

Prologue

PAIGE

Eleven years earlier

“Did you have fun, Cupcake?”

“Yeeehaaah,” I whooped, leaping over the puddles on the sidewalk. It had rained while Mom and I were at the Mardi Gras party. It wasn’t raining anymore, but there were lots of black clouds in the sky and they made it feel a little creepy. Not that I *personally* was creeped out.

“And you’re sure you’re not cold in that thin dress?” Mom asked.

“A little,” I admitted, not wanting to lie to her. *Always be honest and always be yourself*, that was what she always told me. “See? I should have dressed up as a vampire after all. Then I’d have a cloak right now to keep me warm.”

Sighing, Mom took off her cardigan, crouched down and draped it over my shoulders. The cardigan was far too big, but it smelt so nice – of Mom, and of cake. There’d been king cake at the party. I loved king cake. As usual, though, I hadn’t gotten the slice with the baby, the little plastic one they bake into the cake which is meant to bring good luck.

“Oh, Paige. You know the deal with vampires.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know. Vampires are evil. It’s okay, Mom.”

She looked at me with a sad smile. “Your dad is a little strict sometimes, and I don’t want you to have to pretend just for our sake. But with vampires... it’s different. You haven’t seen the things your dad has seen. You just have to trust us, Cupcake, okay?”

I nodded, because I really did want to believe Mom and Dad – and I didn’t want to disappoint them. I was allowed to secretly think vampires were cool without telling anyone.

A big raindrop landed on my head, then another on my face and another on the back of my neck. It was as if someone had turned on a shower – a shower like the one in our old house that took a while to get going. Mom patted my arm one more time, then straightened up and took my hand, glancing around. It was pretty dark with the rain clouds overhead, though it couldn't have been that late or I would've been in bed already, even on Mardi Gras. And the streets of the French Quarter weren't very busy yet. When the city started to wake up it was time for me to go to bed, that was what Dad always said.

"Come on." Mom led me down one of the side streets.

"But Mom. We're meant to stick to the main streets," I protested. Dad never got tired of telling us this.

Mom sighed again. "I know, but I don't want you catching a cold right before Mardi Gras. You don't want to miss the parades. If you're afraid, though, we'll..."

I snorted. "I'm not afraid of danger. I laugh in the face of danger!" This was one of my favorite lines from *The Lion King*.

Mom laughed, although with less hilarity than the hyenas in the movie. "My fearless girl. Come on then, let's get home quick so we can cuddle up in our pajamas for a while before you go to bed."

We headed down the side street, away from the streetlights and the colorful Mardi Gras decorations, the buildings all decked out in purple, gold and green. The street was dark and it smelt horrible. And now I really was feeling the cold. I moved closer to my mom, feeling a little freaked out in spite of myself. Mom hurried me along until suddenly we heard a kind of scratching noise up ahead. We stood stock still. The next moment a garbage can fell over with a loud crash, and a shadow darted down the alley. My scream stuck in my throat. It was just a raccoon. Raccoons were cute – nothing to be afraid of.

"God, that gave me a shock." Mum put her hand to her heart. "Maybe we'd better go back after all. If your dad hears about this you won't be the only one in trouble." She laughed again, but in a way that didn't really sound like she found it funny.

We were about to turn back towards the main street when suddenly a man appeared in front of us. He was kind of pale, with red eyes that looked genuinely creepy, and when he opened his mouth I could see two sharp fangs. A vampire costume!

“That’s so cool!”

No sooner were the words out of my mouth than the man grabbed me. A second later a sharp pain shot through my neck. It was as if someone had driven two huge needles into my skin. I screamed. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Mom pull a wooden stake from her waistband and lunge at the man. He spun around and let go of me. I put my fingers to the wound on my neck, which hurt even more than the time I’d accidentally cut the palm of my hand with Finn’s penknife. My skin felt warm and sticky and my fingers came away red. Blood. It was blood. The man had bitten me, and now he was trying to bite Mom.

But no, this wasn’t a man, not like Dad or Stu. This was a vampire.

“Mom!” My voice was no more than a croak.

“Run, Paige!” Mom screamed. And then she screamed again as the vampire plunged his sharp fangs into her neck.

What could I do? I couldn’t leave Mom. I’d never forgive myself. But if I stayed here the vampire would get us both. Help! I had to call for help – but my throat felt as if I’d been eating sand. Again the only sound I could get out was a croak, a piteous whimper. *Mom!* Tears filled my eyes. As if through a veil I saw her struggling with the vampire. I tried to go to her but my legs wouldn’t move. They were barely holding me up. My legs, like my voice, weren’t doing what I wanted them to.

The wooden stake fell to the ground with a clatter and rolled across the wet asphalt. At the same moment my mom went limp and collapsed.

“Mom!”

This time my scream echoed off the walls of the alleyway, and then everything happened very fast. Without thinking I bent to pick up the wooden stake which lay at my

feet, gripped it firmly in both hands and walked towards the vampire, who was still licking my mom's blood from his lips. When he turned to me I plunged the wooden stake right into his heart. The vampire screeched like a wild animal. In shock I let go of the stake, now lodged in his chest, and stumbled backwards. He stared down at the stake, then at me. And then he turned to ash before my eyes and was washed by the rainwater down the nearest drain.

I ran to my mom and fell to my knees. Her eyes were closed, and there was so much blood.

"Mom!" I whispered, taking her hand. It felt far too cold. I bent over her, holding my cheek to her mouth, her nose – and I felt nothing but rain, fear, rage and despair. She wasn't breathing. And at that moment I knew she would never breathe again.

"Mom!"

I screamed so loudly I almost startled myself. Tears mingled with the rain on my face, and I sobbed loudly. I could only dimly make out a group of women coming down the alleyway, but they were too late. Just as I had been too late. My mom was dead – killed by a vampire.

Chapter 1

PAIGE

“Goddamn bloodsuckers!” I swatted the little bastard with my bare hand. Too late. I saw a smudge of blood on my fingers, and I could already feel the painful itch where I’d been bitten. Irritated, I peeled the squashed remains of the mosquito from the palm of my hand, where a pale scar shimmered.

“Perhaps you should focus on getting ready for the run.”

“Perhaps you should focus on your own shit, James,” I snapped.

“Oho. Alright, Carrie, we’ll fight it out on the road. I’m gonna enjoy seeing you eat my dust.” James Riley flashed me an arrogant grin before lowering the visor on his helmet.

I was tempted to remind him that my name was Carrington. Paige Carrington. But I managed to bite my tongue. “Yeah, we’ll see, James. We’ll see,” I said instead.

The adrenaline that was coursing through me – in my anger at James and in anticipation of the run – wasn’t doing my heart rate any good, but my voice didn’t let it show. I’d learned to conceal my feelings when I needed to. All that mattered now were the two C’s: concentration and control. This wasn’t just about putting James in his place – although I was definitely going to do that – it was also about staying alive. One slight mistake and it was all over – in the worst-case scenario not only for me but also for JD, Finn or Mo. Our club had over a hundred members; we had to be able to rely on each other. I was going to show them they could rely on me a hundred percent. And not only because I was Conrad Carrington’s daughter.

One last deep breath, one last glance in James’s direction, and then I pulled on my own helmet over my bandana, leaned forward and gripped the handlebars of my red Harley FXR. I felt the rubber in the palms of my hands, the leather seat beneath me and the hot asphalt under my boots. The heat shimmered in the distance – I could almost hear it, that’s how quiet it was in this sleepy little town. Out of respect, the residents had all gone inside their

houses – a few stood inquisitively at their windows, peering out at us. At that moment we were all totally focused. My dad, sitting in front and to the left of me on his heavy Harley, cast one last glance over his shoulder, taking in James and all the others, his eyes resting for a moment on me. Then he looked ahead again and raised his hand. Almost simultaneously, a hundred engines roared into life. The revving of the bikes shook the asphalt, vibrated through my body and filled me (in spite of my nerves) with the same euphoria that had coursed through my veins like liquid joy when I'd set out on my very first ride. This moment was everything – but it only lasted a few seconds. As soon as my dad and Stu rode off I put my foot down too, and moments later the Louisiana countryside was whizzing past me.

James, who was an excellent rider, got off to just as good a start as me. I was aware of him beside me but I couldn't risk a sideways glance as we passed the Lake Arthur sign, still accelerating. Mo and Finn, who'd started off level with us, were some way behind now. Immediately James and I moved apart so they wouldn't be able to overtake. But with every mile we drew closer together again until finally we were speeding down Highway 26 at eighty miles an hour with our handlebars almost touching. My heart was beating almost as fast, and my whole body was energized as if by an electric current as I steered the bike beneath me. The sound of the engines roared in my ears, but I still felt as though I could hear the rush of my own blood. This was crazy, reckless, dangerous, but it was the ultimate adrenaline rush – that was all part of it. Our club president and his number two always rode at the front when we went out on a run, that was the rule, but the ten spots behind them were equally important, and those had to be earned. So we battled it out: a road race in which only the fastest and boldest could triumph. I was the club president's daughter but that didn't mean I got special treatment – quite the opposite, actually. I was constantly having to prove myself. Partly because I was Conrad's daughter, and partly because I had two X chromosomes. Women were not welcome in motorcycle clubs – that hadn't changed since the Hells Angels was founded in the 1940s. I was the only exception, and James took great delight in making it difficult for me. He wanted the spot that was mine by rights, but I wasn't going to let him have it – nor the pole position behind my dad.

I edged even closer to James. He had no choice but to veer left to stop our handlebars colliding. I heard him cuss, and I couldn't help grinning. James Riley was a good rider: his only problem was that he was too sure of himself, especially where I was concerned. That was his downfall.

He was pretty close to the unsurfaced edge of the highway now, so I accelerated past him before anything could happen. I didn't want to cause an accident, only to shake James off: and I did, but he soon caught up with me again and tried to force me over to one side. *Oh, James!* He was so predictable. For a fraction of a second I braked, only to overtake him again on the left. Behind us Mo revved his engine, but we both knew the situation wasn't dangerous. I knew my limits and would never go beyond them. Not even to get one over on James. My top priority was all of our safety.

James drew close to me again a few times, in half-hearted attempts to save face. But he knew when he was beaten. The road race was over and once again I'd secured my spot behind my dad.

The rush of the air as I rode stopped me from sweating under my maroon pleather jacket, and gradually the adrenaline rush wore off. Although I still had to concentrate, I could finally relax now and enjoy the ride. We were on Interstate 10. As I roared along behind Dad and Stu I sang to myself, the catchy chorus of *Black Betty*. The song was our club's unofficial anthem and was inextricably linked, for all of us, with our runs. Whenever I heard the rocky guitar intro I seemed to feel the wind in my hair and the Harley vibrating beneath me. Dad had given me the bike for my eighteenth birthday three years ago, and we'd spent hours working on it together. Nothing could spoil my mood today, not even the cops – who accompanied us home from Lafayette, as they so often did, to make sure we stayed on the interstate and didn't make any trouble. To be fair, I could see how a hundred bikers in leathers on heavy motorbikes could seem kind of sketchy. But even though I understood where the cops were coming from, they still pissed me off. A lot of the time they didn't even let us have a pit stop, despite the fact that we had no intention of causing trouble. I certainly didn't, anyway. And the others just wanted to enjoy the ride too – this run at the start of

February was especially important to us. Tough days lay ahead, and this was our last chance to recharge and tank up on strength and energy.

As we crossed the Atchafalaya Basin a jolt went through my body as if at the touch of a button, and the atmosphere around me suddenly changed. There was a subliminal aggression now, a tension, a wariness. Even the cops seemed to sense it: they started to cast vigilant glances around them just like the rest of us. Only my dad rode stoically on, never slowing.

I got a wistful feeling as the incredible landscape raced past me: mangroves, cypresses covered with Spanish moss, and other trees, flashes of swamp showing between them every now and again. The bayou was a fascinating ecosystem, one I always wished I could have explored properly. Most of the time we had no business here – this was *their* domain, and usually we would make detours to avoid it. But not today, so close to Mardi Gras. The city had been celebrating since the beginning of January, but two weeks before Mardi Gras was when the party really got going.

We organized about four rides a year. Partly just for the thrill of riding, obviously, but it was also about community spirit and meeting members of other chapters (branches of the club based in other cities). The run in February was also an opportunity for us to remind our enemies who they were dealing with.

Today they let us pass – and I knew it wasn't because the cops were with us. I knew they'd attack us when they got the chance. They were probably just conserving their energy.

This time the tension in my body didn't fade even after we'd left the swamp behind and arrived in Baton Rouge. It wouldn't be long till the Mardi Gras celebrations reached their peak and our enemies descended on the city in droves, as they did every year. It was time for New Orleans to steel itself for the onslaught of the vampires.

Chapter 2

LAVAUGHN

“Would you do me the honor, Véronique?” Holding my left hand behind my back and bowing my head, I offered my right hand to our leader’s “daughter”.

“The honor is all mine, Lavaughn,” she replied with a curtsey.

She put her hand in mine and I pulled her in for a kiss. Nicki put her arms around me and pressed herself against me seductively. I took a swift step backwards and held her by the hips, before my body could respond to her advances.

“Let’s do this later, darling. I’ve promised Johnny a rematch. You know what he’s like.”

Doing the long jump into the water was just something we did for shits and giggles – we had to pass the time somehow – but Johnny took it all very seriously. Nicki came closer to me again, so close that her warm lips almost touched my ear as she replied, “I’ll hold you to that, Lavaughn. I’ll be waiting for you at dawn. Raphaël will be in New Orleans meeting that lawyer from London, so we’ll have the whole boat to ourselves.”

“I can’t wait.” I pulled her to me again and nibbled her lower lip. Raphaël, Nicki’s “father”, didn’t like it when we did this in front of him, but what the hell. Nicki and I were old enough to make our own decisions, for Dracula’s sake. If we wanted to have a little fun with no strings attached, no-one could tell us not to. Least of all Raphaël – who wasn’t actually Nicki’s father, at least not in the traditional sense. He’d made her a vampire and taken her in when she was nearly murdered by members of the Ku Klux Klan a hundred years ago. They’d both suffered a similar fate, and straightaway there was a connection between them. Nicki and I had a connection too, though of a slightly different kind. So what? I’d given up justifying myself to other people a hundred and fifty years ago. And I wasn’t about to start now just for Raphaël’s sake, even if he was our leader and my plans for the

future depended on keeping him sweet. I wasn't about to start tying myself in knots for him. I didn't need to.

The others whistled and whooped as Nicki and I walked to the end of the jetty where Johnny and Eve were already waiting impatiently for us.

"You guys ready?" grumbled my best friend, as Eve popped her bubblegum languidly. A synthetic cherry smell filled my nose, masking for a moment the dank smell of the water. Its surface rippled in the twilight.

"Chill, Johnny. Unless you have plans later or something?"

"No. But you do."

Shrugging, I crouched down. "So what – the Elders are always keeping *me* waiting. It's not going to kill them to wait five minutes for me for a change."

Behind us, Stacey laughed out loud. I gave her a quick wink over my shoulder before putting my hand out to Nicki. She must have been an acrobat in a former life – seconds later she was on my shoulders. I gripped her bare thighs and stood up again. Beside me, Johnny lifted Eve onto his broad shoulders.

"Okay, get ready," Stacey commanded.

I moved to the edge of the jetty, feeling the rough wood beneath the soles of my feet and the breeze, still too warm, on my bare skin. I focused my eyes on the shimmering green water in front of me. In the distance, beneath the bald cypresses laden with Spanish moss, I spotted an alligator. It seemed to be staring straight at me, but I didn't bat an eyelid. The alligators left us alone now, having learned the hard way that it was best not to mess with us. They'd finally accepted that they had to share the swamp. And in that they were way ahead of some of us, including my humble self. But I'd worry about the future later.

"Three... two... one..." Stacey counted down, leaving far too long a pause after each number.

On *three* I glanced back one more time at the people behind us, causing them to start cheering again; on *two* I bent my knees, and on *one* I pushed off from the jetty. Nicki's whoop echoed around the bayou, startling the golden eagles and sending the alligator darting for cover as we sailed out over the water. At last we plunged in. The cold water closed over our heads, dragging Nicki off my shoulders. I managed to grab her arm and pull her close so we would create less resistance. Together we sank to the bottom, where it was always colder and murkier. Then we kicked off from the bottom, floated upwards and broke the surface of the water. I brushed my hair out of my face as Nicki raised one arm with a shout that resounded from the trees. Our audience broke into cheers and applause. I noted with satisfaction that we'd jumped half an alligator's length further than Johnny and Eve.

Grinning, I put my hand out for a high five. Nicki high-fived me and then wrapped her legs around my waist and pressed her lips to mine. This time I didn't put any distance between us – I held onto her ass, wanting to feel her soft, curvy body close to mine. My dick reacted immediately, and Nicki let out a gasp.

"This is torture, Lavaughn," she murmured against my lips.

"That's a promise, babe."

Before she could reply, the roar of at least a hundred engines rang out across the bayou. My head turned with a jolt towards the source of the noise. It was those fucking motorbikes! But then a flock of green herons flew past over our heads, and I realized Stacey was standing as if turned to stone. Her whole body had gone rigid, from her short spiky gelled hair to her black-varnished toenails. I forgot my own anger. In seconds I was out of the water and standing beside her on the jetty. Stacey let out a hiss and went into attack mode. I only just managed to grab hold of her before she could take off.

"Don't," I said softly, shaking my head. "They will get what's coming to them, but now's not the right time."

"When, then?" asked Stacey. "It's been a year. A whole fucking year, Lavaughn." She turned her head towards me, and there were tears in her eyes.

“I know, Stacey. I know,” I said gently, though inside of me a hurricane was raging. In vampire years twelve months was not a long time – unless someone gave us a reason to mourn. Then a year felt like a whole decade. And Stacey had a hell of a lot to process.

The tension drained from Stacey’s body. I let go of her, knowing she was no longer about to put herself in danger in her desperate hunger for revenge. Instead, I put my arms around her.

“It’s all going to be okay. They’ll pay for what they did to Genevieve.”

Stacey nodded weakly against my chest, and I could only hope I would soon be able to make good on my promise.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw something moving and there was Raphaël, hurrying along the jetty towards us.

“Was that the bikes?” he asked, alarmed.

“It was,” I replied.

Raphaël’s gaze moved from Stacey, still sheltering in my arms, to Nicki, Johnny and Eve, who had also climbed out of the swamp and positioned themselves behind me like a protective shield, and then to the others, who were standing a few yards away not knowing quite what to do with themselves. The mood was still one of anger – Stacey wasn’t alone in wanting to see the bikers suffer. This anger had been smouldering for a long time, and last year at Mardi Gras it had flared into a wildfire that had been burning more and more fiercely for months now. Something had got to give. Everyone had managed to restrain themselves so far; they’d listened to Raphaël and the Elders, and even to me when I’d asked them to be patient for a little while longer. But it couldn’t last. To be honest, I was sick of always being the sensible one. For months I’d been trying to win round the Council of Elders, talking at them till I was blue in the face, but it had all been in vain. I didn’t hold out much hope that today’s meeting would change their minds either. They didn’t want to change anything – they were too set in their ways. But the knife-edge moment with Stacey just now had given me yet more proof that we couldn’t carry on the way we were.

“Everything okay?” Raphaël asked, looking again at Stacey.

I nodded. “All under control.”

Sniffing, Stacey slipped out of my arms and wiped her tearstained eyes angrily. “For now. But if something doesn’t change soon, I won’t be held responsible for my actions.”

Raphaël sighed and we exchanged a glance. It had taken all my powers of persuasion, but at least he was now on my side. It was just a shame he couldn’t come with me to the meeting today, to tell the Elders this face-to-face – although he’d never had much influence with them before. I had no illusions about that. He was our leader, yes, but in our hierarchy that didn’t mean much. In spite of his position he was still just someone who took orders and made sure they were followed by everyone else. And until now his position had been so important to him that he hadn’t wanted to go against the Elders or make a nuisance of himself. But now that we were on the same side, hopefully we’d start to see a shift.

“What are you still doing here, anyway? I wouldn’t keep the Elders waiting if I were you. It’s you who wants something from them, not the other way around.”

“As if they’d ever change their opinion of me and my views just because I happened to be punctual.” I took my clothes with a smile as Nicki handed them to me, and pulled on my jeans and shirt over the top of my wet shorts. “Thanks, darling. I’ll see you later.” With one last wink in her direction, I set off. Raphaël followed me without speaking, but I sensed there was something he wanted to say. “Spit it out,” I prompted.

He cleared his throat. “You know I’m fond of you, don’t you?”

I glanced at him, amused. “This again? Are you going to give me the spiel about how I need to keep my hands off Nicki? Perhaps you should tell *her* that. She’s the one who can’t keep her hands off me.”

Raphaël rolled his eyes. “Do you really think this is helpful, Lavaughn?”

I had to suppress a smile. “For someone who used to be famous for having orgies on his houseboat before Nicki came to the Bayou, you sure are a prude.”

Raphaël sighed and held up his hands. “Okay, okay. Maybe I am too much of a prude these days. Maybe I should stay out of Véronique’s love life. It’s just – she’s my girl, so don’t you go breaking her heart. Understand?”

“Nicki knows exactly what she wants, believe me. She’s more than capable of taking care of herself.”

Raphaël grabbed my arm, forcing me to stand still. “I asked you if you understood. If you trample on Nicki’s heart I’ll rip yours clean out of your body, is that clear?”

“Crystal,” I replied. I had no desire to argue with him. Raphaël liked to play the role of Nicki’s protector, but he wasn’t going to switch back to the Elders’ side just because I was fooling around with his daughter. And Nicki was the least of my worries.

“Alright then.” He let go of me and we carried on walking. “Now, about your meeting. Would it be better if I did come with you?”

Without thinking I shook my head. Of course I would have liked to have him there, because the Elders were more likely to listen to him than me, but I had to do this without him – to show him and the Council that I could manage on my own. After all, I wanted to be Raphaël’s right-hand man one day.

“I’ll be fine. You focus on getting ready for your meeting with Smith, that’s more important.”

Raphaël nodded. “In theory I agree. But I don’t want to leave you in the lurch. If you need me...”

“You’ll be there, I know. But I can do this, okay?” I sure hoped so, anyway.

“Lavaughn!”

It wasn't the first time Timothy had said my name, his voice mildly irritated, stretching out the syllables for far longer than was necessary. I was starting to lose patience. How could the Elders be so stubborn? But heated arguments were not the answer – I wouldn't get anywhere that way. I'd tried it with the Elders enough times before and never managed to change their minds. It was time for a new strategy.

"I know my name, thank you, Timothy." I couldn't help it. But I kept my tone scrupulously friendly and crossed one leg over the other to show how relaxed I was. "In fact you were there, weren't you, in 1730, when my mother gave me that name?"

Timothy, sitting between Walter and Claude at the long table in front of me, closed his eyes for a moment and massaged the bridge of his nose before turning to face me again. "I'll tell you again, Lavaughn. We are not going to reveal ourselves to the humans. That's our final word."

"Okay." I nodded and pushed down the anger in my belly instead giving vent to it. "Am I allowed to know why? Don't get me wrong, I respect your decision. You're the Elders, after all: I'm sure you have all of our best interests at heart." My new tactic seemed to be working – the three men were looking at each other in bewilderment. I smiled inwardly.

Walter was the first to react. He looked at me through narrowed eyes. "What are you planning? You're up to something."

"Not at all. I just want to understand where you're coming from, that's all."

Walter shook his head. "You want to talk us under the table, since your temper tantrums haven't had the desired effect. There's no point in denying it. The decision is made, Lavaughn, and you need to accept it."

I raised my hands defensively. "Walter, please. How am I supposed to accept it if I don't understand the reasons behind it?"

"Nothing would change if we revealed ourselves to the humans," Timothy explained with studied patience. "Or do you seriously believe they'd confront the bikers just so we could have free access to New Orleans again?"

“Probably not,” I admitted. “At least not right away.”

“You saw what happened to the dragons after the dragon princess shapeshifted in that football stadium,” Walter chided. “And how the humans treated the Mexican girl, La Catrina, and persecuted the witch clans. You can’t really want that.”

“It’s true that humans are mistrustful by nature, but they *are* capable of learning. The re-election of Prime Minister Padraig Lynch in Ireland shows that the majority of the Irish, at least, don’t approve of how the dragons and La Catrina were treated. Isn’t it completely normal to set boundaries first and then work out how to get along with each other?”

“Like I said, you’re trying to talk us under the table,” Walter repeated, irritation in his voice. “Where’s Raphaël, anyway? Why didn’t he come with you?”

“He’s getting ready for his meeting with Simon Smith, the British lawyer. Had you forgotten he was in New Orleans? Raphaël is a hundred percent behind me, though. He’s come around to my view. That we need to rethink our entrenched structures.”

Claude raised his eyebrows disapprovingly. “And he can’t spare half an hour to come and tell us that himself?”

“No, because there’s absolutely no need, believe me. I’d never lie to you about this.”

“Oh! But you would lie to us about other things?”

I couldn’t help rolling my eyes. “Of course not. And I haven’t been chewing your ear off for weeks about this same subject just for the fun of it – it’s because I think it’s vital we start planning for the future. The other clan members are getting restless. If we carry on as we have been, things are not going to end well.”

Timothy let out a sigh. “And how is revealing ourselves to the humans supposed to help?”

“We all want justice, and above all freedom. These developments are our chance to take action. Aren’t you sick of being forced to the edges of civilisation by a biker gang? It’s

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time for us to take back what was once ours. Or do you want to be pushed around forever by the self-appointed vampire hunters?"

"No," replied Timothy to my surprise, after exchanging a glance with Walter and Claude. "But we don't need the humans for that. Listen to our plan."