

# DISORIENTED CHAPTER 5

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It was like stepping into a medieval dungeon or perhaps an ancient crypt. Stone steps led down a spiral staircase. Torches were affixed to the wall and were the only source of light. There was the sound of water dripping someplace in the far distance. Bishop led the way down the stairs with Chris close behind him. Eventually the stairs ended at the entrance to a vast stone chamber. Much like the staircase the only lighting was torches. Their flickering light caused distorted shadows upon the gray stonework. In the chambers' center stood a vast round table built out of a black substance. It was so dark it appeared to absorb all light that fell upon it. There were several chairs around the table and a number of beings had taken a seat already. They were a mixed group: some young and fair looking; while others looked older and more distinguished. There was one sitting at the table who Chris recognized instantly. "That's ... That's ..." she stammered.

"Malcomb Druthers." Bishop said for her.

"But he's the owner of Druther's Bookstore." Chris whispered to Bishop.

"Quite right," Bishop said as he took a seat at the table. "He is also the head vampire in Portland."



“He’s a... You mean all this time I’ve been working for... I can’t believe this.” Chris said astonished. Her mouth hung open. She looked as if she was about to say something more when Bishop turned to her.

“Take a seat, Chris.” He said gently. Yet there was more than a hint of force behind his words. Chris took the chair next to his. Bishop folded his hands and leaned his elbows on the tabletop. A broad, almost sugary smile crossed his face. The torchlight reflected off of his wire-rimmed glasses.

“I bid you welcome Lord Bishop,” Malcomb Druthers said from where he sat across the table.

“Lord Bishop?” Chris silently mouthed at Bishop.

“Long story.” Bishop whispered to her. Then looked back at Druthers, “Thank you for meeting with me on such short notice,” he said looking at the other vampires present at the table. “I was not expecting the other members of your council however.”

“You said the situation was of great importance,” Malcomb said. Then he looked at Chris, “Is this the young woman you spoke to me of?” he asked.

“Yes,” Bishop answered, “May I introduce Christina Sparrow. Better known as Chris.”



Chris was alarmed, even a little afraid. Was this some weird set-up perhaps? Had Bishop only brought her here to inflict some untold horror upon her? Chris felt the urge to run, but wondered if just how far she could make it before one of the vampires caught up to her.

“Greetings Chris,” Malcomb said in quite a kind voice. Almost like a beloved grandfather. “I believe you work for me. Serving coffee at my bookstore.” He smiled at her.

“Ahhh yeah ... I mean yup ... I mean yes, sir ... ,” Chris closed her eyes and took a deep breath. “I’m sorry. I’m just a little nervous.”

“It is understandable,” Malcomb said, “Given everything you have gone through. But you have nothing to fear. We are here to help you.”

“Help... me?” Chris questioned.

“Yes,” Malcomb said, “You are now one of us.” He said opening his arms and gesturing to the other vampires. “We can help you. Show you everything you need to know.”

“Thank you.” Chris said, very surprised.

“Well that’s just wonderful,” Bishop said expressionless. He looked at Malcomb, “But I would like to know what you’ve found out.”

“Concerning this NOX drug, no doubt,” Malcomb said equally expressionless.

“I’ve had my people investigating the matter.”

“And they’ve found ...” Bishop prompted.

“Very little,” Malcomb said. “However I have reason to believe it is being shipped in through Lord Wraithstone’s territories.” A very somber mood fell upon the table.

Chris looked at Malcomb and the other vampires. Then she turned to Bishop.

“Who’s Lord Wraithstone?”

“Branlaven Wraithstone is a necromancer,” Bishop began.

“A necro-what?” Chris asked.

“A necromancer is much like a wizard,” Malcomb piped in. “They dabble in animating the dead for their own uses.”

“And Lord Wraithstone is a very powerful one,” Bishop said. “This could be very serious indeed.”

Malcomb got up from his chair. The other vampires rose as well. “Let us worry about this another time, Bishop,” he said. “This is a time to celebrate.”

“How so?” Bishop asked. He did not get up.

“You have brought us a new member for our order,” Malcomb said. “That is more than enough reason to celebrate. We shall worry about Nox and Lord Wraithstone another time.”

“This used to be where Doctor Hoyt had his dark witch coven meet,” Malcomb said gesturing about the stone room. “They used to carry on a number of nasty things here. Once I learned of it I thought it the proper place for my council meetings.”

“Kind of morbid, don’t you think?” Chris said, “You told me he used to kill people here.”

“True,” Malcomb said, “but it is out of the way and most people do not know of it. It’s a safe place to meet.”

“I see.” Chris said. She looked about the room. Soft classical music was being piped into the air as various vampires chatted with one another. That’s when she noticed one person’s absence.

“Where’s Bishop?” she asked Malcomb.

“I should imagine he’s left already,” Malcomb said. “It’s his nature. He stays only long enough to complete what he needs and then he is gone. Part of his goal tonight was to bring you to us.”

Chris nodded her head in understanding. “There is something I’ve been meaning to ask,” she said. “Is Bishop a vampire as well?”

Malcomb laughed heartily at this. “No, Bishop is no vampire,” he said at last. “But he can see the world as it really is.”

Chris asked, “What is he then?”

“That, my dear, is the billion dollar question,” Lord Druthers said. “Bishop is a mystery to us all.”

This confused Chris somewhat. “I don’t understand,” she said at last. “How is Bishop a mystery?”

“Bishop is not human,” Malcomb explained. “However, he’s also not one of any of the other races. Bishop is quite unique to the world.”

“So what is he?” Chris asked. This puzzled her. “Does anyone know?”

“As I’ve said, he’s a mystery,” Malcomb said. “No one knows what Bishop is. But we do know he’s been here a very long time. I first met him back during the rise of the Roman Empire.”

“Wow!” Chris said surprised. “That was over two thousand years ago.”

“Indeed,” Malcomb said. “I believe him to be older than that though,” he said. His thoughts were reaching back over ages past. “There are many legends of Bishop. But if any of them hold veracity only Bishop knows — and he does not let up his secrets easily.”

“There seems to be more to Bishop than I first thought there was,” Chris commented.

“Oh yes,” Malcomb said. “Where Lord Bishop is concerned, there are puzzles and questions in great abundance. Yet no easy answers.”

### **Bishop’s journal.**

I have come to something of a crossroads.

Although I still have yet to discover the origins of NOX and who is distributing it, the discovery that NOX is coming through Branlaven Wraithstone’s territories disturbs me to no end.

I have difficulty believing Branlaven to be behind NOX’s creation. Drugs have never been his style at all. But do I believe him to be involved with this on some level. I have to investigate this further. Which means I may have to go into the underworld — Branlaven’s empire of the undead.

But that lies in the future. For the moment some things are going better. Christina Sparrow is doing well. Under the tutelage of Malcomb Druthers, Chris has learned a great deal of vampire culture in the last few weeks. She has come along a great deal from the frightened child I first encountered.

I find I am relieved in a way. Her ability to adjust to the changes in her life is a good sign. I can only hope any future victims of NOX shall prove to be as lucky as she has been.

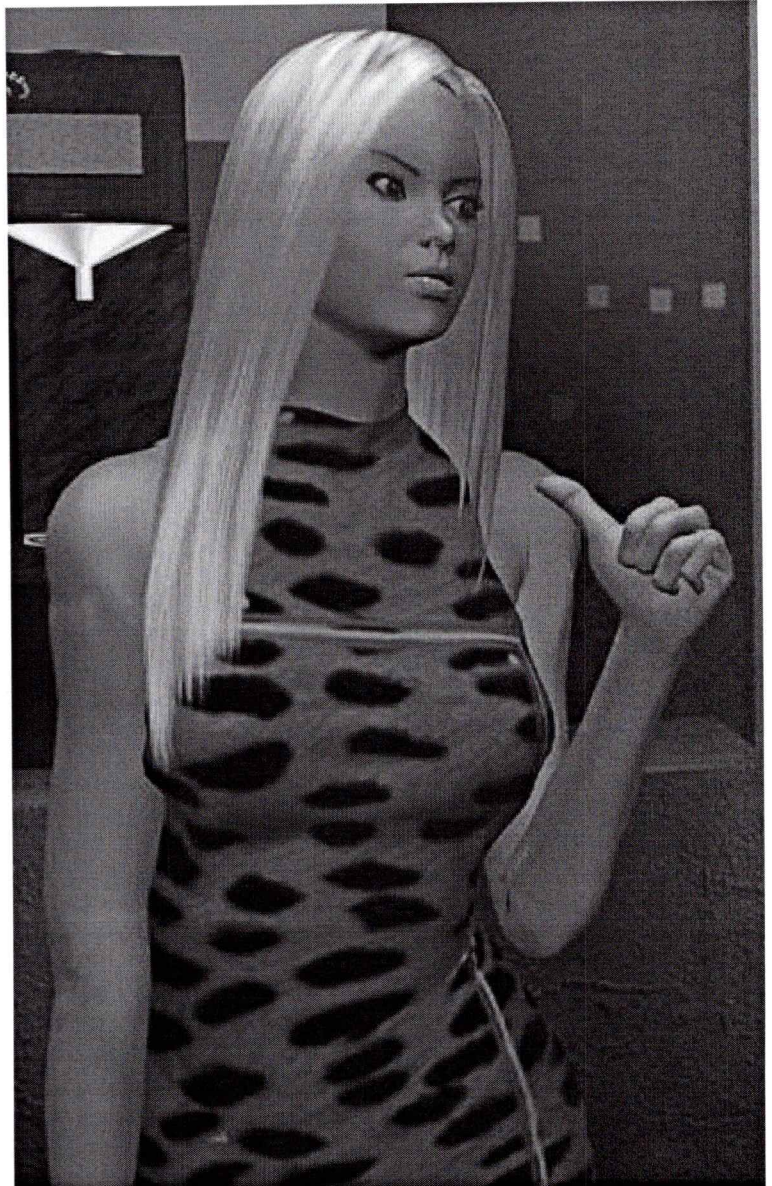
Time will tell. It always does.

### **Extract ends.**

“You know. There are times I wish I was you.” Niki Walters said as Chris came into the coffee shop. Chris had on a pair of sunglasses, which she pulled off and stuffed into her backpack as she came behind the counter.

“Why’s that?” Chris asked putting her stuff away and pulling out her apron. She quickly tied it on.

“Lets see,” Niki began to list thing off, “First, you bolt out of here without a word. Second, you don’t come back for weeks. Third, not only do you not lose your job, but management goes and give you a big fucking raise.” Niki sighed, “Plus fourth, you get to set your own hours. But you’re never in here until after sundown. And then for only three hours a night,” Niki shook her head in confusion, “I just don’t get it. If I pulled that shit



I'd be out on my ass in a second."

"I've got influential friends these days." Chris said with a smile. Niki just rolled her eyes and walked off into the back of the shop.

"I'd like a espresso please," a dark skinned elf said at the counter. He was dressed in green leather armor, with a deadly looking sword slung on his back. His hair was bright orange. It looked like flames were dancing on his head. A few weeks ago this would have been quite a disorienting sight for Chris. But happily that time has now passed.

"One espresso, coming right up," Chris said without so much as batting an eye, and set off to get the elf's drink.

