course, I suppose that could also be a side effect of his aura. Or vice versa.”

“I took to him quickly, too,” she agreed. “I don’t know if his aura and talent are part and parcel or not. My knowledge of doppelgangers is pretty limited. Broadened by recent events, to be sure, but still limited.”

“Turning the rudder rather sharply to port as we used to say, any idea whose territory their town falls under? Technically speaking, that is,” he asked, idly running a hand up and down her side.

“Not really,” she answered in a near purr. “It’s too far away for Birmingham or Dallas to claim. New Orleans is still pretty messed up and can’t seem to effectively lay claim to anything beyond its city limits. That’s assuming that the latest to claim leadership is even still in charge. I understand that a pack of werewolves is trying to make Mobile a power center. If they succeed, they might expand their borders the way vampires do. Should that happen and they successfully expand out far enough... they might end up laying claim to the area the town belongs to. God help them if they do and the doppelgangers aren’t interested,” she finished with a little shudder.

“Yeah,” he sighed. “Whoever would have thought that there’d be a little town out in the middle of nowhere with so many doppelgangers? Up until we visited the place, the largest doppelganger population I’d heard of was in Atlanta. According to the council there, they have a population of a little over five hundred.”

“Oh?” she asked curiously as she began playing with the hair on his chest, “Who did you hear that from?”

“Julia Hernandez mentioned it about a year ago, sometime during our beloved ruler’s winter gathering, as I recall. She had been doing a little spying for our beloved leader. Evidently, Atlanta hosts roughly half that number of vampires, twice that number of soulless, and half again that number in werewolves. The numbers for the other races were pretty low. She also mentioned that someone had been killing off trolls. At the time, I received the impression that no one cared enough to do something about it. Not that I blame them for such a common sense attitude. Can’t abide trolls. I thought I told you about this?”

“You mentioned the trolls, love,” she replied, leaning over and slowly kissing her way across his chest. “I don’t remember hearing... any population numbers though. It’s strange to think... we found a little town with a fraction of Atlanta’s population... but with at least twice it’s doppelganger population.”

“You think there were that many there?” he asked distractedly, as he slid his hand from her side to her breast. “I knew there were a lot... oh, that feels good....” The conversation died out then as their other activities became more energetic.

Some time later as she lay quietly on top of him, she resumed their conversation, “I think there were a lot more doppelgangers than we saw. I’d guess fully half of the town were doppelgangers. Maybe a little more. The little glimpse we had of the surrounding area suggested that the one-to-one ratio held for quite some distance outside the town as well. A lot of doppelgangers, any way you care to look at it.”

“Mmm hmm,” he agreed with a contented sigh.

“Was it just me,” she began a little apprehensively, “Or was there a rather wild, feverish look in Kristoff’s eye before we gave him the blood potion?”

He sighed and closed his eyes a moment before reopening them and brushing a bit of hair away from her forehead. “I saw it too. Something dark. Based in fear if you ask me. His relief when the potion healed him was what one would expect after living for ten years with the injuries he sustained. But... I thought I saw something beyond that, as well. Perhaps I’ll broach the subject with him a bit later after he’s gotten used to running around again. It’s bound to be a touchy subject

though.”

“Of that I have no doubt,” she agreed, one ear against his chest, listening to the sound of the blood surging through his veins and arteries. “For a moment, I was frightened for him.”

“He certainly had an air of desperation about him,” Jeff agreed with a sigh.

“What do you think about the whole Houston angle?” she asked a couple of minutes later, still without moving.

“I think it’s a disaster waiting to happen... if it’s true,” he said, wrapping his arms around her.

“That’s an understatement,” she replied, still content not to move. “Checking out what’s really happening down there’s going to be dangerous. The Seven Masters don’t like outsiders poking around in their business.”

“I suppose we’ll just have to poke subtly,” Jeff told her with a small smile.

“So, you wanna go?” she asked, raising her head to look at him. “Risk life and limb? Torture and a possible view of a sunrise? The possibility of having our AAA card taken away?”

He laughed softly a moment before turning more serious, “We did tell our new doppelganger friend that we’d investigate the matter for him. I do like to keep my word whenever possible. I suppose the least we should do is find out some of the basic facts regarding what’s happening in Houston now. Besides, it’s bound to be interesting at the very least.”

“You do have a point there, lover.” She was silent a moment. With her chin in her hands she looked down at her husband seriously. “The more I think about it, the more I believe that boy is a potential power and that we’re being drawn into the web he’s creating.”

“Do you really think he’s that strong? And if so, is Lou doing it consciously?” he asked curiously, taking it for granted that she knew what she was talking about. For himself he had only the vaguest idea about the subject and really wasn’t that curious at the moment. Smiling, he lifted up his head enough to kiss her lips slowly and thoroughly.

“Mmm,” she murmured with a pleased smile before turning serious again, “I doubt that he or any of them have the faintest clue. Right now I’d say it’s almost all potential. The longer he lives, the stronger he’s likely to become.”

“What, if anything, do you think we should do about it?”

“Keep him close. Guide him when possible. Watch out for him when he’s away from his people. So long as he stays in that sleepy little half-doppelganger town, he should be safe. However, that means we’ll have to keep it’s location secret. On the up side, that will probably greatly reduce the chances of them sending assassins after us as well.”

“Assassins?” he asked, gently sliding both his hands down her back to cup her backside. “Do you really think that’s a possibility?”

“It wouldn’t surprise me,” she responded with a grin that had nothing to do with the topic of conversation. “We should make arrangements so that if he leaves the town, we’ll be there to watch out for him.”

“Well, I can’t help but remember that we already invited him to stay next summer. That seems like a good start. Get him used to seeing us. More used to our presence. Who knows, maybe we can walk around like vampires in front of him without scaring him half to death?”

“Yes,” she agreed, wiggling a bit to get more comfortable, “I rather doubt that he would have too much trouble with that. He seemed unusually accepting of us being vampires.”

“He seemed quite curious to me. As if possessed of a strong sense of curiosity rather than being an oddity. That might explain it.

“So here’s the plan,” he continued, arms around her while he ran his hands up and down her

back as he spoke. “We do a preliminary investigation of Houston. While doing so, we make sure not to be killed or even worse... lose our Triple A membership. We begin making Mister Lou McAlister more comfortable around us so that we can help shape his life. All of this while trying not to get caught up too deeply in this whole potential power thing. By the way,” he asked with grin. “Have you noticed how much of our blood supply we’re using on lovemaking?”

She took his face in her hands and kissed him passionately before raising her eyebrows suggestively and answering, “Not as much as we’re going to.”