

VAMPIRE ROADTRIP

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ISBN: 978-0-9841074-6-9
0-9841074-6-0

Published by JimSam Inc.
P.O. Box 265
Lobelville, TN 37097
www.JimSamInc.com

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1st printing 2011
Printed in U.S.A.

Editing by Kristen Lijewski
Cover design by Jeff Couturier
Photograph of Doreen Serrano by Michael Norris

Dedication

To my loving wife Kristen and my children Vinnie, Piper, and Memphis, who inspire me each and every day.

I'd also like to thank my parents, Tom and Marlene Lijewski; *all* family members and friends, including but not limited to: Eight Ball Grifter (John Mizga, Matt Theodoroff, and Dylan Ratzsch); the Deans (Morgan May Moallemian and Eric Hardy); Doug and Leslie Ditto; Sam Ditto; Jacob Ditto; and every band and every person who has contributed to life's experience.

~ Wade Lijewski

- Mom and Tom for remaining my baseline for morality.
- The sisters who complete my Circle: Colleen and Julie, whose roles in this lifetime have given me the strength, power, and courage I would not have had as only one.
- My son, Michael, for proving to me that I've done something right in this world.
- My son, Alex, whose story ideas and creativity can be seen throughout every page of this book.
- To Rob, my One and Only Devil Forever – for bringing me back to life and showing me that some risks, no matter the outcome, are worth it.
- And to my Dad, who taught me to love thunderstorms, to find the positive in a negative world and to always trust myself despite all else. No matter where you may be in the Universe at any given moment, you will always be with me because your real home is in my Soul.

~ Doreen Serrano

Chapter I

Central Park had always been Dominic's favorite place to reflect. It was where he went when he needed to get away from the pack and when he needed to remember the man he once was. He appreciated his place in the family and he took his role as leader seriously but there were parts of Dominic none of them knew; he wanted to keep it that way. Memories of his mortality were still branded in his brain, giving him hope. Immortality had been a generous gift but no one had warned him of the true price. There had been no manual to which to refer and no frequently asked questions website to introduce him to life without a soul.

Dominic had wanted it all. It had always seemed a cruel joke from God, the greatest prankster of all, that human life expectancy wouldn't allow him to even make a dent in his ambitions. The time and youth allotted to humans were a teaser – a cheap appetizer thrown on their table as a reminder of what they could never really have. Because of the fleeting qualities, time and youth could never quite fill the needs of the mortals, so they were always left hungry and wanting for more. Suppressing his

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appetite as a vampire had been far more satisfying than quenching his thirsts as a human had been.

Dominic had always seen the universe as being filled with an infinite amount of flavors and he wanted to taste them all. He wanted to be an icon in the entertainment industry. He had longed for an important career that meant something, one that made an important mark on the world. He had yearned for a normal, quiet life with a wife and children and a beautiful home of his own. He had wanted to save the world. Suffering from frustration at his five meager senses and his short life span, he had always searched for ways to extend his time. In the end, he knew that was the reason that he hadn't resisted the bite that turned him.

Walking through the dark fog that seemed to envelop the entire park, Dominic remembered the hungry fangs and how they had penetrated his most prominent vein. Rather than defending himself and trying to protect his vulnerable throat, he had tipped his head back to expose it further. Every day for the last twenty years, he had wondered if the acceptance of his turning had been his most unforgivable act of all in the eyes of his first maker. Dropping himself onto the closest bench, he rested his back against the hard wood and narrowed his ice blue eyes as the fog surrounded him.

The simple gesture worked as an on switch that activated his night vision, one of the many gifts given him upon the change. It allowed him to see all of the things that, as a human, he was unable to see; he shook his head slowly, snickering at the irony of it all. The gifts that seemed so special to him in the beginning gradually

lost their novelty over the years especially after the realization that his existence had been far better when he couldn't see the world for what it was. Dominic had come to realize humans were fortunate indeed for their inability to see the universe in all of its ugliness and torment.

He was antsy but couldn't quite figure out from where it was coming. Rising from the bench, he continued his walk through the park as memories from that night played out in his head over and over again. The bite, though painful and terrifying, had begun the metamorphosis that he could neither fight, nor resist. He remembered the blackness that had taken over and how it had been followed by a deep fear that he had been stricken with blindness and paralysis for the rest of his days. Pulling his jacket tighter against his body, he tried to shake away the memories as he concentrated instead on the sounds of the park – squirrels scurrying to their trees as nuts fell from their filled jaws; debris as it was pulled along by the wind until a stronger gust swallowed it entirely; discarded cans scraping across the gravel; humans giggling in the distance.

He enjoyed the noises and wanted nothing more than to bask in their presence but was not strong enough to fight the memories when they demanded his attention. Reluctantly, he found himself tuning out the sounds from his present as he was transported to that moment of his past, which he couldn't make himself forget, no matter how hard he tried. He had awakened from his death to a burning passion he had never before known with the realization that his new existence had no end and the discovery that he could hear the thoughts of those who

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passed him on the street... It hadn't taken long to find his new life had certain advantages over his human life. He had been blessed with a different kind of awareness, one he thought he wanted until he actually possessed it. God's once questionable existence became undisputed knowledge so there was no longer the requisite that he rely on blind faith. Sadly, he had come to realize that faith was necessary to the continuance of his spirit; without it his soul was painfully malnourished and impossible to sustain.

Dominic had been pulled into some inner circle of understanding, becoming privy to God's design for the universe and His penchant for soul play. He learned that reincarnations were designed to accommodate the humans' continued existence and he had reeled from the truth of their existence. God's plan had been well thought out and perfectly executed; Dominic felt a certain privilege to have been blessed with the knowledge. It wasn't until years after his turning that Dominic fully understood what it meant for him.

When time no longer mattered and loss of life was no longer a possibility, appreciation was a gift of the past. Because of their knowledge of a beginning and an end, the humans lived with constant gratitude they didn't even realize they possessed. Upon his discovery that happiness actually thrived upon the limitations of the human experience, Dominic had finally been forced to admit to himself that his gifts had actually been curses. He had fallen into despair upon learning the painful truth; by throwing his gift of mortality back into God's face, he had committed the worst of all possible sins. He knew

he had been deemed the villain in the Good Book of the believers and it was an agonizing conflict for him.

His only choice had been to find some way to continue without falling victim to the debilitating resentment that had overtaken him. He had refused to allow the darkness to take him entirely because he knew once he surrendered himself to it, he would be sacrificing the last vestiges of his humanity. He had forced himself to welcome the new awareness and to view it as a gift but had to work hard not to share it with the wickedness that repeatedly whispered out his name, lest he allow himself to become the monster that the bite had intended.

He had found ways to utilize his amplified senses and his bestowed abilities of mind-speak and thought reading only for the good of man, refusing steadfastly to share his abilities with the darkness that beckoned him. It was a difficult, almost painful balance to maintain but there was never another choice for him. Dominic had vowed to destroy himself before allowing innocent blood to stain his hands. He would do what was necessary to survive but would not do so at the expense of the humans who were truly pure of heart.

With the help of the music that had always guided him and the ability to feed off only the evildoers, he had been able to survive in his new role for the past twenty years. His family had been handpicked from a pool of other like-minded vampires who believed as he did. Existence hadn't been easy for any of them because the balance had to be maintained at all times and it was not easy to keep. He had learned to live with the painful irony that his new life could never be as enjoyable as his old one because the promise of a forever ruined it for him.

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Dominic slowed his pace at the first signs of need. His cravings had become stronger and more powerful than they had been in the past and he began to worry that his plan had a flaw he hadn't foreseen. There was a new desperation attached to his hunger that had begun to cause an imbalance within and he knew what would happen if he tried to ignore it. Never wanting to reach the point where the need took over, he and his pack had devised a schedule to include the routine thievery of human souls.

Killing wasn't truly a necessity as it was not the mortals' life source that filled the void. It was the taste of their souls and their essence that sustained Dominic and his pack, drawing through small increments of blood. However, deep-seated greed and gluttony teased them to drink long after the need had passed and his pack had discovered it foolish to believe they could stop after only a few drops. It was who they were, what they had become, and after learning the hard way that they were incapable of stopping themselves once the feeding had begun, they had put into play a new course of action that would keep them alive without forcing them to succumb to the darkness.

Dominic's knees began to weaken and his palms were saturated with nervous sweat as he flinched against an ache. Suppressing his instincts was uncomfortable and it stirred up an eerie sensation inside to which he referred as his 'dark passenger.' Having recently started justifying to himself that it might be acceptable to harm an innocent here and there, Dominic had begun to face the reality he had hoped would never come. The evil he

had ingested had begun to turn on him. If he did not find another way, and soon, a choice would have to be made – continued survival as a monster or the sacrifice of his own existence altogether.

He knew the answer was somehow related to music – the one force that had not lost its power and that still held the ability to tame the savage beasts within that worked so hard to take over. It had been another of God's gifts that the humans had not come to fully realize and it had the power to inspire untapped abilities in both species. It was their catharsis and their anchor and Dominic knew if he could figure out how to use it to its fullest potential, it was quite possibly their salvation.

His hunger needed to be satisfied immediately and Dominic sniffed the air like a dog. His blue eyes shone as they darted around in every direction in search of something, anything that might hold him over until he'd arrived at his intended destination. A nearby squirrel scrunched its nose rhythmically as it analyzed the acorn in its paws and Dominic's eyes narrowed as he manipulated its thought waves. Commanding the rodent to stay put, he crept up slowly behind it and readied his built-in arsenal: his nails and his teeth.

The squirrel became alerted to his presence right before Dominic's mini blades pierced its side with brutal force. With his sharpened nails, he pulled the small, meaty snack to his mouth like a shish-ka-bob and tried to feel grateful for the two bites the tiny creature offered. Still hungry, he continued to trudge along, depressed that the excitement had been so short-lived. Breathing a sigh of relief after turning the corner, he made his way to

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the end of Central Park and gazed upon the apartment complex before him. Looking at the address that stared back at him, he felt the excited palpitations that always preceded a kill.

Dominic jumped over the low gate that enclosed the courtyard of the complex and followed the short path that led to the side of the building, remaining hidden in the shadows the whole way there. Passing a first floor window, he looked in and saw the woman – the wife, the victim of domestic violence and the mother who was too afraid of her own punishment to protect her child. She had a black eye and swollen cheeks that were stained with tears. As she leaned over the oven to put a meatloaf inside, Dominic accidentally tripped over an empty beer can and it ricocheted off the nearby gate. He ducked down just in time for her to turn his way and remained below window level the rest of his way around the corner. Part of him wanted to kill her for her cowardice but it was the part that Dominic refused to nourish yet.

The next window belonged to the nine-year-old boy he had seen in the newspaper. His room was painted two different shades of blue, as though the painter had changed his mind halfway through. Model airplanes hung from invisible string in each of the corners and their display boasted endless hours of time and concentration. The window was opened a crack and a dim light escaped from the closet, making the boy visible in an otherwise darkened room.

Dressed in Spiderman pajamas, he sat Indian style on the floor with his head rested back against the wall. His thumb was lost inside his mouth and he sucked away at

it with desperation, as though he had reverted to his infant years when life had been safer. He seemed oblivious to the world around him and the sight made Dominic hate the father who had forced him into such a pathetic state of regression. He fantasized also about making dessert of the judge who had sent the boy back home as well as the social workers who slept peacefully in their own beds. When he tapped lightly on the glass, the boy showed no response so Dominic continued on to the next window in search of dinner and justice in one sitting. The hairs standing up on the back of his neck told him he had found his prey and he remained as quiet as possible as he peeked inside.

“You.”

The angry whisper inside of his head only added to the rage he already felt rising within. He pulled his head out of view and held it firmly against the wall as he worked to reel in the emotions before they could cause him to make a mistake.

“Charles Mahoney.”

Dominic spit the words out like they were a bad taste. He had seen the monster’s name and face in an article at the previous day’s ‘first wake’ and there had been no doubt in his mind where he would go to dine. A school janitor, Charles Mahoney had been accused of molesting eleven boys between classes and during after school activities. Though he had lost his job and had his son removed from his custody, something had gone awry in the state’s case and because of their errors, the boy was returned to a father who was willing to hurt him and a mother who was unwilling, or unable, to put herself in harm’s way to protect him.

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Lounging comfortably on his rumpled bed, the pervert faced Dominic with closed eyes. He napped peacefully while his wife despaired over meatloaf in the kitchen and his son sat catatonic in the next bedroom, ruined in all the ways that mattered. Charles Mahoney deserved a slow and painful exit from the world and Dominic felt no guilt for ridding the world of the sleazy pedophile. He did harbor some concern, however, that the man's wickedness would infect him upon the bite and that by absorbing the monster, he himself would become monstrous.

Dominic tried to embrace his role as Bible antagonist as he pulled open the window and squeezed himself in quietly beneath the glass without disturbing light or sound. He tried not to gag on the heavy stench of beer, smoke and sweat that assaulted him and he had to stop himself more than once from pouncing on the man without fanfare. Charles Mahoney deserved to experience the same fear and pain that he had brought down upon his family.

The bedroom was cluttered with empty beer cans while a pack's worth of butts overflowed from an ashtray next to him. Dominic looked with disgust at the child molester, propped up comfortably against the pillows, snoring soundly; he made a beeline for the sleeping sloth, too excited to draw out the moment any longer. Dominic pressed a hand tightly over the man's mouth and utilized enough force to keep him pinned to his pillow despite the struggle. Filled with satisfaction, he watched in delight as the pedophile's eyes flew open in shock and he greeted him with a blade-toothed smile. He saw the plea,

the fear... the submission in his eyes and felt a sense of justice in the tingling of his own fingertips.

Dominic cocked his head to the side and studied Charles Mahoney with interest as he listened to the screams inside the man's head. He could feel the desperation in his victim's incessant squirming but he felt not an ounce of pity for his terror. God had gifted Charles with humanity and he had made of himself a monster. For that alone he deserved to die.

"How terrifying this must be for you," Dominic said gently, shaking his head with feigned sympathy. "I mean, to realize that hell has come for you personally."

Charles screamed into his hand and the vibration tickled Dominic's palm, causing him to laugh louder and press down harder. Tipping his head to the right, he cherished the taunting for all it was worth as it recharged his energy and made him feel alive again. Though he enjoyed the rush completely and would have loved to continue it all night, he was mindful about the child and woman so close by. They didn't deserve any more trauma.

His original plan had not been to kill the man in his own home but instead to lure him out into the streets and hunt him down, a game he and his pack enjoyed playing on special occasions. Dominic had deemed the molester worthy of such a treat but the only opportunity that presented itself was in the here and now so he took it. Aware that he did not have the luxury of time, he pulled his hand from the man's mouth and drew a shush finger to his lips. From the horrified expression on the face of his prey, Dominic knew his transformation must have taken over completely and that Charles was no longer looking

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into the eyes of an intruder but instead, staring into the eyes of the creature the intruder had become.

"Sssshh," he whispered soothingly. "You don't want to scare your family, do you, Charles?"

Charles shook his head back and forth. His ragged clothing and unshaven face made him seem older and more fragile than he really was but he didn't put up as much of a fight as Dominic expected. It seemed as though he somehow knew that resistance would be futile.

"What do you want?" he cried. "I have money!"

"Do I look like I want money?" Dominic laughed.

Charles tried to make him comfortable with a smile but it came as more of a grimace. Lacking an appropriate amount of teeth and sincerity, Dominic found it disturbing on a strange level.

"Well then, what do you want?"

"Your remorse."

"Okay, okay! You got it!" Charles surrendered. "But what am I remorseful for?"

"You see?" Dominic asked, shaking his head in disappointment. "It doesn't work that way, Charles. You cannot vow remorse for something when you don't even know what that something is. Kind of defeats the purpose, you know what I mean?"

"I'm sure whatever you think I've done is good enough reason!" he groveled.

Dominic laughed heartily.

"It's that easy, huh?" he asked. "It's that easy to accept that you've done something heinous enough to warrant this kind of punishment?"

Before letting him answer, Dominic clamped a hand over the molester's mouth again but this time, he used

the silence to do more than just frighten him. With the long, thin blade that was once a right pinky nail, he sliced along the crooked crease above the man's eyebrows and it created a glistening line of blood from one side of his forehead to the other. Along with another muffled scream came a generous rush of tears and more fruitless struggling.

"What's the matter?" Dominic asked with sarcasm. "Did that hurt?"

Charles nodded violently as he tried to speak through the hand silencing him. Although Dominic heard the prayers inside of Charles' head and knew exactly what he was saying, he was having too much fun playing along.

"What?" Dominic asked, cupping an ear with his free hand. "I can't hear you."

He was rewarded with more tears and more muffled screams to which he simply rolled his eyes and covered a yawn. Plucking a piece of hair from the pedophile's head, he pulled it into his line of vision and started examining it, just for fun.

"I'll make you a deal," he said to his victim.

Charles nodded and blinked repeatedly as the tears ran off his cheeks and onto his neck.

"I'll take my hand off and let you speak if you promise not to call attention to yourself," Dominic bargained. "You wouldn't want to chance bringing harm to your family now, would you?"

The man shook his head to signify his obedience and Dominic fulfilled his promise to remove his hand. Glaring down into the cowardly eyes, he fought the urge to literally wipe the mouth right off Mahoney's face but out loud, he praised him.

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