

## Chapter 12

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# Flights of Futility

The following day I awoke to something screeching at me and licking my face with a sticky tongue. Opening my eyes, I saw Joyce lying beside me, its long tongue lapping at my face. It was long and sticky and...hairy?

“Ewww, no!” I said, sitting upright and wiping the slime away.

It chittered strangely at me, army-crawled over with its wings, then snuggled in.

“I’m sorry,” I said. “It was just unexpected.”

The bat chittered again at me, and I pet its furry head.

RAINE MONDAY



“Guess I should see the damage,” I said.



I stared into the mirror at my changed visage. Gone was the vaguely masculine face, with stark lines and chiseled edges. In its place was pure beauty.

My voice had risen to a light alto. While I still possessed little Sean, there wasn't much left.

I sighed and walked back out into the main room. "Guess there was no getting around it," I said to the bat.

It chittered at me again, followed by a squeak. While I'd been asleep, it had finished the last of the blood.

"Yeah, I know." I picked up the blood packets and dropped them in the trash. It had been hopping around the room, and bat guano was everywhere, including the bed.

"Why can't you at least control your bowels," I snapped to the bat. "You've made a mess of everything!"

The bat screeched at me, flew across the room, and butted its head into the door.

"Ah, so you've figured out flying!" I said. "Are you sure you can go outside during the sunlight hours?"

## RAINE MONDAY

It screeched again at me, bumping into the door.



“Alright,” I said and opened it. With a lick to my cheek, it streaked out the door, then into the air in an erratic pattern, zipping and zagging to and fro, before flying off vaguely northeast.

Deciding that was my cue to leave the hotel, I packed my backpack and headed out.

It was much heavier than it had been. Or I was much weaker. I decided it was heavier.

It was now or never. If I ever had a chance to leave DarkWater, now was the time.

Walking back down the road, I passed the tunnel closed sign, then up the incline to the east. The scree and rocks threatened to send me tumbling back down, but I was able to make my way around to the forest carefully.

I shrugged; it seemed easy enough. I got out my compass and took note of my bearings. Getting lost in a forest without a solid sense of direction was easy.

## DARKWATER FALLS

In the distance, I could see where the mountains formed a “V” shaped saddle where I could continue my journey. I made a note of the time, the position of the sun, and the bearings that I wanted on my compass.

Snapping it shut, I took a drink from my water bottle and headed toward the saddle.



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Hours later, I had enough.

DarkWater Falls was blocked on all sides by invisible barriers. Each time I crossed the ‘boundary’ about half a mile from town, I was immediately transported back to the entrance where I’d been dropped off by the bus.

## RAINE MONDAY



I started hiking back toward the hotel, upset that my efforts had been for nothing. I was tired, hungry, and cold.

Night was falling as I entered the hotel parking lot. I heard a chittering above me and spied Joyce the Bat flying.

“Did you have a good day?” I called up to it.

## DARKWATER FALLS



It screeched and fluttered in for a landing next to me. Blood streaked down from its mouth and stained its teeth with red tendrils.

“You’re a mess,” I said. It gave another screech in return.

I opened the door, and it hopped inside.

“You know, if you’re going to be in here, you’ll have to control your output. Can you do that?”

It screeched and nodded.

“Let’s get you cleaned up,” I said, lifting it into my arms to take into the bathroom.

It immediately began licking my face with its long sticky tongue. “Eww, stop it!” I giggled, and it squealed as it licked me some more.

I got the shower going and held the curtain for it.

“Well?” I said. “Get in.”

It gave me a small squeak and hid behind me.

“Look, we can’t snuggle if you’re covered in blood. Get in there and take a shower!”

## RAINE MONDAY

It squeaked, then flew up into my arms, climbing me. Its nails were sharp.

“Ow! Okay, okay, we’ll take one together.”

I got undressed, lifted it, and entered the shower. “There, are you happy now?”



It gave a little squeak.

I soaped up its furry little body, then rinsed it off. I cleaned its nose and between its talons, where it had been tearing animal flesh to drink the blood.

Then I soaped up my hair, showered as it flapped, and hopped inside, playing in the water like a child, pelting me with droplets.

After one splash, I gave a small scream. “Stop that!” And it chittered back at me. I realized it was laughing.

Exiting the shower, I took out the hairdryer attached to the wall in the bathroom and blow-dried its fur, then my hair. It loved the feeling of the warm air, closing its feral red eyes and arching its back.

I stroked the pelt on its scalp. “How different your life will be now, huh?”



## DARKWATER FALLS

It gave a small squeak.

“At least you’re a super-bat, not just an ordinary one.”

It shrugged thin shoulders, then lifted its leathery wings, staring at each of them.

“Yeah, that must be tricky to navigate without hands anymore.”

It nodded but then flapped and took flight, zooming around the room effortlessly.

“I am glad you’ve mastered flying, though. That must be fun.

It landed in front of me and looked up, nodding. It chittered and squeaked for a while. I wish I knew what it was saying.

“Want to go with me to get some food?”

It shrugged and nodded.

I grabbed my jacket and headed for the door.



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“I’m sorry, hon, we don’t allow pets here.” Rose set a placemat down in front of me. I’d pulled down a booster seat for Joyce, who sorta stood, squatted on top of it. It had a hard time sitting still, and

## RAINE MONDAY

I wondered if the bat body needed the nearly constant motion or if Joyce's brain was shifting to be more batlike.

"Um, not a pet...this is Joyce."

In return, Joyce gave a little screech and waved a wing.



Rose's eyes grew wide. "Oh, she's in bat form! How long before she changes back?"

I sighed. "she can't change back."

"What?"

I nodded. "Whatever 'conversion' Dominic did to her completely caused her to transform into a supernatural bat."

"She's trapped like that?"

Joyce nodded and gave a mournful little whistle-squeak I hadn't heard before.

Rose's eyes opened wide. "Oh, by the Dark Gods! How horrible!"

"Yeah, it makes my transition seem tame in response."

She glanced at me. "You're turning out gorgeous."

I smiled and blushed. "Thanks, honey."

"I take it you've given up trying to leave DarkWater falls?"

## DARKWATER FALLS

I nodded. "I hiked around as much as possible and haven't found a way out."

Rose sat down in the booth next to a squirmy Joyce. "Many have tried, hon."

"I was just hoping, ya know?" I wiped a tear before it could smudge my mascara.

"We all do."

"So, what faction will you join?"

I shrugged. "I suppose, the witches, but I haven't returned to see Mei yet."

"My Master would take you in if you're interested."

"Who might that be?"

"Dark Lord Russel. He owns this place."

"Demon, I take it?"

She nodded, raising her fingers. Dark talons had replaced her fingernails.

"Ahh, so you're being transformed also."

She shrugged but nodded. "Just thought it was time, and Russel kept mentioning how edible I looked."

I remembered Slade and shivered.

"Well, what can I get you tonight?"

"The special," I said.

"Anything for Joyce?"

The bat squeaked and shook its head.

"It doesn't eat food anymore. I think it sucks the blood from live animals around town."

"You shouldn't refer to her as 'it,' honey."

"Yeah...I looked at the small furry form. "I guess I owe you an apology, Joyce."

It squeaked and shrugged.

"We have some blood in the back for our vamp customers if you'd like."

Joyce squeaked and nodded.

"Good. It always makes me happy when we have something."

Rose got up and went into the kitchen.

I stared at Joyce. It...she kept raising a foot and scratching at her chin, or the top of her head, or somewhere else. Her head continually darted from left to right as if seeking or assessing.

I felt terrible for her.

"Listen," I said. "I know you probably have new urges and instincts."

She nodded, flapping her wings.

"But you can stay with me as long as you'd like. I don't know what will happen to the hotel now that you're gone, but obviously, you won't be able to take care of it anymore."

She shook her head and let out that little whistle again.

## RAINE MONDAY

“Is there someone I should notify? Who owns the hotel?”

She scabbled and chittered...she fluttered up on the table and then scratched at the placemat.

“Probably needs a pen,” Rose said, putting our food down. She set my burger and fries in front of me and a glass of red liquid in a shallow cup in front of Joyce. Then she handed Joyce her pen.

Joyce grasped the pen with her finger-like claws. It took her a minute to control; then she wrote: Banner Corp.

“Ahh, okay. And the number is in the office somewhere?”

She nodded.

“Great, we’ll do that tomorrow.”

She wrote something else on the placemat. “Thank you for this.”

“Aww, you’re welcome, honey. I’m glad we can at least have some form of communication now.”

It chittered, then set the pen down.



It skipped over to the cup of blood, and its long tongue extended downward into the bowl. She sucked it into her mouth, with some blood leaking from her jaw onto the placemat.

## DARKWATER FALLS

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After eating, we went back to the room. Sitting on the bed, she snuggled up under my arm, and we watched tv for a while.

I gave her a notebook and pen, so she could write.

“How are you feeling, hon?”

She took the pen and wrote in the notebook in disjointed letters.

“Sad,” she wrote.

I stroked the fur behind her ears. “Maybe we can find a way to undo this.”

“How”

“I don’t know. I was thinking of talking to Mei tomorrow.”

“Only natural things”

“Yes, I know, but maybe she might know of a way to reverse it.”

Joyce chittered a long time at me. Then she took the pen. “Each day, I forget more.”

“I get it. The bat instincts must be strong.”

“Words hard.”

I looked her in the eyes, with both hands on her furry cheeks. “We’ll figure something out, okay? I don’t know what, but we will.”

“It okay, I bat.”

I nodded and held her until she fell asleep.