

Silently Publishing Submission Guidelines



Without Love
Nothing
Changes



Silently Publishing Submission Guidelines

Table of Contents

1	<i>Submit A Query Letter First</i>	1
	<i>Three page letter</i>	<i>1</i>

2	<i>How Your Submission Is Handled</i>	2
	<i>Acquisition editors are your champion</i>	<i>3</i>
	<i>We find readers to give us feedback</i>	<i>3</i>

3	<i>How To Proof-Edit A Manuscript</i>	4
	<i>Find a friend to read your story</i>	<i>5</i>
	<i>Use tools to check grammar, consistency, and find mistakes</i>	<i>5</i>
	<i>Render your scenes in your mind.....</i>	<i>6</i>

4	<i>What Else We Need From You</i>	8
5	<i>About Us</i>	9
	<i>Statement of Faith</i>	<i>9</i>

6	<i>The Silently Series Storyline</i>	10
	<i>Selected excerpts</i>	<i>11</i>
	<i>Majken, Thomas, and Kimberly</i>	<i>11, 26</i>
	<i>Jeanine and Alecia</i>	<i>17</i>

7	<i>Storyline Undercurrents</i>	30
	<i>Love, Grace, Compassion, and Right with God</i>	<i>30</i>
	<i>A howling wolf</i>	<i>30</i>
	<i>Without Love Nothing Changes.....</i>	<i>30</i>

Silently Publishing Submission Guidelines

1 Submit A Query Letter First

We seek well-written and crafted novel-length series fiction in the teen, fantasy, suspense, or mystery genre. Actually, being outside the norm is fine with us. We are interested in *series* fiction; that is, covered in more than one novel. Novel-length is defined as greater than 50,000 words. We do not accept anthologies of the type where different characters appear, such as generations within a family portrayed. We want the same characters throughout the storyline. We want people in serious, difficult, and impossible situations that readers may find compelling, real, and honest. We look for stories that readers will care about and want to stay with.

You should have the initial novel written and edited as well as you can before you submit your storyline to us. We need to know you have actually written and finished a complete story first.

Submit a query letter of three pages. Title each page with your name, city, providence or region, telephone number, e-mail, and with the date submitted in 'dd mmm yyyy' format.

We only accept submissions electronically in Adobe PDF or Microsoft Word DOC or DOCX format. Do not mail a query or manuscript or digital files by postal mail except at our request.

On page one: Tell us about the story you have just written. Give a synopsis of what it is about and the main characters within the story. Tell something of the conflict and what happens. Be passionate but concise and as specific as you can. Tell us where and when the story takes place. At the end of page one, give us the word count, number of chapters, and how the manuscript is divided.

On page two: Tell us about the next stories you have in mind, or have drafted, or may have even written. This is the place to pitch your storyline. The drama or the situation you have chosen for the initial story must have room to grow and expand into subsequent stories. There should be development and a deepening awareness of the people and the circumstances you have written about.

On page three: Tell us about yourself (as a writer) and why you are writing this specific storyline. Why is it important to you? In addition, tell us about what types of readers you envision would enjoy the story you are telling. If you feel it is appropriate you can share about your life, family, and other things that give us an idea of you as a unique person. Finally, at the end of the third page, tell us again your contact information and the best ways to remain in touch with you.

Email to submissions@silently-publishing.com or or after **8 March 2015**.

Silently Publishing Submission Guidelines

2 How Your Submission Is Handled

Each submission is assigned a unique tracking number generated by computer. If you have sent your query by e-mail, we will reply with an e-mail to give you the number assigned to you and this project. Refer to this number in the subject line of all future correspondence.

This part during the submission process is for you to introduce yourself to us and allow us the opportunity to see if this storyline concept, the drama and situations you want to portray, and the genre of story itself would look like something we can work with. Two or more submission editors will read your query letter, make an initial judgment, and categorize the storyline itself as where in a bookstore or library shelf you might go to find this story.

Any writer with enough resolve and determination to even attempt a storyline is a winner to us. Although we cannot accept every query, we wish you blessings and God's direction and favor; if we are unable to work with the story – we will send a standard non-acceptance letter.

Once the initial editor review is passed, a person with greater experience in the genre will review the storyline with emphasis on the story you want to tell and how you portray the characters and conflict in the storyline. It may be at this stage, we want to see the first three chapters of your story. Please place in the header on your sample chapter manuscript your name, the story title, and our tracking number for this project so it appears on each page.

We are looking at your story, how you engage the reader and involve them in the drama, how you write a scene and evoke emotions, imagery, and the heart you have placed in the people you write about. A good story is like a fight. You know it when you are in one. A good story compels you to read further.

At this point, one of three things will likely occur: (1) we love it and want to see more; (2) we like it and believe it has potential with some work; or, alternately (3) we deem that it needs further development or the concept is not quite right for us.

We cannot promise a totally customized specific-to-you reply at this phase, but the editorial reply may have checkbox comments about where the work is and suggestions of how we think it can be made better.

There are basic common attributes in the craft of writing, such as “show, don't tell,” how to handle dialog, narration, pacing of a plot, managing point of view, and characterization.

Far beyond the craft of writing and specific editorial points on your spelling, grammar, or whether you have written in the first-person or third-person point of view, we have to make a gut decision whether this story (and storyline) is right for us, a judgment on what effort it will take to craft a salable and finished storyline, and a business decision whether we can produce the story into book form efficiently. Some people believe that writing is art. Actually, selling is art. **It is at this point that the craft of writing meets the business of publishing and the art of selling.**

Silently Publishing Submission Guidelines

Acquisition editors are your champion

The acquisition editor or team responsible for your project will be your champion. He or she or they have the enjoyable task of selling your project up the line, so to speak.

At this point, Silently Publishing is classified as small press. This means that we produce less than ten books a year, or we have less than 50,000 USD in sales revenue. We do not mean to deceive you into believing we have thousands of authors and projects and millions of dollars to pour into each project.

Initially, your acquisition editor may only have to pitch against three other book projects, but we *will* grow. And, this is the process of selection of the titles for our next spring or fall catalog.

We find readers to give us feedback

Once your story manuscript and storyline concept (with notes, letters, outlines, sample chapters, or whatever else we can assemble) passes acquisition stage, we pass your story to someone who likes to read outside of the business. That is, John Public or Jane Public reader. We found out years ago that the best computer program testers are seventh-graders who know nothing about computers, programming, or logic. By the same concept, people who like to read will know whether they like to read your particular story; if so, what they like about it, or if not, what they did not like about it.

Management must still decide

Once your story passes the reader phase, the initial story with its storyline proposal is sent for a member of senior management to decide whether go or not on this story. Sometimes this will be as much as leap of faith as a hard business decision. We have to decide the timing and how quickly the project can be done. Will it fit in the next spring catalog or will it take two years to finish and maybe we can fit it into the fall catalog two years hereafter?

Once your story manuscript and storyline gets this far, you have been *accepted* for publication.

Now the real work begins.

Silently Publishing Submission Guidelines

3 How to Proof-Edit a Manuscript

You are the writer, and you know the story you are trying to tell better than anyone else. Due to the realities of publishing today, especially with many people directly publishing their own stories, the days of a publishing house editor laboriously checking your grammar and spelling will not occur. It is our expectation that you, dear writer soon to become author, will use the tools and techniques we provide to produce the single Word document of your masterpiece fully edited and ready to be typeset.

We assume you are working with a software program, such as Microsoft Word, to actually type the story. If you have prepared your story using a software program designed to help you craft and structure your story, it will allow you to print or export in rich text format.

Create a Word document file for each scene. Below is a sample naming convention to place scene files in sequential order:

SA2.Chap01.1.Thomas.HIDDEN.15Oct2011.

SA2.Chap01.2.Kimberly.SECRETS.18Oct2011.

SA2.Chap01.3.Majken.APART.19Oct2011.

SA2.Chap01.4.Kimberly.PHOTO.19Oct2011.

SA2.Chap02.1.Jeanine.SACRIFICE.21Oct2011.

SA2.Chap02.2.Jeanine.MORNING.22Oct2011.

SA2.Chap02.3.Jeanine.PICKUP.22Oct2011.

SA2.Chap02.4.Jeanine.RAIN.23Oct2011.

The first chapter scenes above are in alternating point-of-view. That is, the story is told from a different character's perspective. When you assemble the multiple POV scene files into a single chapter file, you will place a scene break between the scenes.

The second chapter scenes above are with the same character perspective and would only have a scene break if time elapsed between the scenes, such as night to morning.

A hard scene break is denoted by three asterisks (* * *) centered between the passages. A soft scene break is denoted by simply an extra blank line between the scene narrative.

Silently Publishing Submission Guidelines

We ask that you insert a hard scene break (* * *) wherever you want to show a break between any scene. This makes it easier for our technicians to know where you intended a break to occur as opposed to a stray extra line in the narrative.

Create a single Word document file for each chapter, inserting hard scene breaks as needed.

Assemble your chapter files into a single Word document file for the entire story, beginning to end.

Create a title page with your story title, your name, and the copyright year. The copyright registration for your story will be filed in *your* name. The Library of Congress copy will be registered to ***Silently Publishing***.

Find a Friend to Read Your Story

Print one or more copies of your entire story. Make sure your Word document has page numbers and the title.

Find one (or more) friends to read it and mark on the printed manuscript. Ask them to mark whatever they wish: words that are unclear, misused, or need correction. This good friend of yours would also be the person to judge whether what the characters do in the story makes sense, if factual details are in error, or if they spot one of the numerous inconsistencies.

Create an Audio File of Each Chapter

While your friend is reading it, save your chapter document files as a text format only (with a .txt file extension) by selecting File, Save As. You are removing all the formatting that Word has. If this seems too technical for you, find a computer-savvy person to help you. You will use these input files with a text to speech program developed by NextUp called TextAloud. Choose your favorite of the natural sounding voices, male or female as you prefer, and generate audio files of each chapter of your story, and listen to them. This is a good place to catch run-on sentences, incorrect or missing punctuation, and words that are valid words but misused in the passages. Fix these issues as you find them.

Use WhiteSmoke to check grammar

After the audio proof, we recommend a grammar check using software called WhiteSmoke. You will require a computer with an Internet connection. You cannot feed your entire document into the WhiteSmoke server – this may be done while the story is still in scenes. We recommend getting a screen print program, whether free or purchased, and have on your editing computer. As you upload a section for WhiteSmoke to check, the server will return with a double-spaced document where corrections have been suggested. DO NOT blindly accept the choices the computer is making. Make screenshots of the parts of the editing suggestions on the manuscript you agree with and later print (preview) these for your review.

Silently Publishing Submission Guidelines

The tedious part of this is to double-check the grammar checker suggestions by looking up the word choices (via the Internet). Use more than one dictionary or resource. Try to justify your usage of the word and try to find an example where it was defined with the usage and meaning you intended. The grammar checking software only knows patterns of words, generally. **It is up to you as the writer to ensure that the words you used are grammatically correct within the context of the passage you are editing, that you are really saying exactly what you are trying to say, and convey the meaning you intend.**

At this time, the WhiteSmoke profile is not configurable and will apply all writing styles to your fiction document – including rules for business writing. Just endure it. We know the rules of writing fiction, what makes sense dramatically, and expressing how people actually think and talk do not match business writing rules. Use the tool for what it can do for you and overlook everything else it does.

WhiteSmoke will find many more errors that you may have thought possible. Once you have chosen the corrections to make, print (preview) your screenshots of the corrections and make them in your document. Either work from beginning to end, making all corrections as you go, or work on the same type of correction throughout the document in a batch.

Editing is grueling, painstaking, and tedious work. It is very difficult and time-consuming, but it is the price of being a professional writer.

We consider it your job to produce the fully edited and ready-to-typeset Word document of your story. You know best the story you are intending to tell, and the ultimate choice of the story rendering is on you.

Finish the WhiteSmoke corrections and print a revised copy for yourself. Put it aside for a week. Let the pages cool off. Rest.

Check your manuscript against many sources

Once you have recovered from your WhiteSmoke edit, retrieve your well marked printed manuscript from your good friend (who will receive an autographed copy of each story they proofed from you in thanks) and go back through their copy with your revised copy. Ensure that you check your corrected copy against the edited copy provided by your friend. Either justify the passage was written as intended, or find the correction you wish to make and do it.

The real person who took their precious time to read your story has a way of seeing thing that either you or the computer may have missed. Now that you are not in writing phase, and the bulk of the grammatical or structural edits have been caught, focus on the flow of the story and how the scenes are played. Look in the edited manuscript for remarks on the margins or question marks with circles drawn around them on the pages.

Silently Publishing Submission Guidelines

Render your scenes in your mind

At this stage of your edit, play a game in your mind. Pretend you are a computer graphic program that has to render your story scene as a part of a role-playing game. For example, the character must pick up the sword to have it in their hand to swing it. The character must open the door before they can go through it. When you visualize in your mind your story scenes in a manner similar to playing a three-dimensional game, you are rendering it and this will help you catch consistency problems. Fix these mistakes.

Check consistency with PerfectIt

With your entire story in a single Word document file, use a software tool called PerfectIt to check for consistency. PerfectIt is not a grammar or spelling validation tool. It checks your entire manuscript for consistency.

For example, PerfectIt will find the phrase “dark adapted eyes” used in one passage and later written “dark-adapted eyes” or the phrase “Helena Regional airport” used in one passage, and later written all capitals, “Helena Regional Airport.” Fix what you need to. PerfectIt can only find and compare phrases. You still need to read with consistency in mind. You have to catch the problem of a character with blue eyes in Chapter Two and the same character with green eyes in Chapter Ten.

Ensure foreign words are italicized

Finally, check your document for use of foreign words, phrases, characters, accented characters, and italics. Back in the day of typing manuscripts double-spaced with ragged right margin, it was customary to underline a passage intended for italics. For our purposes, *italicize* the passages in your document as you intend that they appear in the final printed story.

Congratulations, Professional Writer!

When you get this far, call yourself a professional writer, and send the document per instructions. It is then our job to take the proofed and thoroughly edited manuscript and typeset it professionally into a trade paperback format, likely 6 x 9 inches, and have a graphic artist produce custom artwork for the cover.

Silently Publishing Submission Guidelines

4 What Else We Need From You

Besides your story manuscript, we need a descriptive overview for the back cover, a dramatic scene excerpt for the front inside cover facing page, and any disclaimers, acknowledgements, or thanks you wish to place in the front matter.

The cover artist assigned to your project will need your ideas, suggestions, and feedback as the cover artwork is developed.

Watch people browsing in a bookstore and observe how they decide whether to buy a fiction book. They see the cover art, and it catches their eye. They pick it up, they look at the back cover to see what it is about, they thumb through a few pages starting at the beginning. They read a few passages, they skim through it thinking. Then they turn the book over and look at the price and judge whether they want it, or have enough to buy it, or they may decide to put it down and come back for it later.

You have three opportunities to attract a prospective reader's attention and, therefore, make a sale.

The first opportunity is your dazzling cover artwork.

Your cover artist is a graphic designer specialist who knows what elements must be on a book cover to make it appealing, draw the eye, and captivate. The price for producing the right cover artwork only seems high until you realize that most fiction book buyers do literally judge the book by its cover.

The second opportunity is your story summary on the back cover.

Your story summary must entice, tease, and draw the reader into wanting to know more. You must convey clearly what type of story this is and something of what it is about. Be honest and give your prospective reader enough information about the story contained therein. Most people will make a snap decision, whether they are interested in knowing more in those few seconds. The back cover will not be the place for your biography, your picture, anecdotes of how you wrote this story while travelling across the Himalayas by mule, or statements from well-meaning reviewers.

The third opportunity is your scene excerpt on the first page.

Select a dramatic, poignant, or action scene that you feel will draw a reader into the pages of your story. As typeset, it must fit onto one page **ONLY**. Trim away, condense without losing the essence of the passage, combine paragraphs – but make it fit on one book printed page. That is, you are fitting on our typeset page to the size of the printed book.

Our plan is to put your story before a reader who may buy it.

Silently Publishing Submission Guidelines

5 About Us

Silently Publishing, Inc. is a privately-held for-profit S corporation formed in Alabama in 2011. Our corporate headquarters is in 2100 SouthBridge Pkwy Suite 650 Birmingham Alabama 35209, and our telephone number is 205.490.1288.

Please send all correspondence to our postal mailing address

Silently Publishing P.O. Box 11732 Birmingham Alabama 35202-1732.

Direct all e-mail inquiries to: **inquiry@silently-publishing.com**

Our website: **www.silently-publishing.com**

Our logo is a howling wolf with the phrase **Without Love Nothing Changes** ® below it.

Silently Publishing and “howling wolf” design are trademarks of Silently Publishing Inc. and are registered with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

Statement of Faith

We are a Christian-based company in that we believe in God, the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, and believe we have eternal life only by His blood. We believe He is the Word made flesh, that He was born of a virgin sent of God into the world, that He lived a perfect sinless life, and that He died and rose again so we may live. We believe that the Bible is literally true, and that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity.

Silently Publishing Submission Guidelines

6 The Silently Series Storyline

Our premier storyline offering is called the *Silently Series Storyline* by **Douglas Robinson**, our first author. (We haven't gotten Douglas to say much yet, but we're working on it...) The storyline deals with vampyric blood drinking people.

DISCLAIMER for The Silently Series Storyline

This storyline deals with vampyric blood drinking people and includes scenes where the characters drink blood, hunt for blood, kill for blood, or shed blood. It is not our desire to promote fear yet it is human nature to have an adverse reaction to blood drinking. This is why we refer to these living people as having a vampyric medical condition. They are not undead nor occultic. While violence may be present, it is never glorified. These people survive as best they can under difficult and bitter conditions. Any that survive any length of time become efficient predators.

We claim no responsibility to any perceived or adverse reaction to the content of this storyline or content derived from the discussion of the subject matter.

The first story is called *Silently Comes The Night* and the second is called *Rites of Passage*. These are available on Amazon in print form and Kindle in electronic form.

The next three stories of the storyline are: *With Deadly Intent*, *Overkill*, and *Majken's Story*. Overall, there are sixteen stories in the storyline. According to Douglas, the storyline began in 1993 and went to 1999. The stories are arranged in groups of four: twelve are considered "modern day," and four are "historical."

We are not writing about "vampires" as you often see portrayed, typically undead occultic creatures. These people are rendered as living persons with a vampyric medical condition that forces them to consume blood to live.

Douglas' comments on his storyline:

*"I see the situation differently than most people. I see people trapped in a condition that forces them to survive by drinking blood, not occultic creatures or demonic spirits wanting an upgrade. I can go to a bookstore, close my eyes and wander down the aisle, point my finger toward a book, and very likely it will be a vampire-related story. Vampirism is the devil's big gun. He uses it to attract and make the occultic world glamorous. It is most often shown as fun, sexy, and the people are always powerful and attractive. My interpretation of this condition is the opposite. As I see it, the vampyric condition is a cruel, bitter, and hard existence. A dear friend of mine recently expressed her concern for me, saying, I am a lost person apart from God because I wrote a "vampire" story. Well, if I had an undead vampire in the story – I would agree with her. I replied and assured her there were no "vampires" in my story. Psalms 112:4 in the King James Version translation of the Bible states: **Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness: he is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous.** Before you judge me, get to know the people I have written about. See what they do and how they think. God has a place in these stories, although not always obvious. You ask me, How could you write a story like this? I reply, How could I not?"*

Silently Publishing Submission Guidelines

We invite you to meet a few of the people in this storyline.

Majken is the female vampyric lead of the story. When we meet her, she has come to Trenton and has chosen a college to live and a young, friendly athlete to help her meet and select people on whom she depends for fresh blood. Her boyfriend, Thomas Kline, does not know who or what she really is and falls in love with her student alias. A killer vampyr has come to Trenton also. His name is John. Majken is trying to get him out of her territory, but John has set a trap for her in a warehouse. Majken has hired a black cab driver, Clifton Burnam Rawls, to take her into one of the worst places in the city at night.

Majken tensed on hearing the massive garage-type door close. Her instincts warned her of a menace and she knew she could not exit the way she had come in. A glimmer of light filtered through a dirty window at the front of the building so she could see the entrance. She ran through the dark bewildering labyrinth, then entered a large rectangular clearing. A shoe scuffed the concrete floor in front of her.

Suddenly, all overhead lights flared on. Majken froze and crouched in the clearing. A disembodied voice yelled run, and she heard a steel cable whip the air. A massive crate fell. She dove with her arm over her face for the nearest passage and felt a splintering crash at her heels. A man wielding a heavy oak board swung madly for her head. She dodged; the weapon grazed her shoulder. She reached his throat before he regained his balance, squeezed, and smashed his head into a crate. Her next assailant looked stunned to see her miraculous escape, and tried to grapple her barehanded. She met him, sidestepped, and shoved him into the smashed crate. He fell, unconscious.

* * *

C.B. knew he had done it now by stumbling into a private war. He did not like the odds. Men were screaming and cursing ahead. He had shouted on impulse when he had seen the crate dropping, but he doubted that she lived. A searing pain ripped through his right biceps. A man struck him with a board with nails driven through the end. He screamed, spun around, and jerked on the thug's arm. The weapon splattered on the floor when C.B. kicked him solidly in the groin. Dizzy from the exertion, he eased himself to the floor. Shadows were jumping off high stacks and running. He was a goner, he thought, as surely as the woman he had risked his life for lay crushed under a heavy crate.

* * *

Majken ran the winding corridors. The bulk of a body lay before her. She sprinted and jumped. The body groaned and rolled over. Her driver? She dragged him to his car, climbed in the front seat with him, and turned his key in the ignition. His right arm collapsed limply on the fur; his wounds reopened. Majken shook him awake and prompted him to drive. She placed the car in gear. C.B. grimaced as they pulled over a curb into the street, but drove as she directed him, finally stopping in an empty parking lot to recover.

Majken rested her head on the dash and cradled the torn fabric of her dress in her lap. "I think we've done enough for one day," she said. Her exposed shoulder was badly blistered. The strain of battle brought twinges of her blood need to the surface.

Silently Publishing Submission Guidelines

The man next to her started to laugh, then roared. He told her nothing was worth what she put him through. When she turned and looked at him, the fresh blood she needed was pouring between his fingers. She pulled on his injured arm. He cried in pain as blood flowed from torn skin. She drank while he struggled, and finally slumped on the steering wheel. His eyes were half-closed when he mumbled, "Why?"

Majken stopped drinking to feel her tissues absorb the nourishment. She propped the man that had helped save her life in his seat; his skin was cool, but his pulse was regular. He was strong and would survive.

She retrieved her bag and placed a dressing on his arm, reinforcing it with white gauze. The bleeding slowed. Majken thanked him for helping her and gave him their current address. His home was nearby and she asked if he could drive the remainder alone. He nodded. Majken started to get out of his taxi. Her dress was ruined. She needed a cover-up. C.B. told her he kept a blanket in the trunk for cold December mornings.

She borrowed it, wrapping it around her as a shawl. She reached through the driver's window and started his car. The day had been eventful. She told him his services would not be needed for the second day. Before he pulled away, Majken leaned through the window, kissed his forehead in thanks, and told him, "Maybe I'm a vampyr." He looked ready to believe her.

Majken stood in the parking lot until he disappeared from sight. Normally, her situation would be desperate. Not this time, she mused. She crossed the street and entered a familiar complex. It was her reserve city apartment last used when she was here with Marc. The manager and a few other people gaped at her entrance. She ignored them. A key fit the lock. She crawled to bed, and slipped from consciousness.

Thomas discovers Majken is vampyric when he goes with her to an isolated mansion she used as a hide-a-way to condition John to leave her territory permanently. Her blood needs have been driven high by her association with John, and she must get blood from Thomas when she did not want to. Thomas is later exposed to her blood in her fight with John and he will become vampyric.

With three lightning fast strokes, she cut his left shoulder, near the shoulder blade and away from vulnerable arteries and veins in his neck. He lay in stunned silence as his blood started to flow from the wound. Majken dropped the knife and held his wrists firmly. She fed, lapping his blood as it began to pool on the surface of his skin. He struggled. She held him fast as her long hair spilled over into his face. She could not bear to see the shocked expression on his face anyway.

Soon, it was over and she released him. She drank no more than if he had given two units of blood at the blood bank. His skin was clammy to touch, he lay still and unmoving. Majken rested on her side. Her mouth was smeared with blood, but it hardly mattered if he saw her now.

Silently Publishing Submission Guidelines

She retrieved a second item taped under the table, a wide, absorbent gauze bandage. She folded a thick mat over the area, and wrapped the remainder over his shoulder, across his chest, and under his armpits to secure the dressing.

He was limp as she bundled him in the comforter and lifted him to the couch. Thomas stared at the ceiling, his mouth drawn tightly. He may have been conscious of her, or maybe not. Majken pulled on her panties and sat next to him on the edge of the couch. His lips parted, but his eyes carried the full weight of speaking for him.

Majken ran her fingers through his damp hair, then gathered her gown and left for a few minutes. She reappeared wearing a simple cotton pullover and resumed her position next to him.

Thomas tried to speak. “Why?”

Majken phrased her sentence carefully and spoke it slowly. “I must drink blood to live.” His eyes widened. It might have been better, she thought, if they expressed hatred, instead of deep hurt.

“Do you understand?” she asked. “I am a vampyr.”

Words gurgled in Thomas’ throat, barely coming out.

She took his pulse at his neck. He was regaining his sense of where he was; next he would remember what she had done to him. Majken felt a slight coolness in the study. While placing extra logs on the fire and stirring the ashes, her eyes swept over the still form on the couch. It was impossible to guess what he was thinking. She feared she had taken more blood than she had realized.

The small knife, stained with his blood, lay on the hardwood floor. She hefted it in her hand. “It wasn’t meant for you,” she told Thomas slowly, bitterly. She threw it to a far dark corner of the room. Majken examined his pupils and breathing. Slightly dilated. What could she say to him? She had already done her worst.

His eyes closed unevenly. Unable to bear the sight of her, she assumed. When he closed his eyes, he reminded her in some ways of a little boy that had fallen asleep in his mother’s arms. Majken talked.

“I know you hurt, because of me. I know you’ll never forget what I’ve done to you. You see, I have no choice, no room for hope.” Her voice faded as she looked beyond the walls, into the darkness. “Forgive me, Thomas,” she whispered to the silent walls, “because I would do it again if I had to.”

* * *

Thomas stirred slightly, his body extremely weak, as if crushed and beaten. His wounds stung sharply, blistered and raw. Gradually, hazy impressions soaked through his mind. He remembered the banquet, her running away, and his coming here, reluctantly, with her. They had just finished when she cut him.

His entire body ached, and his shoulder must have been cut to ribbons the way it bled. And she drank it. Thomas had heard about certain people that liked to hurt, and be hurt, during sex. He was not one of them. Oh, God! he thought. It was more than that. She had actually drunk it.

Silently Publishing Submission Guidelines

Subtly, he opened his eyes. She was still there, sitting nearby. Everyone tried to warn you, he lamented, and you only have yourself to blame! He wondered how he could have let her do it. Why had he not fought? Now he was utterly alone and defenseless with someone who could kill him.

Thomas watched her closely. She placed the canister of fruit juice on the low table, opened it, and poured half a glass. She was talking to him, or had been talking to him. He could not remember. All that registered on his mind was the shock. He coughed.

She had been his friend and companion, once. He thought he loved her. She asked him to try to sit up and take a sip. When she first spoke, for a brief second, she became the girl he thought he knew. She had the same face and hair and figure. “Mary?” he whispered hoarsely.

The stranger shook her head. “Majken.”

“Ma-j-k-en,” he tried to say.

Majken slipped off the table and knelt before him on the floor.

Thomas went pale and pushed with his hands in front of him. “Are you going to kill me?” His lips trembled and he breathed in sharp gasps.

She froze. “I never intended to attack you, Thomas.”

“Why did you do it?” His tongue and mouth moved like they were filled with cotton.

“I must have blood to live,” she answered simply.

Cold fear made his normally brown eyes appear wide and black. He weakly kicked the comforter loose. “Is this what you’ve been hiding?”

She hesitated, then said, “I’ve lived this way for many years.”

Thomas broke into a nervous laugh. “Are you trying to tell me you’re some kind of vampire?”

Majken nodded solemnly with no hint of amusement or frivolity. “I don’t like to call myself that, but, yes, you could say that I am a vampyr.”

Thomas blinked several times and stared at her hard. She never turned into a puff of smoke or a bat. She remained frighteningly solid. “How long were you supposed to be this way?”

She reacted to the sarcasm in his voice. “I have too much self-respect to play guess-how-old-I-am games with you!”

He regretted his tactic. He had never seen her angry. He had never seen a lot of things in her before tonight. As long as he could keep her talking, he hoped he would be safe. “I’m sorry,” he said quickly, “but all of this is hard to believe.”

Majken picked up the glass. “I poured this for you. If you are strong enough to sit up, it would help you regain your strength.”

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Thomas failed his first attempt, dizzy. The second time he managed to prop himself on one arm, but his dressing stuck and he fell again. Majken put his glass down. “Will you let me help you up?”

He gritted his teeth and succeeded on his third attempt; his head swam. He took the drink and sampled it nervously. Majken smiled. The fruit juice was warm and had the slick, pungent taste of being stored too long. Beggars can't be choosers, he thought. He felt better, and when he did not choke and die in the next few minutes, more confident. He tried to sit up, but collapsed against the velour covering.

Majken quickly supported him by his opposite arm and helped him lie flat.

“Why did you come here?” he asked, his words slurred.

“I brought you here to see this once beautiful mansion, and to ask for your help.” Majken fell against the couch, facing the wall, and appeared to watch the fire. “I wanted to have time together, then I was going to explain what I really was and all of those things you didn't understand.”

Her voice became small and distant. “More of John's ways rubbed off on me, than my ways affected him.” Majken bowed her head between her knees.

“John?” Thomas stammered.

Majken frowned. “It's not a pretty story.”

Thomas considered what he had heard so far. She spoke easily and rationally, as any sane person. In fact, now that she was talking to him, she seemed most free. Phillip would be thrilled. He was more than apprehensive to hear what her version of not a pretty story would be.

Thomas goes to his parent's home in Sumter South Carolina after Majken leaves him in Trenton. He is in denial concerning his vampyric symptoms. Majken knows he is going through The Change and soon she comes to Sumter to find him. We meet Thomas' sixteen-year-old naïve but brilliant sister Kimberly. He cut her to get blood, not in control of his actions, then fled.

Kim noticed she was standing in the center of Thomas' bedroom, very intently concentrating on something. Her brow furrowed with thought and she pressed her right hand to her temple. In a moment, she stopped. Kimberly watched her closely. Something was definitely up.

Majken dropped her head and sighed. Kimberly wanted to ask, Do you know where he's gone? She knew to be silent now. Let Mary or Mirriam or Majken think. What's in a name anyway? Kim considered.

“We will find him,” she said with quiet certainty. Kimberly let out a breath that she was unaware that she had been holding.

Again she asked Kim, “How did you get hurt?”

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Now they were alone. Kim glanced in the hallway to make sure her mother had not returned. "I cut myself on broken glass," Kimberly parroted. She rubbed her left forearm. "How did you know I was hurt?"

Majken replied, "First, can I see your bedroom?"

Kimberly led her from Thomas' room to her bedroom. Her bedroom, too, had been lived in. Majken gently closed the door to the hallway. "May I see?" she asked Kimberly.

With a moment's hesitation, she pulled her oversized sweatshirt over her head. Her petite bra was pale pink today. The flesh-colored gauze wrap on her left forearm had a dark reddish splash, like her cut had opened and bled through the gauze. Majken gently reached for Kimberly's arm and unwrapped the stretchy gauze bandage. It hurt a little. Blood had soaked into the white gauze pads. Maybe it was when Kim was thinking of smashing her brother's nose.

After looking at the ugly wound for a second, she replaced the white gauze pads and rewrapped her forearm in the flesh-colored gauze bandage. Kim felt a surge of these powerful feelings flooding her heart.

Her own brother had hurt her!

She was keeping his secret and protecting Mom and Dad from this ugly thing, whatever bad had happened to him.

"Thank you," Majken said solemnly. "That is not a cut made by broken glass."

Tears trickled down her cheeks. She hated to cry. It made her feel like a baby. Yet before this stranger, this woman her brother clearly loved, she, too, had to confide in somebody.

"He cut me," she said quietly.

"I know. He was not himself when he did it. When he spoke of you in Trenton, I could tell that you and he are very close. Thank you for protecting him. We have to find him before anyone else does." Majken got Kimberly a wet washrag to wipe her face. Runny nose and all. She held the towel for Thomas' sister to make herself presentable.

Kimberly pulled on her sweatshirt.

"I found news articles on this slasher suspect in Trenton at the time you and he were there together. He came home claiming to have had an accident. When I checked the newswire, I couldn't find any trace of an actual confirmed attack by this suspect after the time of his accident. I got scared. I came to him wanting him to calm my fears, but he said this John suspect captured him to get to you. He said you came after him and that's why he's alive today. When he went to this old construction place he once worked at, I thought he was going to drown himself, but he didn't. I asked him what really happened up there. He talked about burning mansions, serial killers who fall off cliffs, but don't die, and you. You're in the middle of all of this.

"Who are you? What's really going on?"

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Majken smiled a winsome smile, kind of fragile but tender at the same time. Her eyes were gentle when she reached around Kimberly and hugged her.

When Kim reached around Majken, she felt very solid muscle. Lithe and very strong. “Oh, Kimberly,” Majken said, “Thomas was so right about you. He told me you’re a snoop into everybody’s business, and you’re good at it.”

Kimberly smiled at that. She looked into those dark violet eyes with her light brown eyes, seeking truth, seeking hope.

“I cannot promise that I can tell you everything – certainly not until we find him. But I will say that I will do anything I can to protect him and give him back his life, if it can be done.”

In that moment, Kimberly looked into this stranger’s eyes and believed her. Even if her brother’s problem was bigger than the whole state of Texas, she saw that this woman loved her brother and vowed she would do anything to protect him and give him back his life. That was good enough for Kimberly.

As part of the *Rites of Passage* storyline, we meet a vampyric girl in a totally different situation. Jeanine has been trapped in a blood cult for nearly twenty-five years. Alecia is the seven-year-old daughter of the current blood cult leader. Jeanine has raised Alecia and loves her. She discovers that Nolan, Alecia’s father, plans to sacrifice her.

Alecia finished eating. Jeanine put her bowl in the sink and ran water in it. She prodded Alecia to go get dressed and ready for school. Jeanine dressed in her own bedroom, careful that Alecia not see the fading red welts on her backside. When she pulled her tight jeans up, the welts did not burn like they did yesterday.

Alecia met her in the kitchen.

“Honey,” she said, “get your raincoat.”

Alecia rushed to her bedroom and came back with a bright yellow slicky raincoat with a hood. Jeanine bundled Alecia in the coat. As she knelt in front of Alecia buttoning the coat, the little girl turned to reach for her book pack and took out the crayon drawing she had made for her yesterday.

Jeanine smiled. It was a little house drawing with two people outside. One obviously her, with yellow bouncy hair and a smaller girl beside her with dark brown hair. The house had not been fully colored in, but there was a flower blooming in the window. There was grass and a tree behind the home.

“Let’s put it up here,” she said. Alecia’s face brightened as Jeanine found a spare magnet and stuck the picture on her refrigerator. She gazed at the picture.

It was now obvious that there was no man in the picture.

Jeanine choked a little bit.

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She prodded Alecia to go for the door. Jeanine picked up a piece of newspaper to use as an umbrella. Funny, she thought, how she did not have a raincoat herself. She took Alecia to school and came home.

Alone, the silence in her little trailer was deafening. Jeanine turned on her TV just to have some noise in the home. She glanced at it briefly. Some exercise show, it looked like. She kept the TV pointed toward the kitchen. She kicked off her sandals and raked her fingers through her tangled wet hair. There was a little mirror in the ceramic candle holder on her wall. Her hair was getting past her shoulders and it was time to get it cut.

She picked up odds and ends in the living room to tidy up the place.

Then she remembered the new phrase Nolan had said at the sacrifice. She went to her bedroom and found her old Latin college textbook stuffed under her bed and browsed the index.

“sacrificium primogentium” she remembered.

She hummed a Fleetwood Mac song that had been in her head since yesterday as she looked.

Jeanine found the word she was looking for and stopped breathing. “Oh God,” she muttered. “Oh, no!” She frantically double checked the roots of the words for any alternate meanings. Black swirls seemed to float around her head.

The phrase meant *firstborn sacrifice*.

Oh God, oh God, oh God!

Nolan meant to ... to ... *kill* his own daughter!

“Sonofabitch!” she swore. Everything she had seen the man do from the time she met him flooded her consciousness. He was just cold and cruel enough to do it, too!

But, why? Why would he kill his baby?

Alecia was good and right and sweet and loving. Alecia was everything that Nolan was not. But, she was his firstborn child. She knew vaguely of Nolan’s ex-wife in California. Sarah, she thought her name was.

Still, for Nolan to plan to kill his own daughter meant he had a reason for doing it. The murdering sonofabitch never did anything without a reason. Her mind reeled as she stuffed her Latin textbook back under her bed.

She pondered as she plodded mindlessly to her living room.

Nolan obviously meant to kill his own daughter. His firstborn. In ancient times, children were often sacrificed to false deities to gain favor of the gods.

Something else Nolan did bothered her because of what Alecia had asked her.

Why? Why did Nolan beat her bloody after every sacrifice? The prattle of the talking TV ruined her concentration. Jeanine bound up and snapped the TV off. She stood with her hand on her chin in the middle of her living room. She had to think.

Jeanine closed her eyes. She had seen gushes of blood from so many sacrifices through the years that she would always see it. The images were indelibly etched in

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her mind's eye. She would see blood forever. The life of the flesh is in the blood, she recalled. Raised Catholic in a Catholic high school, some of her past Bible study classes came to mind.

The life of the flesh is in the blood.

Jeanine looked at her slender hands, her slender youthful body, and her face in the ceramic mirror. She still looked much as she did, even to the day she ran away with Bobby.

She stifled the pain in her memory.

I'll be with you forever, she remembered.

Although she felt the passage of over twenty years gone by, she had changed little, if any at all. She aged, she thought, but the effect of aging on her body was not the same as a normal human. Jeanine rubbed her eyes with her fingertips. Black swirls again. She made space between her sofa at the tiny table in front of it and collapsed the length of her sofa. The fake leather, really cheap plastic, she thought, squeaked as she settled down.

Blood everything, she reasoned.

What was she? She recalled a late-night movie she had seen years ago. A vampire movie. A circus, she believed. The movie looked to be old, even by her standards, and the undead creatures sprouted fangs and drank the blood of the living. She felt of her own normal teeth with her fingers.

Fangs – pleeeaaasse.

Another term bothered her. Undead.

Undead, as in once dead, and came back.

This didn't sound right either, because she, obviously, was very much alive. If she had died and came back, she would surely know it. She squeezed her fingertips with her thumb and saw the skin pale and turn pink.

Blood flow, obviously. Yep, she thought, very much alive.

Mother Rosalind taught that Jesus said the rich man died and went to hell. As a Jew, he saw his father Abraham in Abraham's bosom and cried for Lazarus to bring him water. Abraham said, There is a gulf fixed between us. You cannot come to us and we cannot come to you.

Jeanine pursed her lips. Dead was dead and that was it as far as she was concerned. She really couldn't explain these creatures that people called vampires. She shivered. Whatever they were, they were not people come back from the dead.

She didn't even *like* black.

However, whatever she was, she knew that she knew that she knew she could only drink blood to live. She lived by blood, fresh blood, and did not age in the normal human way. By all accounts, she reflected, in the natural, she was like them in the only way that mattered. She had to drink blood to live.

She remembered the movie. Within a hour the show had started getting gory and she had turned it off.

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The movie did make one other point.

Vampire blood made more vampires.

According to legend, drinking vampire blood made a normal human turn into one of these creatures. Whether you drank it, or bathed in it. She remembered her beautiful mother Roxana telling her stories of evil Elisabeth Bathory, who bathed in the blood of servant girls she sacrificed to stay youthful forever. In her mother's village, actually.

Vampire blood made more vampires.

Jeanine sat upright at once.

Nolan was beating her bloody after every sacrifice to get her blood! Suddenly, the seemingly endless ritual sacrifices of the blood cult made sense.

These were people, twisted people, trying to become like she was. Nolan was going to sacrifice Alecia to whatever god he believed was the vampire god to make himself, with her blood offering, like one of these creatures!

Jeanine hunched forward and placed her head in her hands with both elbows on her knees. It made cold and cruel sense. Nolan would surely kill Alecia if he thought it would do for him what he was wanting. This was beyond ludicrous. This was beyond impossible. Nolan was aging. His coal black hair now had streaks of grey at his temples and in the back of his head. His hairline from the front was slightly receding.

Well, she asserted, whatever Nolan was trying to get from her blood, it was not working for him. Nor any of the other blood cult zombies she had encountered through the years!

Jeanine's mind reeled. She had no other choice now. She had to take Alecia away from him, take her far away, find a place where he would never find them. She pulled on her sandals and grabbed her keys off the counter.

A desperate plan formed in her mind.

Escape with Alecia was her only thought.

Jeanine tells Alecia that her father wants to hurt her and asks Alecia to come with her. She makes sure Alecia understands she will never see her father again. Then Jeanine tries to explain her vampyric condition to Alecia because they will now be living and travelling together. She takes Alecia home to her trailer.

Jeanine turned her black-and-white television around so she and Alecia could watch the evening movie together. Alecia got cold, so Jeanine covered her with a quilt.

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With nightfall, it had finally stopped raining. At bedtime, Jeanine made sure Alecia got her bath, brushed her teeth, and got ready for bed on time. Tomorrow would be a big day. After Alecia finished, she let her baby girl sit up and watch the evening news while Jeanine got a shower and prepared for bed as well.

When she got out of the shower, Jeanine checked her backside as she stepped beside the toilet onto the cold linoleum floor. The former bloody red welts had completely faded to barely pink. By tomorrow, she thought, the scars would be completely gone. If only her feelings and everything else that had happen to her would fade and heal as quickly. She found Alecia bundled in the quilt in the center of the sofa. She'd propped her feet on the table and she was wiggling her legs like she often did.

Jeanine smiled and plopped down beside her baby girl.

She seemed unusually quiet. Jeanine reached over the quilt to hug Alecia and gave her a kiss on the side of her cheek.

Alecia smiled vaguely. She seemed far away. Maybe what they'd discussed at the pavilion was bothering her. "Honey, what are you thinking about?" Alecia looked at her, seeming to look through her.

"It wasn't your fault," she said.

Again, the tone of her voice had become so much more knowing and aware than for a child of seven. "What do you mean, baby girl?" Jeanine almost held her breath in anticipation of what Alecia would say.

"When that bad thing happened to you years ago – it wasn't your fault."

Fresh tears welled up in Jeanine's eyes. Truth be told, Bobby had dragged her into this miserable life. In her heart, she had always looked back and thought if she'd only done this, or didn't do that, he might be alive today and none of this would've ever happened. I'll be with you forever, in her memory. She stifled the pain and looked at her baby girl. She was so proud of the remarkable young lady Alecia would surely become.

"What a treasure you are, baby girl. Nolan'll never know what he missed when he didn't see you."

Jeanine nudged Alecia up and prompted her to go to bed. Before Alecia entered her own bedroom, Jeanine asked her, "Want to sleep with me, baby girl?"

Alecia turned with a sudden smile and practically leaped into her Jennie's arms. Everything good and everything right in her life lay next to her that night. Jeanine watched Alecia sleep a little while before she, herself, closed her eyes and slept.

When morning came, the sky was the color of ash. The sky was full of turbulent clouds – the wind was blowing, but, thank God, it was not raining.

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Jeanine flees with Alecia and she eventually returns to Charlotte North Carolina, where she was raised, but she has not yet found her Papa – who should still be living in his seventies. She goes to the cemetery where her Mamă is buried to learn more about her father and his whereabouts.

As she and Alecia left the church, Jeanine noticed several nearby taverns and lounges she might hunt at later that evening. Finding her Papa was on Jeanine's mind as they made their way back to her car. She found a place for Alecia's lunch, then headed for Norland Road and Evergreen Cemetery.

Her old middle school, where she was attending when her Mamă died, was just across the street.

Memories flooded her mind. She was starting to remember places and directions again. When she saw the dried grass, white brick columns, and wrought-iron fence, she stopped at the entrance and just could not drive in right away.

"Where are we?" Alecia asked.

Jeanine turned off her Mustang engine and rested her hand on top of her steering wheel. "Baby girl," she said lowly, "this is where my Mamă is buried. I was only ten years old when she died."

Alecia was silent for a moment. Then she asked, "How did she die?"

Jeanine bowed her head. "Ovarian cancer."

Jeanine gathered her courage and started her car engine. She idled, placed the car in gear, and moved slowly forward.

Her eyes were on the north west corner of the cemetery. If her Papa was here, or not, she just had to know.

She started talking: "My Papa loved my Mamă very much. When she died, it nearly destroyed him. But he had me to take care of and he couldn't just quit. When Mamă died, it came sudden. From the time she was diagnosed to the end was only four and a half months." Tears trickled down her cheeks.

Jeanine made the turn at the end of the road and started circling the cemetery. She picked out the Bryer headstone from the distance. Oh, God, she thought to herself.

"My Papa has no family and most of my Mamă's family is still in Romania. I'm from the Mihnea lineage." Jeanine lifted her head proudly. She tried to steady herself. If her Papa was here, then her Papa was here. She parked and saw the tombstone with the family name etched on it. Cold stone. Cold tears.

"C'mon baby. We have to know."

Jeanine got out and stood at her door until Alecia came beside her. She instinctively reached for Alecia and Alecia slipped her hand into her's. The dry grass crunched under step. They circled the tombstone. The spot beside her mother was ... empty. Her Papa was not here. If her Papa was not here then he had to be alive

Silently Publishing Submission Guidelines

somewhere. The youngest boy of an old family, her Papa had no family other than she and her Mamă. Surely, he would still be in Charlotte somewhere. She just needed to track him down.

Alecia stood at the headstone and drew her finger along Jeanine's mother's etched name. Roxana Mihnea Bryer. Jeanine felt the distinct ache of missing her Mamă again, but also sweet memories of the happiest time when her Papa and Mamă were together.

Jeanine knelt on the dry grass and reached for Alecia. Alecia came to her. She wrapped her arms around Alecia and said, "Remember, baby girl, that death is not the end of life. When we trust Jesus as Savior and believe in His blood, God can forgive our sins, then we have eternal life in Him."

Alecia seemed a little puzzled. "Aren't you angry at God for taking your mother?" she asked. Jeanine hugged Alecia and kissed her.

"No, I'm not. We live in a sinful and broken world. We have to trust God to take care of us. But I don't think He causes us to die. God is love and truth and all life."

"What about when that bad thing happened to you?" Alecia looked like she did when she was hiding from thunder. Her little pout turned Jeanine's heart inside out. It was like when Alecia cried for her in the pavilion.

"I made the mistake of following Bobby and staying with him. It was my own stupid choice that put this on me. I certainly can't blame God for my own ignorance and fear."

"What were you afraid of?" Alecia asked.

"Not being loved," she replied. "Not being loved like my Papa loved my Mamă." Jeanine wiped slow pooling tears from Alecia's eyes. She held her baby girl in her arms.

"I want you to know how much I love you and how proud I am of you. I don't regret one moment we've ever spent together. I don't ever, ever regret having you in my life, and I solemnly promise I will be very proud of the remarkable young lady you will soon become."

Alecia's eyes were bright, clear, and trusting. Her baby girl reached for her. That hug was worth all of the tears and the ache in her soul over her past. She felt in her heart that God didn't make the bad thing happen to her, but she was so thankful, that since she was coming down this broken path anyway, that He put Alecia on the same path with her.

Her Papa was not here. That was settled.

Jeanine is Alecia's protector, but she still must drink blood to live.

Jeanine straddled his chest and poked the sharp end of the razor blade against his arm above his elbow. He flinched slightly, but otherwise did not move. She jabbed him harder and drew blood this time.

He still did not move.

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Now reasonably certain he was not going to awaken, she made four deliberate cuts along the fleshy part of his forearm and let his arm dangle off the bed. She did not have a bowl to collect her evening meal, but she did have the wine glass she drank from earlier. She dumped the last of the wine out and used the glass to collect the blood she now so desperately needed. When it was one-third full, she drank quickly and replaced the glass under his arm.

Blood had splattered on the crisp white bedsheet. No way to explain that away, she thought. He bled until she half filled the wine glass again. As his blood started to clot, she held the wine glass between her legs on the floor and used his bathrobe sash she was going to use to throttle him to bind his arm and stop the bleeding entirely. Finally, she lifted the glass and drank.

Her body was already absorbing the blood.

Jeanine got on her knees and gently lifted his arm to his bed. He rolled on his left side in front of her. She got up and used his bathrobe to cover him against a chill, then started picking through his living room in the dark to find her own strewn clothes. She finally found all of her clothes. She dressed and wanted to leave quickly so she could get back to Alecia before daybreak.

When she looked out his window to the street below, it was raining. The rain was driven by the wind in sheets. This man did not say anything, one way or another, about actually hiring her. She decided she would keep him as a lover, but she would not work for him. He lay still behind her.

She felt cold. Jeanine rubbed her arms.

Jeanine got soaked as she left the man's apartment. When she got to her car, sleet gray rain drummed on her windshield. She was so tired.

Too tired to drive right now. She just wanted to close her eyes for a moment.

She slept dreamless sleep.

When she opened her eyes, the sun was a handspan above the city in the sky behind a thick canopy of gray clouds.

Jeanine was instantly awake.

By her internal body clock, it was about nine-thirty in the morning.

Alecia!

Jeanine jerked awake with a start and oriented to the people milling on the city street before her. The Uptown pedestrians were busily going about their business. When she started her car, more than a few turned to stare at her. She let her Mustang throttle down and she gently eased into city traffic. Her light sensitive eyes ached in the bright daylight.

She headed for South End and Alecia.

As she idled beside a bus, she realized her blouse had been soaked by the night rain and was almost transparent on her skin. She flushed when she realized people in the bus above her were staring. She made a left hand turn and found a less populated path. When she pulled into her motel, a black lady was pushing a cleaning cart into the open room two doors up from her and Alecia's room.

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Jeanine parked, got her room key from her locked glove compartment, and unlocked her room. She hung the DO NOT DISTURB sign as she locked the door. The room was dark when she shut the door. Jeanine kicked off her sandals.

“Alecia?” she whispered.

She found Alecia curled in her clothes on top of the cover of the first bed. The other bed had not been disturbed. She had curled in a fetal position and was so still. White lines of tears were on her face. Jeanine knelt quietly on the carpet and ran her fingers gently through Alecia’s dark brown curls.

She vividly remembered Alecia and the thunder storm in her trailer several weeks ago. A lifetime ago. She’d promised her baby girl that she would always be there to protect her – and last night, it had thundered, she was sure of it.

Alecia stirred slightly.

Nothing says failure quite like a little girl’s tears.

She rolled over and opened her eyes.

“I’m so sorry, baby girl,” Jeanine started. She felt a distinct ache at the wounded way Alecia was looking at her.

“You were gone all night!” Alecia wailed.

Jeanine’s eyes saddened. “I know.”

Alecia rolled back over and faced away from Jeanine.

“You don’t care that I cried all night, and you weren’t here. You don’t care about me! All you care about is your stupid blood needs!” Her fists were balled up. Alecia pushed Jeanine’s hand away from her shoulder.

“I love you, Alecia, and I do care.”

She gently turned Alecia to face her.

“I tried to explain to you what I was and how I have to live before we left your father. I wanted to get back before morning, but the man I eventually got blood from would not go to sleep. He had me up all night.”

Alecia’s eyes welled up with tears.

“You only care about yourself,” she said angrily.

Jeanine sat on the floor next to the bed. There was very little light in the room, only a sliver of light from the part in the curtain, yet Jeanine could see Alecia clearly in the dark.

“I won’t argue with you, baby girl. You are my life. Your father and all the others before him kept me enslaved to their way, and I was forced to do things I regret to this day. But I never ever regretted you. I would rather die than go back to the way life was for me before you came into my life.”

With that, Jeanine got up and went to the bathroom. She used the bathroom, got several drinks of water because she felt dehydrated, then undressed and slipped into a large t-shirt that came down to her thighs. She pulled the covers aside and slid

Silently Publishing Submission Guidelines

into the crisp white sheets. Outside, she heard the cleaning lady push her cart past their room to the next room in line.

The bed across from her squeaked.

Alecia stirred and sat up.

She guessed that Alecia could only see a black outline on the bed before her. Jeanine waited to see what Alecia would do.

Alecia moved to the edge of her bed, sitting still and saying nothing. Her legs dangled off the edge of the mattress and did not reach the floor. Her bare feet knocked the frame a few times. Then she stood and tiptoed over to Jeanine.

Jeanine could see that Alecia held her right hand over her mouth. She was starting to cry. Jeanine swept back the covers and made a place for Alecia.

“C’mere, baby girl,” she said quietly.

Alecia bound toward her.

Jeanine guided her to the empty space beside her so they would not bump heads or any other body parts. Alecia was crying, but Jeanine smoothed the tears from her face and softly said, “I know you missed me, honey. I’m not angry at you for your feelings.” Alecia cuddled next to her.

Jeanine held her baby girl.

“I’m disappointed, too, that I didn’t get back sooner. You see, baby girl, I miss you, too.” Jeanine lay back and Alecia curled at her side. Everything good and everything right in her life lay next to her. Jeanine did not sleep for a while. She focused and listened to Alecia’s heart beating. She found she could also hear the swishing of blood through Alecia’s body, the slight gurgling of water through the air conditioning compressor, and several cats meowing outside somewhere. She finally slept peacefully.

When Majken finds Thomas, she returns with him to his parent’s home. The next night, she explains to him what this vampyric condition is and how his body is Changing. (The scene that you are reading took place in September 1993.)

Majken begged off the evening meal, claiming to have dined in town with Thomas. They sat at the kitchen table drinking cups of hot tea and socializing after dinner. She claimed to be exhausted and wanted to turn in early. She kissed Thomas on the cheek as she passed by him. He went upstairs after her within fifteen minutes. She pushed open her bedroom window and met him on the roof as the cool evening breeze stirred the leaves of the elm and poplar trees planted around the house.

A waning moon hung idly in the sky.

Thomas placed both hands on his knees.

“I’m sorry,” he began. “I’ll do whatever you want us to do without further flack. As it is, I owe you my life about two dozen times already anyway.” Majken scooted

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closer to him on his right side. She placed her arm around his back and rested her head on his shoulder.

“I know this is difficult for you. I can see that you love your parents and sister. But there is nothing they can do, nor I can do, to stop what’s happening inside your body.”

She placed her other hand over his arm and reached around his wrist, probably to take his pulse. She added, “The next three weeks will be the hardest part of your Change. If you survive that, then you’ll live.”

“What do you mean Change?” he asked.

Majken spoke lowly, moving closer to him.

“We call it The Change because your entire body adapts to drinking blood and blood becomes the only sustenance you can take to survive from then on. In most cases it is triggered by exposure to a vampyric person’s blood, like in your case. In rare instances, a person can become vampyric by drinking blood and they Change. The survival rate is low. If a person is too young when they’re exposed to vampyric blood, they die. If they are overage, they die. I don’t know of any person older than twenty-two who has survived a reactive Change such as yours.”

Thomas stammered, “I’m twenty-four!”

“I know. That is why I say if you survive.”

He sat still, unmoving, and bowed his head. Majken adjusted her position so he could look into her eyes. “Do not give up,” she said firmly. She waited until he looked into her eyes. “You are a strong young man and I think your desire to live will be the deciding factor on whether you live or die. I do not wish to lie to you. What you are facing is not easy. But others have survived and you can too if your choice is life.”

Thomas sat stunned for a few moments.

“You called my Change reactive. What does that mean – how many kinds are there?”

Majken adjusted her position so she was facing the same direction he was. “I know of three ways: adaptive, mutagenic, and reactive. Your Change is reactive because it’s like throwing hot oil into cold water. From the age of twenty to twenty-two, your body is in the fastest growth and is at the peak of sexual and physical maturation. A reactive Change means that your entire body seizes upon the vampyric condition and your body is forced to adapt so quickly. I knew your Change would be reactive because of your age when you were exposed to my blood.”

“How did you Change?” Thomas asked.

“My Change was adaptive. I was young, barely in puberty, when I was attacked and exposed to vampyric blood. My body took two years to adjust to the vampyric condition, from the time I was fourteen to sixteen.”

“How old are you?” he asked.

Majken smiled wryly.

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“I was born in the winter of 1698. I will be two hundred ninety five on my birthday the fifteenth of December.”

Thomas gasped and exclaimed, “You’re two hundred and ninety four!”

“Yes,” Majken replied.

She laughed and prodded him when he just sat with his mouth hung open. “Are you okay?” she asked.

“Yeah,” he said. He whistled low and stared at her up and down. “You look good. You don’t look a day over two hundred.”

Majken grinned and took his arm.

“Why, thank you,” she replied.

Thomas watched the light evening breeze stir her long chestnut hair. “The last Change is mutagenic,” she continued. “This is when a person drinks blood and, for reasons we do not fully know, they survive and become vampyric. A friend of mine became vampyric this way. He was drawn to drink blood from his youth. When he succumbed to it, he became vampyric in the true sense.”

“What happens if someone is too young?” he asked.

“No vampyric person I know would ever deliberately expose a child to their blood. Children are not mature enough physically to Change. It causes a collapse of their immune system, very high temperature, and swelling of their brain. It is very brutal.”

“What happens if someone is too old?”

Majken replied, “If a person, say older than twenty-five, was exposed to vampyric blood, or worse tried to drink it, their body is already in a state of decline. For a brief time their body can handle the acceleration of The Change, but they quickly start hemorrhaging and generally die of heart failure.”

Thomas paused thoughtfully.

“You said exposed to vampyric blood or drink it. What other kinds of blood drinkers are there?”

Majken sighed, then replied, “Other than true vampyric people, people of all types drink blood even from ancient times. Some drink in ritual, some drink ceremonially, some drink to attain immortality or extended lifespan, some drink because they like the cruelty and death associated with it, and some drink because they want to become a vampire in the classical sense – my advice to you, avoid them all.”

Thomas raked his finger through his thick ash brown hair. “Whew,” he said. “Who ever thought there’d be this much to it!” He told her about his reaction to the sun on the fateful family Labor Day cookout and what came out of him just last night. Majken explained. “You were exposed to my blood. Unfortunately, you have acquired my sensitivity to sunlight also. Your body is hyper-reactive right now. Later on, it will not be this bad for you, but you will always have to be careful to avoid radiant energy, like sunlight, to avoid being sick.”

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She paused thoughtfully. “What is coming out of you marks the second phase of your Change. The entire inner lining of your former digestive system is sloughing off and passing. I am sorry to say it will only get worse.”

Thomas pressed his fingers to his eyes.

“Don’t you have any good news to tell me?”

Majken brushed the roofing tile grit from her palms and stood. She reached down for his hand. When he touched her hand, she grasped his and pulled him forcibly to his feet. At this point, he had not yet seen her fight or use her tremendous strength. “If you survive, you have a future on the arm wrestling circuit.” Thomas rotated his right arm and rubbed his shoulder.

“Got it,” he said lamely. Majken glanced to her left.

“Kimberly has gone to bed. Now is our opportunity to feed.”

Thomas grabbed Majken’s arm.

“Wait a minute,” he said, “that’s my sister!”

Majken regarded him calmly.

“Trust my judgment, Thomas. Your sister is the youngest, most viable donor we have here tonight. I will be careful with her. I do not want to hurt her, but we both have to feed tonight and it is better to do it while you’re still in control. You were out of control when you came into her bedroom in a dream state and cut her.” Thomas released Majken’s arm.

“You are vampyric now. You must drink blood just to survive. You must learn to blend in with humans, be part of their lives without getting too close. Yet the ache of your life and existence apart from humanity will sometimes cause you to tell too much, to want to be seen and be recognized for who and what you really are. This is very unfortunate. That is what happened between you and me in school. I let you gradually see and learn too much about me, and now, here we are. I regret, Thomas, that you were exposed to my blood. If I could have prevented it, or if I could change it now, I would. I hope one day you will forgive me.”

Majken led Thomas through her bedroom window to her bedroom and showed him her puncture set. She retrieved another puncture set from the bottom of her valise and gave it to him. This was not the happiest moment of his life, but he was at least thankful she knew how to get blood from donors without killing every person she got blood from.

She told Thomas to sit on her bed and wait until she came for him. She padded silently on bare feet to Kimberly’s bedroom and entered.

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7 Storyline Undercurrents

Douglas' comments on Majken and the storyline undercurrents:

*"I think Majken is a remarkable person in her own right just because she has survived for so long. Her name is Norwegian. Her mother was Norwegian and her father German. I cannot tell when I first saw her, because vampyric people have been on my heart even from my time as a child. I prayed and sought to find the meaning of her name for many years. About two years ago, I finally found it. Her name as a derivative of Mary speaks of her capacity to love and her great need for love. Her name as a derivative of Mirriam means **sea of bitterness**. I believe in her case, both meanings apply. She survives, I think, because most of her decisions and choices are the right ones. When she was exposed to vampyric blood as an almost-fourteen-year-old girl, she survived a brutal rape, her beloved and betrothed had been killed, her father banished her from her home in disgrace, she was left with the fact that her body was now Changing, and she had to again face the man who made her vampyric; a man she remembers as a Beast.*

*"There is a deep undercurrent in Silently Comes The Night. It is love. There is a deep undercurrent in Rites of Passage. It is grace. Jeanine's name, in fact, means **God is gracious**. Compassion must show up in the third story; right with God must show up in the fourth story. The Holy Ghost brought Psalms 112:4 to my attention as early as 2011. I saw the pattern of love, grace, compassion, and right with God repeated in each of the four-story blocks. I would not call this a Christian story by any stretch of the imagination. But I believe many readers can find hope and courage for their situation, whatever it may be, by seeing how Majken chooses life. The scripture tells us that Jesus was approached by a rich young ruler. Jesus, seeing him, loved him. I humbly offer the thought that seeing is a vital part of loving. Many Christian people love God, love their families, and serve faithfully in ministries and churches across the globe. Regrettably, I believe our love stops at the point our revelation of a person, or seeing, stops. I am suggesting with this storyline that, maybe, there is more to it than what you have seen or know.*

"As I was growing up, I had a poster in my bedroom. It was a sheep dog howling over a lamb that had fallen in the night, laying motionless in the cold snow. In my mind through the years, the sheep dog changed into a wolf. Now a wolf is howling over those lost in the dark cold night. True vampyric people are physically changed blood drinking human predators. When you insist as a Christian that we only need come to the Light, that there is only right and wrong with no shades of gray, and that anything remaining in the dark is inherently evil just because it is in the dark – some people have no other place to be except in the dark."

We want writers who are courageous and will deal with serious issues, render stories and people honestly but with the door open to love and grace somewhere, and writers who will bring us main characters who have a core of good in them in spite of everything else in the darkness.

Our wolf is howling over those lost and alone in the dark.

Without Love Nothing Changes

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