

Blood Kin

“Oh god, and Cammie came by,” Jeff Greene said as they drove along Hessian Street. “You know she’s unemployed again.”

Chuck McDonough, Jeff’s husband, gave a Lurch-like moan. “My sympathies.”

“Kim says she was there an hour. Asking her don’t we need another receptionist, asking Don about yoga and Miriam about aromatherapy, trying to get free sessions, you know. And get this: she actually asked me ‘Can I borrow your coat? Mine’s so thin, and it’s really cold out, and I have to go a bunch of places and I think I have a cold, and since you’ll be inside with clients all day...’ When I said no she gave me that look, you know; and ‘Oh well, maybe it isn’t pneumonia and I guess I’ll survive, but I can’t understand why you’re so stingy...’ Wait, where are we going?”

“Church. There’s a leak in the tower Karyn wants me to look at.”

They pulled into the lot at Agape Metropolitan Community Church. Karyn Stone, their pastor, smiled and waved from the door. She handed over and explained the various keys to Chuck, who announced “I’m off to count bats.” He negotiated winding narrow stairs, ancient doors, steep ladders, and finally a stubborn trap door whose hinges turned with a sepulchral moan.

Cautiously he raised his head to look round the bell-chamber. Dim October light barely filtered through louvers. The single bell hung silent and forlorn. There was dust, dirt, a few mummified pigeons, and enough cobwebs for a dozen Charles Addams anthologies. There was also, in the darkest corner, a bundle of black cloth hanging from a rafter. He thought it might be an old robe, left behind and long-forgotten, until it unwrapped itself and looked at him. Looked up at him; for the bundle – or, rather, creature – was hanging upside down. He saw clawlike hands; blood-red mouth on a dead-white face; beaky nose, deep-set beady eyes, and black hair slicked back from a widow’s peak. “Who are you?” he asked.

“I am Jasgodja.” The voice was as sepulchral as the ancient hinges, and heavily accented. “I am *nosferatu* – vampire.”

Chuck was by nature an open-minded man. “No kidding,” he replied. “Excuse me a minute.”