

UNBELIEVABLE



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The word "UNBELIEVABLE" is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font. There are several red, blood-like splatters and drips on the letters 'L', 'I', 'E', and 'V'. A single drop is falling from the bottom of the first 'L'.

By

**Geoff Habiger
and
Coy Kisse**

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Author's Note: This story takes place immediately after the events depicted in *Unremarkable*.

Chapter 1

“**Y**ou want me to work for the Treasury Department?” I blurted out, confused by what Eliot Ness had just asked me. “You mean, like a G-man?”

“Exactly,” Ness replied. “Your circumstances have now made you uniquely qualified to join my team in our mission to take down Al Capone, once and for all.”

“You have a team?”

“Yes, and I’m hoping that you’ll become our newest member. You can say no, of course, but I really don’t want to have to put you down after all of the trouble that I’ve just gone through.” He smiled at that last part, so he was joking. At least, I hoped that he was joking.

I began pacing my new apartment as I thought about his offer. I was now dead to the world, literally. My life, as I knew it, was officially over. My parents thought that I was really dead. I’d never be able to see them again, to hug them and tell them that I love them. I’d never be able to tease my little sister about anything and everything. I couldn’t go back to the post office, so I had no job. My ex-girlfriend was already dead, so I didn’t have that to worry about, but it seemed that my options for what to do next were pretty limited. Not only that, but I’d also need a supply of blood.

The reminder of me drinking blood for the first time sent a quick wave of revulsion through my stomach, and the sudden need for water crashed into my head. I en-

tered the kitchen and opened one of the cabinets next to the sink. Inside were three octagonal-shaped glasses, all of which matched the red-stained one that had held the 'juice' that Ness had given me. I picked up one of the glasses and admired its cleanliness, momentarily, before filling it with water from the tap. This apartment was certainly an upgrade over my previous place, just in the selection of glassware alone. I wondered what other hidden treasures were awaiting my discovery as I took a sip from the glass. I offered Ness a glass, but he declined, so I closed the cabinet.

As I drank, I thought more about my new life. Ness had told me that I'd be getting a new name to go along with this nifty apartment and new job. I could completely reinvent myself. I would never be Saul Imbierowicz, unremarkable post office worker, ever again. Instead, I'd be a dashing Treasury Agent slash vampire, using all of my newfound skills to rid the world of the scourge that is Al Capone. *I'll stalk bad guys in the dark of the night, delivering vampiric justice. I'll be the best Treasury agent ever! No other agent can do what I can. No other agent... um...*

"So this team that you want me to join, they'll be okay with me being..." I hesitated, unsure of what word to use. I settled on, "... me?"

"No, no." Ness shook his head, emphatically. "None of them can know your true nature. As far as they're concerned, you'll just be a new recruit, eager to help rid the city of alcohol and those who supply it."

"So you'd be the only person who knows the real me and what I can do? How am I supposed to use my 'unique qualifications' if no one can know what I truly am?"

Ness considered what I had said for a few moments, and then nodded. "I see what you mean. If you can't be free to use your abilities, then there's really no point in

having you on the team at all.”

I suddenly grew concerned that I had just made myself useless to Ness, and that my brief respite from the land of the dead was about to be cut short, when he continued, “So that means that we’ll just have to get you a partner.”

“A partner?” I asked. “But that would mean that someone else would have to be brought into the loop about me not being dead. And about vampires. And about me being a vampire.”

“That’s true,” Ness replied. “Unless, of course, they were already aware of the existence of your kind.”

“Someone that already knows about vampires? That’s got to be a pretty short list.”

“It is. But there’s one name that I think might just float to the top. In fact, it’s someone that you already know.”

I was wracking my brain to try to figure out who Ness was talking about, when he continued, “Christian Wright.”

“Agent Wright?” My surprise was obvious. “I guess that would be okay with me. He always treated me pretty well. But he works for the Bureau of Investigation, doesn’t he? Do you think that he would be willing to join your team?”

“Yes, I think that we could convince him to come and work with our team.”

“*Our* team? But I haven’t even said yes, yet.”

“No, but you will. Al Capone murdered you. He stole everything from you that you hold dear. You’re not going to turn down the chance to get revenge on him. You’re going to jump at the chance, and thank me for the opportunity.”

Damn it, he’s right. That monster has to pay for what he did to me. For what he did to my family. No normal person will be able to take him down. It has to be me.

I sighed. “Fine, you win. I’ll join your team. What do

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we do now?"

“Right now, you rest up, and take some time to start getting used to your new home. I’ll come back tonight, and we can start to find out just what you can do.”

Chapter 2

After Ness left, I took his advice and collapsed onto what turned out to be a very comfortable couch. My very comfortable couch. Unfortunately, the comfort of my new furniture did not outweigh the fact that my life was in shambles. I couldn't go back to the post office, so I'd never get to chew the fat with my friend Joe about the Cubs again, or to share a meal with him at the diner as he fawned over the waitress, Francine. I'd never go to Temple again (not that I did that too often to begin with, as Mom constantly reminded me).

Mom. I'd never see her again. I'd never get another hug from her as she stood behind my chair at the dinner table, wrapping her arms around me and kissing the top of my head after setting a plate of warm *rugelach* in front of me, telling me to eat it before it got cold. I'd never be able to look back over my shoulder after leaving home to see her, blowing a kiss to me while standing on the front steps, holding hands with Dad, watching me go wherever I was headed.

Dad. I'd never be able to listen to another Cubs game with him, both of us agreeing that Frankie Frisch was just a flash in the pan, and that Kiki Cuyler was the fastest man in baseball. I'd never again get to see him come home from working an overtime shift at the plant, exhausted from the stress of the day, but satisfied that the work had been done, and proud that it had been done properly. I'd never

again get to hear him yell at me to stop fighting with Sarah over who got to choose which radio program we'd listen to next.

Sarah. I'd never get to tease my little sister about her prom dress, although I know that she'd look beautiful. I'd never get to see her graduate high school, and see the pride that she took in that accomplishment reflected in my parents' eyes. I'd never see her get married and have kids, never be their 'Uncle Saul', and never get to tell them all about what a nightmare their mother used to be when she was younger.

They all thought that I was dead, and the thought of that was killing me. The image of my family, huddled together, crying over my grave, sent me spiraling into a tornado of despair. The pain of that vision brought my own tears to bear, and they flowed freely, as I knew that I was the cause of all of that pain. Nobody should ever have to grieve their own loss, but this was worse, as I didn't even have the comforting embrace of death to end my suffering. I had to keep living through it all. *Or did I?*

You did not just think that, a voice replied. It sounded like Sarah. I sat up, and I looked around, searching for the source of the voice. I shook my head, trying to clear it.

I'm right here, nudnik, the voice said. Nobody was in the room with me, and it didn't sound like it was coming from a neighboring apartment. It sounded like it was coming from—

Your head? It's definitely empty enough, if you're having thoughts like that, big brother, the voice chided.

Sarah? Is that you? I asked, incredulous, and then thought to myself, *No, it can't be. I'm just imagining it.*

Oh, it's me, alright, Sarah said.

Is this another new vampire power? I can talk to you in my mind?

Vampire power? What are you talking about?

Oh, right, you don't know. You think I'm dead, but I'm not! Well, I guess that, technically, I am dead, but that's not the point.

So, what is the point?

The point, little sister, is that I'm not really dead. I got shot by Al Capone—

The Al Capone? Sarah interrupted.

Yes, the Al Capone. I bristled at the interruption. How many Al Capones do you know?

Well, I don't really know any Al Capones.

Then let me finish my story.

Okay, okay, fine, whatever. Go ahead.

Thank you. As I was saying, I got shot by Al Capone, and I died. Then I woke up here, in this apartment.

It's a lot nicer than your apartment.

Well, it is my apartment now, but yes, you're right, it is nicer. Anyway, apparently, Moira, my ex-girlfriend—

Wait, you had a girlfriend? How is that even possible?

I tell you that I've come back from the dead and you take that in stride, but I tell you that I had a girlfriend, and that surprises you?

Well, yeah, I think that the odds of you coming back from the dead would have been much higher.

Shut up. Will you please let me finish my story?

I'll try, but no promises.

Again, as I was saying, Moira, my ex-girlfriend—

Now, see, I can understand you having an ex-girlfriend, because no girl would want to stay with you, but I just don't get how you managed to get a girlfriend in the first place in order for her to be able to now be an ex-girlfriend.

ARGH! Will you just SHUT UP?

That's no way to talk to your sister, a man's voice chided. You apologize to her, right now.

Dad? I asked, wondering how this new power worked, and if I could connect to even more people.

Who were you expecting, John Barrymore? Dad's voice asked, rhetorically.

Sorry, Dad. I just wasn't expecting to hear your voice.

Just because you don't expect to hear me doesn't mean that you don't listen to what I'm telling you, he said, in the stern voice that he used when he was enforcing the rules.

Apologize to your sister. Now.

Sorry, I mumbled in my head.

What was that? I can't hear you, Sarah taunted.

That's because he's acting like a petulant child, Dad grumbled. *You apologize properly, like a man.*

I sighed. *Sarah, I am sorry for speaking to you so rudely, and I sincerely hope that you will accept my apology.*

Was that so hard? Dad asked.

Apology accepted, Sarah said.

I swear, the two of you just act like wild animals sometimes, a different female voice added.

Mom? I don't know why I was surprised. I should have expected to hear her after Dad had put in his two cents.

I'll never understand why you always make your father be the one to force you two to treat each other with respect, Mom scolded. *He works very hard at the plant, and he doesn't need to play ringmaster to your little circus when he comes home.*

Miriam, it's fine, Dad said.

No, David, Mom replied, *it's not fine. They should both be apologizing to you. If their Bubby was alive, God rest her soul, she'd be reading me the riot act about how I raised not just one, but two insufferably rude children.*

I'm sorry, both Sarah and I said, simultaneously.

Thank you, Mom and Dad both said, also simultaneously.

There was an awkward silence that lasted until I couldn't take it anymore, and I asked, *So, can I finish my story now?*

That won't be necessary, Saul, Dad replied.

Why not? I asked, confused.

Because we already know, dear, Mom said.

Huh? What? I babbled.

We all know what you're going to say already, Sarah explained, *because we're all you.*

Chapter 3

I sat, bolt upright, on the couch, as Sarah's (or, I guess, actually, my own?) words splashed into my face like a bucket of ice water. This wasn't some new vampire power. I was going screwy. Hearing voices. As if that, alone, wasn't bad enough, it took one of those voices actually pointing it out to me in order for me to finally realize it. How embarrassing is that?

I stood up and hurried into the bathroom, turning on the tap so that I could splash some actual water in my face. I had to compose myself. I couldn't tell anyone about this, especially Ness. If he found out, I wouldn't get to be a G-man, and I would most likely also get killed. Not that I would blame him. I mean, who wants an insane vampire running amok in their city?

I shut off the tap and went into the bedroom, thinking that, if I took a short nap, maybe I'd feel better. The bedroom was furnished with a simple bed, a nightstand with a shadeless lamp on it, and a chest of drawers. I rummaged through the drawers, finding them all empty, and then turned my attention to the nightstand. I sat down on the bed, and opened the single drawer on the nightstand.

Inside was a book. I picked it up and checked the spine: *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker. I sighed, and rolled my eyes. Ness must have thought that he was being funny. I quickly flipped through the book and noticed that, on the inside front cover, was an inscription—“*Maybe it will help.*”

E-” Ok, so maybe he wasn’t trying to be funny, after all.

I stretched out on the bed and thumbed through the first few pages. It did not hold my attention, with the primary focus of what little that I did read being paprika and geography rather than vampires. I tossed it on top of the nightstand, and vowed to myself that I would read it, cover to cover, later. I’d give it the benefit of the doubt that maybe Ness was right and that it would help, somehow.

Deciding to try to take a nap, I fell back on the bed and closed my eyes. I’m not sure exactly how long that I stayed in bed, but I never fell asleep, and I didn’t get the comfort that I so desperately sought. Disgruntled, I got out of bed and headed back into the kitchen. I opened the icebox, thinking that maybe Ness had left me something to eat, but the inside was as empty as the Wrigley Field bleachers in December, so I shut the door, disappointed.

As if on cue, my stomach rumbled. I was starting to get hungry. That little rumble started an avalanche of panic. What was I going to eat? My mind reeled as I eliminated possibility after possibility. I didn’t know how vampires were created, so I didn’t want to risk trying to feed on someone directly and accidentally do *this* to somebody else. I could have gone to the stockyards, but then someone that Dad works with might have spotted me, and I couldn’t let that happen. Ness might bring some blood with him when he returned, but, based on the angle of the sun, that wouldn’t be for several hours, at least. What would happen if I got so hungry that I lost control? I could hurt someone. Or kill them. *I’m not a monster! I’ve got to find another way!*

You know where there’s a lot of blood? Dad’s voice asked, and then answered his own question. *A butcher shop.*

I snapped my fingers. “That’s it! Thanks, Dad!” I said,

aloud, before realizing that I had actually spoken the words rather than just thinking them.

Dad replied, *You're welcome. What kind of father would I be if I couldn't help my own son in his time of need?*

"Okay, a butcher shop, that's good, I can work with that," I said, still speaking aloud, thinking that continuing to talk to myself out loud might make me feel a little better than limiting the conversation to the confines of my head. "But I don't even know where I am. I woke up here for the first time since I died, and I haven't been outside of this apartment yet. I don't even know my own address."

Sounds like you need to go on an adventure, Sarah prodded.

"I can't just stay here, hoping that food will magically appear," I said, testily. With that, I picked up the keys (*my* keys) to the apartment, and headed out into the hallway. As I locked the door behind me, an image of Mrs. R flashed into my head. I said a silent prayer for her, and made a mental note to get a second lock installed.

I took the stairs down, and exited the lobby out onto the street. I stood there momentarily, comforted by the bustle of the city, and by the sense of normalcy that it invoked in me. It was a brief respite, as a dark-suited man collided with my shoulder, knocking me to the ground as he continued on, grouching, "Watch where you're going, asshole!"

"I was just standing here, you jerk!" I called out to the man's back. He ignored me, walked on down the street, and turned the corner, disappearing from view.

Maybe he didn't see you, Sarah offered. *Is invisibility one of your new powers?*

"I don't think that I was invisible," I replied.

"I don't, either," a man's voice agreed.

Surprised, I looked up to see a police officer standing

over me. "Are you hurt?" He asked.

Embarrassed that he had caught me talking to Sarah, and determined not to let that happen again, I replied, "Just my pride." I started to stand up, and he offered his hand to help, so I took it. I brushed myself off as he asked, "You new around here? I haven't seen you before."

"Just moved in today," I replied. "This is your regular beat, then, Officer..." I prompted.

"Gallagher. Yep, I've been walking it for, oh, eight years now. Welcome to the neighborhood, Mister..." He echoed my prompt.

"I..." I began. I had started to say my last name, and quickly remembered that I was officially dead. My mind spun with how to proceed, when it hit me that I could kill two birds with one stone. "... If you've been around that long, maybe you can help me. I have nothing in my icebox, and I need to find a butcher shop. Could you direct me to the closest one?" Proud of myself for thinking so quickly on my feet, I smiled at the cop with, what I hoped, was an innocent, friendly smile.

"Oh, sure," he said, not realizing, or, at least, not mentioning, that I hadn't offered him my name in return. "About two blocks down, on your left, is Horvath & Son. He's Hungarian, so he's got a lot of... unusual things, but he also stocks the basics. He should have whatever you need."

"I sincerely hope so," I replied. "Thank you for your help, Officer. I appreciate it." I offered my hand, and he shook it.

"You're welcome," he said. "For my help, and to the neighborhood."

Chapter 4

Leaving Officer Gallagher behind, I made a beeline for the butcher shop. My stomach was rumbling even more loudly, and I wanted to make sure that I got there before they closed up shop for the night.

The door to the Horvath & Son butcher shop was standing open, and a rectangular, hand-written sign hung from the adjacent window, proclaiming that the shop was in a similar state. A sandwich board sign stood in front of the shop, detailing the day's specials in chalk and a surprisingly elegant hand-written script. The smell of blood emanating from the shop bombarded me. My stomach lurched at the enticing aroma, and the hunger pangs became more intense. I felt my fangs (I have fangs now!) start to extend, an involuntary response to the nasal stimulation.

Mmm... that smells delicious, claimed a woman's silky voice in my head.

"Moira!?" I exclaimed, and then realized that I had spoken aloud. I glanced around to see if anyone had noticed, which, thankfully, no one had, as nobody was nearby. I quickly stepped around the corner into the alley for some privacy, and I repeated myself in my head. *Moira?*

In the flesh, baby, Moira replied. *Well, not really, but you know what I mean.*

Is everyone that I know in my head? Ness? Joe? Bubby? Are you in there?

She giggled as she condescended to me. *Oh, Saul, I don't think that your dead grandmother will be putting in an appearance.*

Why not? You're dead, and here you are.

Here I am. Did you miss me, lover?

Miss you? You tried to kill me!

That's true. But I didn't have a choice.

Of course you had a choice! You could have chosen not to try to kill me!

That's not true, and you know it.

Well, you could have at least not enjoyed it so much.

If you can't enjoy life, then there's no point in living it. Speaking of which, you must be getting pretty hungry right about now.

My stomach growled in response. *Yes, but I'm hoping that this butcher shop can help me out.*

Ew, animal blood? You're really going to stoop that low?

Yes, I really am. I'm not like you. I don't kill people.

People like me?

You know what I mean. She was starting to frustrate me.

Yes, I do. And you're just fooling yourself. You need to embrace your new life, and take every advantage that it has to offer. But, just like everything else that's good, that new life comes with a cost: a cost that you have to pay.

Yes, but I get to choose how to pay it, and I choose not to kill anyone.

Oh, pooh. You're such a wet blanket, Saul.

Now she was making me angry. *Yeah, you've told me that before, I grumbled.*

And it's still true.

I was fed up. *Whatever! As you said, I'm hungry, so I'm going to go deal with that before the butcher shop closes.*

I turned my back on her in my mind, and mirrored the movement physically as well, striding purposefully back around the corner and into the butcher shop.

As I walked through the door, the smell of blood overwhelmed me. My stomach growled again, very audibly, and my fangs extended so quickly that I thought they might pop right on out of my head. I held my hand over my mouth, pretending to cough in order to hide them from the view of the strapping young man who was standing behind the counter, smiling as he greeted me.

"Welcome to Horvath & Son. How can I help you?" He asked, in a friendly voice that had only a slight hint of an accent. Hungarian, I assumed.

"Sorry," I explained, continuing to fake my cough. "I think I've come down with something and I don't want to spread it around."

"No problem, sir. Is there something special that you're looking for?"

Oh, you'll do just fine, Moira seductively stated.

"Shut up," I mumbled under my breath.

"I'm sorry, sir, I didn't quite catch what you said," the young man, who I assumed was the aforementioned '& Son', replied to my errant words.

Shut up, I repeated in my head, as I faked a bigger coughing fit to cover my mistake. *I've got to stop doing that,* I thought.

Yes, you do, Dad's voice said. *You'll just keep drawing unwanted attention to yourself if you don't.*

I'm sorry, Dad, I replied. *This is all new to me. You know, since I'm meshugenneh and all.*

Don't say that, sweetheart, Mom chimed in. *You've been through so much. It's completely understandable that you need some time to adapt.*

Thanks, Mom.

You're welcome, dear. Now, you should probably answer that nice young man before he throws you out of his store.

Mom pulled me out of my reverie, so I shook my head and again apologized to Son Horvath. "Sorry," I said, "I was just trying to think of an easy way to say it."

"It's okay, sir," he replied. "This city is full of immigrants from all over the world, so we get our fair share of unusual requests. What do you need? Brains? Heart? Tongue?"

"Um... blood?"

"Oh, going to make some blood pudding, are we?"

"Um..." I hesitated briefly, wondering what in the world that 'blood pudding' was, and why someone would eat it, and then said, "Yes. I'm making a pretty big batch, so I'm going to need quite a lot. Is that something you can provide?"

"Well, I guess that depends. When do you need it?"

"Er... now?"

"Oh, I see. Well, we don't normally keep blood on hand, as we usually just run it down the drain. Let me go back and check with my father to see what we can do for you." He turned and walked through a door that I assumed led to the back of the shop where the butcher would do the work that was not meant to be seen by those wanting to actually eat anything that he sold.

I perused the contents of the meat case as I waited, and my fangs began to retract a bit as I started to get used to the smell of the shop. The selection of offerings was actually pretty impressive, and the prices listed on the chalk sign were very reasonable. If he had any kosher options, they must have been by special order only, as there were none present in the case.

After a few minutes, a man emerged from the back.

He was an older man, probably in his sixties, mostly bald, with a white tuft of hair circling the back of his head. He had on a thick canvas apron that was covered in old brown stains and fresh red ones. He wiped sweat from his forehead with his right sleeve, and in his left hand, he held a lidless glass jar that was about half-filled with what I assumed was blood.

"Is all could get," He said, in heavily-accented broken English. "Pig. Is good, yes?" He asked, as he proffered the jar in my direction. My initial reaction was to flatly refuse, since it wasn't kosher, but then I realized that particular distinction was something that I was going to have to ignore if I wanted to keep from starving myself. The jar held maybe half a pint of blood. I figured that would be enough to last me until Ness came back and we could make a longer-term plan.

"Yes, thank you, that's great! How much do I owe you?" I asked, reaching for the money that I suddenly realized that I didn't actually have.

That's my big brother, Sarah teased, always thinking ahead.

Shut up! I responded, proud of myself that I hadn't done it aloud that time.

To my relief, the butcher shook his head, waved his right hand, pushed the jar toward me with his left, and replied, "No, no. You take. You make. You bring. I taste, yes?"

I nodded my head in agreement, feeling somewhat ashamed that I wouldn't be repaying his generosity with some tasty blood pudding (whatever that was), but not so ashamed that I wouldn't take it. "Yes, of course," I agreed. "And thank you so much, Mr. Horvath," I added, gratefully.

I took the jar from him and, as I did, the proximity of the fresh, warm blood set my hunger pangs off in force. The growl that emanated from my stomach sounded like a

mama bear that was defending its cubs, and my fangs fully extended, ready to take in the crimson feast.

I completely lost control. Before I knew it, I had raised the jar to my mouth, dumping the blood in and swallowing as quickly as I could. With each frantic gulp, a wave of pleasure rippled through me, sating the hunger that had been gnawing at me. I closed my eyes and let the feeling consume me, enjoying the sensation.

Oh, yes, that's it, Moira sighed with pleasure. Drink it all!

I rolled the last of the blood around on my tongue, savoring every drop. I heard a satisfied moan that didn't come from inside my head. I opened my eyes to look for the source, and ashamedly realized that it was me. I was also suddenly gripped with panic, as I realized that I had just done all of that in front of the butcher.

Now you've done it, Sarah scolded.

The butcher's mouth had dropped open, and he stood, frozen in place, and mumbled, "Vámpír."

He's seen you, Moira stated, unemotionally. The real you. He has to die.

"No!" I yelled, as the guilt overtook me. I had made a horrible mistake, but I couldn't kill this man. He was helping me. He didn't deserve to die just because I was too weak to control myself. I had to be better. I had to take control.

That's not who I am! I thought. He has to understand. He has to!

I desperately met the butcher's eyes, and I pleaded with him, "You *have* to believe me! I'm *not* a monster!"

His eyes glazed briefly. "Not..." The butcher said, haltingly. "...monster."

"Huh?" I blurted, surprised at his response.

You just commanded him, Moira explained. The same

way that Capone commanded me.

No! That's not what I wanted, I whined. I just wanted him to understand.

We're not understandable, Saul, Moira gloated. We defy their comprehension. Their little minds break at the realization that we even exist. When confronted face-to-face, they freeze, like sheep waiting for the wolf. Be the wolf, Saul. Feed on that fat, tasty sheep!

No! I'm not a monster! I repeated, trying to convince myself.

"I'm... I'm so... so sorry," I stammered my apology to the butcher. The jar slipped from my hand and shattered on the tile floor as I ran out of the shop.

Chapter 5

As I ran back toward my new apartment, it felt like everything was a blur. Then I discovered that it didn't just feel like a blur; I was actually moving faster than I had ever moved in my life! Propelled by my shame, the scenery flew by as I ran, and the people seemed like they were moving through molasses. Within what felt like only seconds, I had already reached the front door to my building.

I had just started to slow down when I realized that I should have started the process sooner, because my increased speed was making me overshoot my target. I tried to compensate by stopping. That was a mistake. My momentum threw me completely off-balance, and I tripped, putting my hands out to break my fall. I skidded, hands first, onto the sidewalk, and the cement scraped a good amount of skin from my palms.

Faster? Check. Graceful? Not so much, Sarah teased.

Shut up, I replied, as I got back to my feet. I went to brush myself off, but noticed that my palms were both bloody and raw, so I stopped. After the initial jolt of pain from my contact with the ground, I hadn't really felt anything more than a slight discomfort. As I inspected the scrapes on my hands, the skin began to grow back right before my eyes!

Another one of the bountiful gifts you have been given, Moira gloated.

I ignored her and stared at my hands, watching as the wounds that I had just suffered completely vanished in a few seconds. I was awestruck that anything like this could actually happen. Suddenly paranoid, I quickly looked around to see if anyone had seen me. The few people that had been within eyesight either hadn't seen, or hadn't cared, as nobody was paying me any attention. I thrust my hands into my pockets, rubbing them on the insides to try to clean them off. I pulled them out to check and decided that they were clean enough, so I went on inside the building and up to my apartment.

Closing the door behind me, I immediately went to the bathroom and scrubbed my hands clean. As I dried them on a hand towel (*my* hand towel), I saw that the flesh of my palms looked different. It was almost shiny, like a baby's skin, and it felt just as soft and smooth. It made sense, as I thought it over. In a way, this new skin had just been 'born'. It made me wonder what wounds I could and couldn't heal, and what that meant for me.

It means that you're immortal, Saul, Moira beamed. I've made it so that you'll live forever.

Like you did? I spat my retort, spitefully.

She chose not to reply, and I didn't really want to talk to her anyway, so I went into the bedroom and sat down on the bed. I glanced at the book on the nightstand, but I wasn't in the mood to read. Instead, I decided to try to take a nap and wait for Ness to come back, so I curled up on the bed and pulled the cover up over my head in order to block the light. I tried to still my mind as it swirled with everything that had happened, but each time that I tried, a new thought would rise up, shattering the peace that I so desperately sought. After what seemed like forever, I gave up, threw the cover off, and strode to the kitchen to get a glass of water.

As I was about to pass the living room, I noticed that there was a large duffel bag sitting on the floor by the front door. Confused, I had just started to move toward it when I saw that there was someone sitting in the chair (*my chair*). I bristled, ready to pounce on this foolish intruder, before I realized that it was just Eliot Ness. I relaxed.

"You know, you really should lock your door," Ness said. "Anyone could just waltz right in here."

"It never stopped anybody before," I muttered under my breath, and then added, in a louder voice, "Thanks for the advice."

"You're welcome," he replied, choosing to ignore my snarky attitude. He then motioned toward the couch, where a garment bag had been laid out, with the zipper open to reveal its contents.

"I took the liberty of bringing you a couple of suits to get you started," Ness said. "Shoes are in the duffel. You can figure out the rest."

"Thanks. I appreciate it."

"If you check the icebox, you'll find a couple of bottles of blood. Hopefully that will tide you over until you figure out your own method."

I walked into the kitchen and opened the icebox. Inside were two one-gallon jugs, both filled with blood. "Wow! What's it from?" I asked. "And how in the world did you get so much?"

"It's cow blood," Ness stated. "And I am an agent of the federal government of the United States of America." He offered no further explanation, so I just nodded and thanked him.

"You might want to eat something before we leave," Ness offered.

"Leave?" I asked. "Where are we going?"

"To see just what you can do."

Chapter 6

I took his advice and drank my fill from one of the jugs. The same, pleasurable sensation pulsed through me as I drank, but it was muted. I didn't know if that was because the blood was from a cow instead of a pig, or if it was due to the fact that I wasn't completely starving this time, but I could tell that there was a difference. The taste was essentially the same, but with subtle nuances, like there are between vintages of wine.

Once I had finished, we left the apartment (*my apartment*), and I locked the door behind me. Ness nodded silently in satisfaction, and we went downstairs. Exiting the building, Ness guided me to his car, and told me to get in. As he drove, he explained that he had gotten access to the University of Chicago, and that we would be able to use their gymnasium and Stagg Field in order to "test" my abilities.

Like a guinea pig, Moira groused. What next? Is he going to dissect you to see what makes you tick?

He's not going to dissect me, I replied. He wants me to work with him.

And when you're no longer useful, or if he decides that you're more trouble than you're worth, what then?

Then I'll have to make sure that I stay useful, won't I?

During the drive, I told Ness about my trip to the butcher shop (leaving out the part about me going full monster in front of the butcher). I described my fast-

er-than-expected experiences with both running and healing my wounds. He nodded as he listened, and I could tell that he was mentally making a list of things for me to do upon our arrival.

We pulled up to Stagg Field and parked in the lot nearby. Ness tossed me the keys and told me to bring the bag that was in the trunk of the car. Inside the trunk was another large duffel bag, similar to the one that he had brought to the apartment (*my* apartment – I really need to get used to that). I slung the bag's strap over my shoulder, closed the trunk lid, and followed Ness inside.

He led me into a locker room, and told me to get changed, nodding to the bag that I was carrying. I opened it up and found some lightweight clothes, a pair of shoes with spikes on the bottom, a towel, and a thermos. I looked back to Ness, who explained that the shoes were made to help run on the track, which was made of sand, and that the thermos held more cow blood, as he wanted to make sure that I had it available if I needed it so that I would be “at the top of my game.”

There's a first time for everything, Sarah taunted.

Give it a rest, I sighed, rolling my eyes silently in response. I was getting better at keeping my side of the conversations in my head where they belonged.

I changed my clothes, and Ness led me outside to the running track. He said that we'd start with the 100-meter dash. We walked the track together, and he showed me where my run would begin and end. He explained that he would hold out a handkerchief and, when he dropped it, I was to run as fast as I possibly could, and to not slow down at the finish, but to keep going full speed all the way through. He then set me up at the starting line, and he walked to the finish line.

The handkerchief dropped, and I sped down the track,

my legs pumping as fast as I could make them carry me. I felt a cool breeze in my face, and the shoes gripping the loose sand. As I sped past the finish line, I snatched the handkerchief just before it hit the ground, and the wake of my passing made Ness' tie flutter a bit.

Learning from my previous mistake, I took my time to slow down in order to come to a stop. Once I had, I found that I was almost three-quarters of the way around the track, so I slowly jogged back to the finish line, where Ness was waiting, slack-jawed.

I handed him back his handkerchief, which he accepted automatically. He stood, stock-still, and stared at it, his brain trying to grasp the reality of what he had just seen. "I... you... um..." he stammered, clearly at a loss for words.

"Pretty fast, huh?" I asked, gloating a bit. "How fast do you think I was going?"

"I'm... I'm not... sure," he blinked several times and shook his head. It must have helped him to clear his thoughts, as he continued, "Once you started, I didn't even see you again until you were already on the other side of the track. I knew that you'd be faster, but I wasn't expecting that."

Clearly, Moira said, sarcastically.

I ignored her jab at Ness and asked, "So you couldn't see me at all?"

"No, it was like you just disappeared and reappeared over there." He pointed to the opposite side of the field. "I think that I felt you pass by, but I never saw you do it." He straightened his tie, unconsciously, and then continued, "Okay, you're definitely faster. Now let's see how strong you are."

He led me back inside, and we walked into a room that contained a lot of strange-looking mechanical contraptions. "Is this some sort of torture chamber?" I asked,

facetiously.

"I'm sure that some people think so," Ness replied. "But no, it's for the athletes to do their physical training. We won't be using most of the equipment here. Mainly it'll just be these." He gestured toward a rack of dumbbells and a bench that was positioned nearby another rack that held long metal bars and large black discs.

"You start with the dumbbells," he said, "and I'll get the bar ready."

I walked over and picked up one of the smallest dumbbells. It felt as though it was nearly weightless, like I was picking up a feather or a piece of paper, even though it was made of cast iron. It had "5 lb" stamped into the metal on each of its heads. I replaced it in the rack, and picked up the largest one that was available. "25 lb" graced its ends, and I picked it up with just as little effort as I had with the previous one. I tested the weight in my hand, checking its balance. I flipped it up into the air, end over end, catching it effortlessly as it returned to my hand. I got into a rhythm, flipping and catching, almost like tossing a baseball.

"What in the hell are you doing?" The abruptness and volume of Ness' voice startled me, and I missed catching the dumbbell on its downward path. It fell to the floor with a loud metallic CLANG, and I looked, sheepishly, at Ness.

"Sorry," I said. "It was the largest dumbbell here, and it's like it doesn't weigh anything to me."

I think you're the largest dumbbell here, Sarah quipped.

Will you please shut up? I pleaded.

"Okay, then let's see how you do with this." He gestured toward the barbell that he had set up on the floor. "Pick it up," he instructed.

I walked over to the barbell and looked it over. It had one large disc attached to each end, with "50lb" marked on them. I glanced back at Ness, who said, "Go ahead."

I bent down and wrapped my hands around the bar, girding myself for the effort that I was expecting to exert. I heaved the bar up and, rather than slowly lifting skyward, it flew upwards, so quickly that it surprised me, and the bar fell from my grip, crashing to the floor with an even louder CLANG!

Ness closed his eyes, lowered his chin, shook his head, took a deep breath, and sighed. "Can you please try to *not* destroy the university's equipment?"

"Sorry," I apologized, again. "This is all new to me, you know. I know as much about my abilities as you do."

Maybe less, Sarah said.

Shut up!

Ness took down the rest of the weights from the rack and added them to the bar. When he finished, he said, "There, that's 250 pounds. It's all they've got. Try that. And this time, go slowly."

I bent down again, trying to nestle the bar in my hands, and carefully began to lift it. I slowly picked it up, this time with a little bit of effort, but not really any more than if I had been picking up a sack of potatoes. I pulled it up and held it above my head, with my arms fully extended. I then pulled it back down and, emboldened, maneuvered it around so that I could hold it with one hand, which I did, with a modicum of effort. I slowly placed it back on the floor, making a slight CLINK as the weights touched the ground.

Ness had either recovered from his initial surprise at my capabilities, or he just wasn't as impressed by my strength as he had been at my speed. "Ok, please put the weights away, and I'll get your last test ready."

I turned and obediently replaced the weights and placed the bar back on the rack. As I turned back around, I heard a loud BANG and something slammed into my left

leg. Blood spurted from my upper thigh, and I felt a massive burst of pain. I glanced up and saw smoke rising from the barrel of the pistol that Ness held in his hand.

Umm... your new boss just shot you, Sarah commented. Maybe you're not useful anymore?

Guinea Pig, Moira added.

"What the hell? What did you do that for?" I yelled, placing my hand on the wound. The bleeding had already slowed, and the pain was fleeting as well.

"We have to know what your limits are if we're going to be able to support having you in the field," Ness explained, returning his gun to its holster.

"So you just shoot me? You could have killed me!"

"I shot you in the leg. You weren't going to die, even if you couldn't heal yourself."

"You could have at least warned me, you know."

"And you'd have just let me shoot you?"

"Well... now that you mention it, no."

"Exactly. If I had given you warning, with your speed, you could have just dodged the bullet. I had to surprise you in order for it to work."

I am liking this Mr. Ness. He is a very smart man, Dad said. I think he will make a good boss.

Assuming he doesn't kill me.

The bleeding had completely stopped, and Ness nodded to the bag. "There's a towel in there. Let's see how you're progressing."

I took the towel from the duffel and wiped the blood from my leg. The wound had already closed, the skin looking pink and new like my hands had earlier. Ness knelt down to get a closer look, then stood back up and nodded.

"Well, we've exhausted our means to test you here. Let's get you cleaned up and back home. I've got one more thing to give you."

Chapter 7

We pulled up in front of *my* apartment (I got it right this time!), and I started to get out of the car when I realized that Ness had left the engine running.

“Aren’t you coming up?” I asked.

“No, I need to get home. Some of us have to go to work in the morning.” He grinned. “To that end, I should have everything in order in the next couple of days so that you can come in to the office and I can introduce you to the team.”

“Okay. So what should I do in the meantime?”

“Relax. Adjust to your new life. Read a book.” He winked.

I smiled back. “Sure. Sounds great.”

“Oh, hey, make sure you take the bag with you, it’s yours.”

“Thanks.”

“Also,” he reached into his jacket pocket and pulled something out. “If you need to reach me, call this number,” He handed me a card, which had his name listed along with a phone number, which I assumed led to the switchboard operator at the Treasury Department. He continued, “And ask for me. Using your new name, of course.”

“But I don’t know my new name,” I countered.

He opened the glove box, pulled out a manila folder, and handed it to me. “That is my last gift to you tonight. It contains a few forms for you to fill out, along with the

lease for your apartment. Your new name is on it.”

Excited to see what debonair name that Ness had chosen for me, I quickly leafed through the papers until I found the lease. My excitement was immediately doused as I read what had been typed onto the page.

“Stanley Kowalski?” I asked, dejected. “Really?”

“What?” Ness replied. “It’s a good Jewish name, right?”

“Yeah, it’s so good that about a million others have it, too,” I complained.

“That’s the point, *Stan*. You need to keep a low profile. Blend in. You know, be unremarkable.”

“That shouldn’t be too hard. I’ve been doing it all my life.” I sighed.

“That’s the spirit,” Ness replied, taking my comment as an acceptance of my new name rather than my disappointment with it. “Try to get some rest. I’ll check in on you tomorrow.”

Having been summarily dismissed, I got out of the car and lugged the bag up to *my* apartment (at least I’m getting better at that). When I reached the door, I checked to see if it was still locked and, to my surprise, it actually was. I shrugged and unlocked the door, opened it, and automatically reached for the light switch. I paused, as I could see quite clearly into the dark apartment without the lights being on, but everything was void of color, as if I was watching a Charlie Chaplin film. I flicked the light switch on and color again filled my vision. I shrugged again, shut and locked the door, tossed the new bag onto the floor next to the other one, and headed to the bedroom.

Once again, I fell onto the bed, thinking that now, finally, I should be able to get some sleep. I curled up into a ball and closed my eyes, surrendering myself to sleep’s embrace. I laid perfectly still for I don’t know how long, waiting for sleep to come, hoping to drift off and dream of

something nice, but it never came. Instead, my mind began to reel, images of my family intermixed with Capone's leering face flashing across my consciousness. I tried counting sheep, but to no avail.

I couldn't just lie there, doing nothing. Since I wasn't going to sleep, I decided that I needed to check on my family to make sure that they were okay. Ness had said that he had a man watching them, but if Capone decided to make my family pay, one normal guy wasn't going to stop it from happening. With newfound purpose, I strode toward the door, ready to rush out into the night to watch over my family.

You're going to go out dressed like that? Dad asked. *Didn't Mr. Ness say that you should blend in?*

I glanced down at the blood-splattered clothes and spiked shoes that I was still wearing from my tests with Ness, and nodded. *Right, this is too conspicuous.*

I knelt and rummaged through the bags that Ness had left me, hoping to find something more befitting the occasion. I found some darker clothes that I thought might make it harder for anyone to see me in the dark of the night, and changed into them.

Better? I asked Dad.

What do I know? I'm no government agent, sneaking around in the middle of the night, Dad replied.

At least you're not still wearing the shoes, Sarah commented.

Well, it's all I've got, so it'll have to do, I countered.

Satisfied that my choice of clothing was more appropriate, I again strode toward the door.

How long will you be gone, dear? Mom asked.

I don't know, I replied, confused. *A couple of hours, maybe. Why?*

You should take something with you to eat. You don't

want to get too hungry. You're all just skin and bones as it is.

I saw Mom's point. I didn't want to be out in the city for an extended period of time and let my hunger get to the point where it was when I was at the butcher shop. *I'll take the thermos with me. Thanks, Mom.*

Of course, dear. A mother always looks out for her children.

I started toward the door again, but stopped. *I've got the clothes and the thermos. Am I missing anything else?* I asked.

Yeah, Sarah replied. Us. You're missing us so badly that you're going against what Ness told you to do and coming to see us.

I just need to know that you're safe. If Capone comes after you—

What? You'll do what? Kill him?

Yes, if I have to.

Do you really think that you even could? You're no killer, Saul.

I killed Moira, didn't I?

That was different. You were fighting for your life.

And I'd fight even harder for yours. Or Dad's. Or Mom's. I won't let anything happen to any of you. Not if I can help it.

Determined, I finally strode out of my apartment, locking the door behind me.

Chapter 8

The weather was surprisingly pleasant, and I found myself enjoying the walk to my parents' neighborhood. The hour was getting late, and the bustle of the city had wound down to a crawl, with a few people out on their stoops having a cigarette or just taking in some fresh air.

As I neared my parents' building, I paused as something caught my eye: a flicker of light came from inside a black Ford that was parked at the head of the street. A man sitting in the driver's seat had lit a cigarette, the smoke from his initial draw billowing out the cracked window. Hoping that the man hadn't seen me, I immediately ducked down and stepped between two parked cars, my foot catching on the curb as I fell, face first, into the street.

And to think, our parents spent all that money on ballet lessons, Sarah quipped.

I refused to acknowledge her comment with a reply as I regained my balance and continued across the street, still ducked down and trying to keep as many obstacles between myself and the man in the car as I could. Once across, I waited, watching to see if he had spotted me, but he remained in the car, enjoying his smoke. Emboldened, I made my way up the street, staying low and keeping out of his sight as much as I could so that I eventually would get a closer look at him.

Once I had gotten as close as I dared, I watched the man, trying to gauge his intent. Based on the spent cig-

arette butts that were piled outside his driver's door, he either smoked constantly or he had been here for quite some time. As he smoked, his gaze was primarily fixed on the door to my parents' building, with an occasional glance around the rest of the neighborhood.

Ness had said that he had someone keeping an eye on my family, and from the close-cropped haircut and what appeared to be a government-issued vehicle, I assumed that this was the someone. I was pleased to see that Ness had been telling me the truth, but that also meant that there was no way that I'd be able to get close enough to the building to even get a glimpse of my family.

Dejected, I was just about to make my way back toward *my* apartment when I saw a man get out of a car from a bit further up the street and step into an alley.

I don't remember seeing a car come up the street, Dad offered.

Me either, I added.

He clearly isn't a smoker, Sarah commented, or you'd have spotted him instantly with your special vampire smoke vision.

I sighed and ignored her. *So if he didn't just pull up and park, he was already sitting in his car when I got here...*

Your grasp of logic is staggering, Sarah interrupted.

Continuing my train of thought, I added, *...which means that he's also watching the building.*

And if the other man is Mr. Ness' employee, then this one can only be trouble, Dad stated.

We'll see about that, I said, as I stood up and raced, full speed, into the alley.

The scent of fresh urine availed my nostrils as I reached the alley and encountered a man standing beside a trash bin, buttoning up his fly. He turned to face me, and I was surprised to see a face that I recognized: one of Mo-

ran's goons, the one that I called Cup, since I never got his name.

"Well, well, well," Cup grinned, "what have we here? We thought you were dead, Mr. Imbierowicz."

Stunned, I paused, grasping for a reply. "You? But if you're here, where's..."

"Right behind you," Cup nodded, with a lopsided grin pasted across his face, and that was the last thing I heard before something hit the back of my head and the lights went out.

Chapter 9

I woke up to the sound of water slowly dripping onto something metal, and a cacophony of strong floral aromas that invaded my nose. I had a sharp, throbbing pain at the back of my head, and vaguely remembered something hitting me there. I started to raise my hand to check to see if I was bleeding, but found that I had been tied to a chair, bound at the wrists and ankles. I opened my eyes, but immediately shut them again as stars flashed across my vision, and a groan of pain escaped my lips.

A gruff voice from behind me said, “He’s waking up, boss.”

“Luckily for you,” came a reply. The voices sounded familiar, but the pain wasn’t letting me focus enough to try to remember why. I figured that I’d find out soon enough, anyway. “Leave us,” the voice commanded, and I heard footsteps receding and a door opening and closing.

“I’m surprised to see you again, Mr. Imbierowicz,” the voice stated, as its owner moved around in front of me. “The papers said that you were dead.”

I steeled myself for the pain and slowly opened my eyes again. Greenery and flowers surrounded me, along with shelves full of vases, a workbench, and a sink, which I assumed was the source of the dripping sound. That wasn’t so bad, but the problem (other than being tied up, obviously) was that I also had “Bugs” Moran looming over me.

This can't be good, Sarah stated.

He has nothing to worry about, Moira added. He's ...

*Sarah interrupted her thought. Captured by Moran!
Tied to a chair!*

Moira grumbled, and then continued, He's not human anymore.

I wanted to give Moran a witty reply, something about Mark Twain, but the pain stole the words away so that all I could muster was, "Huh?"

"I apologize for Mr. Jackson's behavior," Moran shook his head. "He could have killed you when he hit you with that crowbar, but apparently, you're a hard man to kill."

Mr. Jackson? I was confused.

I think he means the man you refer to as Glass, Dad explained.

Oh, him, I replied. He hit me with a crowbar? No wonder my head feels like it's been cracked open.

See? Not human. Moira gloated. You're welcome.

I ignored her, and tried to focus on Moran. "What..." My voice squeaked, so I stopped and cleared my throat. "What do you want from me? You're not still after those stupid ledgers, are you? I already gave them to the feds, so there's nothing I can do to help you."

"That's where you're wrong, Mr. Imbierowicz," Moran answered. "You are correct that I am no longer after Capone's ledgers. Your choice to work with the government, rather than me, caused me to have to change my plans. But there is still something that you can do for me."

"What are you talking about? I'm a nobody. What could I possibly do for you?"

"You may have been a nobody before, but your girlfriend changed all that, didn't she?"

Moira's voice had a slight tremor as she whispered, *He knows.*

She sounds worried, Dad remarked. I had to agree. I'd never heard that tone from Moira, even when she was alive.

"What?" I asked Moran.

"Don't play coy with me, Mr. Imbierowicz. I know what your little girlfriend was doing for Capone. She was building him an army. An army of... well, whatever the hell it is that you are."

Is that really what you were doing? I asked Moira. *Was I just another soldier for you to add to Capone's ranks?*

No, Saul, Moira replied. *You weren't like the rest. You were special.*

Oh, come on, Sarah squawked. *You think a guy like you could really get a gal like her? If you hadn't been working at the post office, she wouldn't have given you the time of day. The only reason she was with you at all was because Capone told her to.*

Don't listen to her, Moira sneered. *We were meant for each other. I loved you.*

But you still turned me into a monster, I countered.

It wasn't all bad, Moira cooed. *I seem to recall you really liking it when I-*

"And now you're going to do the same thing for me." Moran interrupted my reverie. "The best way to fight fire is with more fire. And you, Mr. Imbierowicz, are going to give me the biggest fire this city has seen since the Great Conflagration!"

"I don't know how to do that, even if I wanted to," I whined. "Nobody told me how any of this stuff works."

"Well, it seems pretty simple to me. You just have to do whatever it was that your girlfriend did to you to someone else. And then you do it again. And again. And again. Until I have an army of my own."

So now you're going to shtup your way through the

city, Sarah quipped, leaving behind a trail of baby vampires in your wake. I wonder if they'll call me Aunt Sarah?

Dad huffed at that, and added, *Capone is bad enough, but if Moran gets his way, how many people will die, caught up in his war with Capone? No, you cannot let Moran get that kind of power.*

I sighed. "And, of course, you'll be threatening my family again to make sure that I do what you want."

"Come now, Mr. Imbierowicz. Do you not think that I am a man of my word? No, I told you what would happen if you didn't bring me those ledgers. Your family will die before you ever leave this room."

"What? No! I won't let you hurt them!" I struggled against my bonds.

You've got to do something, Saul, Sarah pleaded.

What can I do? I asked, helplessly. *I'm tied to a chair, and I'm so weak that I can't even break free.*

Moira chastised me. *Oh, Saul. You've already forgotten your most important new skill. Remember what you did to the butcher?*

I don't even know what I did to the butcher, I replied, *or how I did it.*

It seemed like your desperation to have him think what you wanted gave you the power to make that happen, Dad prompted.

Yes, Moira squealed, make him do what you want him to do! Be the wolf!

Moran turned and started to walk away from me, but I screamed, "MORAN! Wait!"

He paused, and turned back toward me. I looked him square in his eyes, and I poured every ounce of desperation to save my family that I had in me into my words when I spoke my command, "You will not hurt my family!"

Moran's eyes glossed over, and he parroted back, "I

will not hurt your family.”

It worked! What did I do?

Mmmm! Moira groaned in delight. The power! Do it again!

I held his gaze and said, “Untie me.” He immediately stepped over to me and freed my hands. I rubbed my wrists as he bent down and undid the bonds that were holding my feet to the chair.

This is all well and good for today, Dad said, but it’s not a long-term solution. Besides, he doesn’t have to hurt us himself. He has a whole gang at his beck and call.

You’re right, I replied. But I’ve got an idea.

There’s a first time for everything, Sarah joked.

Shut up and let me concentrate!

As Moran stood back up, I again met his eyes. “Me and my family are off limits. No one in your gang will ever hurt any of us.”

“Nobody in my gang will hurt you and your family,” Moran repeated.

That takes care of us, Dad stated. But what happens if he finds another you?

Another me? I asked, confused.

He means another vampire, Moira sighed. Someone else to make him the army that he wants.

What am I supposed to do about that? I asked. I don’t know how many vampires are out there. I didn’t even believe that vampires were real until I became one myself.

Then, there’s your answer, Dad said.

Huh? What answer? What are you talking about?

You said it yourself, Saul, Moira replied. You didn’t believe. What if Moran didn’t, either?

They were right. That was the answer. I held Moran’s gaze and added, “You don’t believe that vampires are real.” I then averted my eyes.

Unbelievable

Moran took in what I said, and then shook his head as if to clear it. "What are you doing here? I don't want anything from you." He then called out, louder, "Jackson!"

The door opened, and Glass walked in (Dad was right). "Yes, boss?"

"I have no need for Mr. Imbierowicz. He can go. And Jackson?"

"Yes, boss?"

"Mr. Imbierowicz and his family are not to be harmed."

"OK, boss. Whatever you say."

You mean whatever Saul says, Moira corrected.

Chapter 10

Glass—or Jackson, apparently—led me out of the door and into the street. I glanced around and saw that we were outside a place called Schofield’s Flower Shop. Sitting at the curb was a Packard 343 convertible, with Cup sitting in the passenger seat, paring his nails with a folding knife.

“It’s about time,” Cup complained. “I was almost asleep.”

“Boss said to let him go, and that we’re not supposed to hurt his family,” Jackson explained.

Cup sighed. “Whatever. Let’s go. I’m ready to catch some shuteye.”

Glass walked around the car and got in the driver’s seat. He started the car, and I realized that I didn’t know exactly where I was and that I had no way to get home.

You know what to do, Moira prompted.

“Hey!” I caught Cup’s attention. When he looked my way, I met his eyes and commanded, “You need to take me home.”

“This ain’t no taxi,” Cup replied, and then nodded to Jackson. “Let’s go.” The car rolled away from the curb and sped off into the night, leaving me standing there, dumbfounded.

It didn’t work. Why didn’t it work? I asked.

Maybe you didn’t do it right, Sarah offered.

How could I not ‘do it right’?

How should I know? You're the all-powerful vampire. It's not like I was given an instruction book or anything! Not that you would have read it, anyway.

Enough, you two, Dad interrupted. Your arguing isn't going to do anyone any good.

Your father's right, Mom added. Besides, it's late, and you need to get some rest.

I sighed, unsurprised that Moira had not made her opinions known during that exchange. I looked around, trying to get my bearings, and then I walked down the street until I found a street sign: State and Chicago Avenue. I wasn't very far from *my* apartment, so I set out on my journey home.

* * *

Once I got back to my apartment (ok, I don't think I need to emphasize it anymore), I saw that someone had slid a note under the door. I locked the door, picked the paper up, and read it. It said, "I'll pick you up first thing tomorrow. You're going to help me convince Agent Wright to join our group. Your talents will be wasted unless he agrees to help us. E-"

Great, that's just what I need: one more thing to worry about. At least Agent Wright seemed like a nice guy, so maybe it won't be so bad. I can certainly use a friend to help me get through all of this.

I made my way into the bedroom and collapsed on the bed. Thoughts spun through my brain, clattering around like loose change in a clothes dryer. *Ness was right: I can't see my family again, not if I want to keep them safe. I put them in serious danger tonight. If the command thing hadn't worked on Moran, they'd all be dead right now, and I'd be a vampire stud horse. But why didn't my powers work on Cup? I have so many questions, and no one to give me*

any answers.

I glanced over to the nightstand. *Well, I've been saying that I need an instruction book. Maybe I can find what I'm looking for in here.* I picked up the copy of *Dracula* and started to read.

About the Authors

The writing duo of Geoff Habiger and Coy Kissee have been life-long friends since high school in Manhattan, Kansas. (Affectionately known as the Little Apple, which was a much better place to grow up than the Big Apple, in our humble opinion.) We love reading, baseball, cats, role-playing games, comics, and board games (not necessarily in that order and sometimes the cats can be very trying). We've spent many hours together over the years (and it's been many years) basically geeking out and talking about our favorite books, authors, and movies, often discussing what we would do differently to fix a story or make a better script. We eventually stopped discussing other people's work and started developing our own material, first with RPGs and card games, and now we do the same thing with novels.

Coy lives with his wife and one cat in Lenexa, Kansas. Geoff lives with his wife, son, and two cats in Tijeras, New Mexico.

You can keep up-to-date with the latest news about our writing at our website **www.habigerkisse.com** where we encourage you to check out our blog and to sign up for our newsletter. Subscribers will get behind-the-scenes details about our mysterious writing process, advanced information about new books and projects, and other cool stuff.

If you enjoyed this tale, we would appreciate it if you would let others know about it as well. Leave us a review on your favorite place on the web where people review books (Amazon, Goodreads, etc.) Getting reviews really helps, and is a great way that you can spread the word about our books.

If you want to read more about Saul, you can follow his adventures in the books of the Saul Imbierowicz series. Here's what others have been saying about the series:

Unremarkable

<https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07R6PZWRH>

“The premise invokes classic black-and-white noir, while lurid supernatural details add a touch of blood red.”
– Publishers Weekly

“*Unremarkable* is a really fun read that will keep readers guessing from chapter to chapter.” – Pulp Fiction Reviews, Ron Fortier

Untouchable

<https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B081SQ9QD8>

“...the authors do an excellent job of weaving their imaginative narrative around actual historical accounts that transpired at the time.” – Pulp Fiction Reviews, Ron Fortier

“Saul’s arresting narrative voice and the inclusion of real historical events will please series fans.” – Publishers Weekly

Unavoidable

<https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B08SHVZTGB>

“The action is bloody great, the plot-driver is intriguing, and the climactic reveal is very satisfying... Readers from all corners will find something to appreciate, from the gritty realness to the mythical flourish.” – Zachry Wheeler, author of the Immortal Wake Trilogy

We also encourage you to follow us on social media. We maintain an author page on Facebook (**facebook.com/HabigerKisseeAuthors/**) and Geoff is active on Twitter (**twitter.com/TangentGeoff**). Drop by and leave us a comment.

All-powerful **vampire** G-man has a nice ring to it, if Saul can make the grade.

After his untimely death at the hands of Al Capone, Saul Imbierowicz has to adjust to his new “life” and unbelievable new abilities. Eliot Ness has offered Saul a job as one of his G-men, but Saul must first prove that he’s worth keeping around. Meanwhile, Saul’s longing for his family leads him to discover a new way to connect with them. Saul will need to learn to control his powers if he ever hopes to have a chance of stopping Al Capone, but an encounter with the city’s second-worst gangster threatens to bring an end to Saul’s second “life”.

A new **Saul Imbierowicz Vampire** short set between the events of *Unremarkable* and *Untouchable*.