

Chapter One

Charis was twenty-one, not because that's how many years she'd been alive, but that was the age she felt comfortable being. She was not a model beauty, but of slender physical build with an attractive face. She wore her black hair long and loose. It softly fell over her eyes to keep her secrets hidden.

She stood veiled under the shadows of the knurled Spanish-moss laden tree and carefully watched the activity in the house across the street. There was nothing to indicate that she was a bloodsucking vampire. She expertly blended into the human race like a wolf in sheep's clothing.

She removed the printed copy of *The Savannah Morning News* from under her arm and once again read the headline: *Savannah Sells Historic Park Avenue Home*. The photo under the headline was of a boarded up two-story 1893 Victorian house in rather dilapidated condition. The house had seen better days, and in fact, it looked like it should be torn down instead of renovated.

The article said an architecture graduate, Luke Culture, from the art college had received a federal grant to fix-up the property. He'd moved in and was working on restoring the building to its once-upon-a-time majestic grandeur.

What he didn't know, and what Charis did know, was that there was a teenage vampire in the attic. Her brother, Matthew, was about to wake up from his long nap, and when he awoke, he was going to be very, very hungry!

Over a hundred years ago Charis had placed Matthew down for a *sleeping*. His chosen human age was thirteen. Young vampires needed to take long respites upon occasion otherwise, much like human teenagers, they became lethargic and irrational.

She was thrilled at the thought of seeing her younger brother again, but she was also concerned that his *awakening* was coinciding with the ill-fated renovation project that could prove disastrous.

She observed the house from a safe distance.

The graduate student, Luke Culture was working in the front parlor. He had the lights on and the windows open. He stood on a tall ladder and was scraping off four layers of wallpaper. The sheets of faded paper dropped down and surrounded him like curly potato chips.

Charis thought, '*for a human, he's cute*'. He had light color hair and nice face features; some would say he was handsome. His body type was lean and strong. He wore a paint splattered short sleeved t-shirt, faded blue jeans and tattered sneakers. She immediately liked Luke Culture, but she knew better than to get involved with humans. They made nice pets, but to go beyond that caused nothing but trouble.

Some of her kind, unable to find suitable partners, mated with humans. Charis knew all the vampire partners available to her, and she didn't particularly like any of them. She had decided never to choose a mate, and she most definitely would never fall in love with a human, no matter how cute he looked standing on a ladder scraping off wallpaper.

She stood watching him for at least an hour determining what to do, and then finally decided to take a simple practical approach; she'd knock on the door and ask Luke Culture if he'd heard any unusual noises in his attic. It was a logical question and not so out of the ordinary; after all this was Savannah, and the old house could be haunted.

She approached the front door and rang the bell. Nothing happened. It was broken. She knocked on the door, and when she got no response, she then banged on it with her fist as hard as she could.

"Wait a minute!" he called out.

She heard him climb down the ladder and shuffle through the piles of discarded wallpaper. After struggling with the door, he was finally able to drag it open where it hung unevenly on old rusty hinges.

"Can I help you?" he asked in a pleasant voice touched with a country southern drawl. His smile was fast and genuine. He was even more handsome close up than he'd looked further away.

Her heart fluttered. The sensation of desire that washed over her caught her by surprise. She'd never felt such an emotional and physical attraction to anyone in her entire life! Her eye teeth tingled and her mouth began to salivate. She felt an overwhelming need to possess his soul. She ran her tongue over her lips and held back the temptation to taste his warm rich blood.

'He's absolutely delicious!' Charis thought, but said, "I just happened to be walking by when I saw you working inside. I just wanted to say how great it is that you're fixing this old place up."

"Uh, thank you."

"It really is a beautiful majestic old house, built in eighteen ninety-three by architect Cornelius Vorhees."

"Yeah that's right. Not many people know that."

She wasn't going to let on that she'd known Mr. Vorhees personally or that she'd requested the renowned architect to build the secret space for her brother in the attic.

"Are you studying historic preservation at the art college?" he asked.

"No. I just like old buildings. My name is Charis by the way." She introduced herself and reached out to shake his hand.

When he touched her hand with his hand, she once again felt a tingle in her eye teeth. Her impulse was to bite him and claim him as her servant, but she resisted the temptation. She liked him too much for that.

"I'm Luke Culture, would you like a tour of...."

"Oh, I'd love it! Thank you very much!" she said and slipped into the foyer before he could change his mind.

"It's kind of a wreck right now," he apologized as he dragged the front door closed.

"Oh, maybe now, but it's so full of potential. I just know you'll have it back to its original magnificence in no time at all."

"Yeah, well it has to be done in a specific amount of time or I lose my historic funding."

Charis peeked around the wall and looked into the parlor. It appeared as if a bomb had exploded in the room, but she was determined to find something good to say about the mess. "I just love the fireplace."

"Only some of it's original. It needs some work."

"Just a little stonework maybe," she lied. It needed a complete do-over. She quickly stepped into the kitchen in hopes to find something organized, but that was an even bigger disappointment.

It looked nothing like she'd remembered. There was no cast iron stove, lovely center counter, decorative icebox, or sink and wash basin. Now the cooking area had an old 1950's refrigerator, a cracked tile floor, a rickety wooden table, laminated counters, and a green stove that made a person sick just to look at it.

She stood in the center of the kitchen; speechless. She'd remembered it from the 1920's when it was a speakeasy bootlegger hangout. She'd played cards with high-rollers from New York and won and lost fortunes with the best of them, but that was then, and this was now... now the house was in complete shambles!

Luke sensed her disgust. "They tried to modernize the kitchen in the fifties and I'm afraid they did more damage than good."

"Nothing that can't be fixed," she said cheerfully.

"Here's the dining room." He led her into an adjoining room.

"Some plaster and paint on the walls and ceilings are all it needs. This room will be beautiful when you polish up the lovely heart pine floors."

From there they passed a closet that had been converted into a small bathroom with a rust stained sink and cracked toilet.

"Would you be interested in seeing the upstairs?" he asked.

She could see he was obviously eager to share his restoration project with someone he thought was sincerely interested. "Oh yes, thank you I'd love to see the second floor if you don't mind showing me around." She stepped on the skinny staircase and he also stepped up with her. They stood tightly together on a rickety paint chipped stairway going to... where?

She sucked in her breath. Her chest was almost touching his chest. She was so close she could see the fine worry lines on his brow. She wanted to kiss away his troubles, but instead she stepped up one step and moved away.

He followed her up and, once they stood on the landing, he led the way and showed her the three bedrooms and the bathroom.

Everything needed an enormous amount of work, but in time, Charis believed he'd make the house beautiful again.

In one room she noticed a bed, nightstand and dresser. The furniture wasn't of the best quality, and in fact, she wondered if he'd picked it up at a used furniture shop.

"What's this door for?" she asked and pointed to a door at the end of the hall, but she already knew where the door went.

"That's the stairs to the attic."

"Is there a lot of work that needs to be done in the attic?"

"I don't know. It's just an attic and I'm not too concerned about it unless the roof leaks."

"Does the roof leak?"

"Not yet," he said with a laugh.

She motioned her head to the bedroom with the old furniture. "You're sleeping here as you do the repairs, right?"

"Yep."

"This is an old place; you ever hear sounds coming from the attic?"

"You mean like ghosts?"

"Yeah. This is Savannah and Savannah is haunted you know. You might have a ghost or two in the attic."

"No ghosts, maybe bats."

"Bats? What kind of bats? Have you seen a bat?"

"No, but I hear flapping around at night, so I'm guessing it might be bats."

"But you don't know that for sure."

"No, I don't know that for sure. Would you like to go up there and see?"

"No. No, I better go now." She started down the stairs. "You do know bats are a protected species. You can't kill them."

"I wasn't thinking of killing any bats."

They stood at the bottom of the stairs. He was a safe distance from her, but still within her arm's deadly reach.

"You can hang around and help if you want," he said hopefully.

"I'd love too, but I have to get to work."

"You work at night?"

"Yes, I work at Haints Alive Tattoos on Jefferson."

"You're a tattoo artist?"

"Yes." She rolled up her right sleeve to show off her tattoo. It was a homage to her mother; a sexy vampire lady behind a banner that read: mom.

"Your mom's a vampire?"

She tenderly reached up and brushed the plaster dust out of Luke's hair. With the simple gesture she cut her fingernail in the skin behind his right ear which drew a very tiny amount of blood. She smiled and wished him good luck with the renovations.

"Thanks," he said and escorted her to the front door. He had to pull, smack, and kick the door to open it.

She went down the porch steps, stopped at the bottom, turned and looked up at the attic window. The window was open, which was good because maybe her brother would be able to get out without disturbing Luke Culture.

"Come back anytime. I'm always here," he said.

"Thank you. I think I just might do that."

"Please do!" His happy grin expressed his sincere hope that she'd return.

Charis thought, *'Oh my, he's so delicious I just want to eat him up.'*

Chapter Two

Charis hurried across town through dark areas that no young woman should ever go alone. She pushed open the door and burst into Haints Alive Tattoos.

The owner, Hank Underwood, didn't bother to look up from reading *Tattoo Today*.

She rushed through the shop to the back room, swung open the refrigerator door and looked at the collection of blood-filled test tubes. It was protocol at the tattoo parlor to draw a vial of blood for 'testing purposes', but it was just a sham. They kept human blood in the refrigerator, and some in the freezer for when Charis was hungry.

Hank, although not a vampire himself, knew her secret, and he also knew she would suck every ounce of blood out of him if another blood source was not available. He made sure she had a full stock in the refrigerator.

She had bit him once, making him her servant, but she preferred not to use him because Hank had a wife and two young children to support. He had a good business, was a member of the Chamber of Commerce, and the leader of the Crypt Crawlers Motorcycle Gang. He was physically big, muscular, and decorated with bad-ass tattoos. Nobody messed with Hank, nobody except Charis.

She popped the cork on a test tube and held it under her nose to check for disease. She could smell tainted, contaminated, unhealthy blood. She never drank bad blood. It couldn't kill her, but it could make her sick.

The blood was good. She drank three test tubes and closed her eyes as she enjoyed the last drop.

"You're late. Rough sunset for ya?" Hank called back to her.

"I had some errands to run, sorry." She walked into the tattooing area, removed the magazine in Hank's hands and replaced it with her copy of *The Savannah Morning News*. She plopped down in one of the chairs as he read the headline: *Savannah Sells Historic Park Avenue Home*.

"What's this all about?"

"That house on Park Avenue is where my brother's sleeping. I put him there so he'd be safe, but now this grad student is doing a complete renovation. It's only a matter of time until he finds the coffin in the attic."

"You put your brother in the ghetto?"

"The house wasn't in the ghetto when I put him there. It was one of the finest houses in one of the best Savannah neighborhoods. His being in a bad part of town isn't really the problem. The problem is, Matthew is waking up. He's only thirteen in human years and he's been sleeping for over a hundred years. He has no idea what the world is like now. He's going to wake up confused and lost.

Nobody likes to wake up from a long rest and find themselves alone. I promised I would be there for him when he wakes up.”

“So why can’t you be there when he wakes up?”

“Because Luke Culture is in the house that’s why?”

“Who’s he?”

“Read the freaking article Hank! He’s the grad student who’s fixing up the place!”

Hank looked at the paper, but he didn’t want to read anything. It was more fun getting the story directly from a crazy vampire. He smiled and said, “I don’t see the problem here. Go over there, bite the dude and he’ll give you the keys to the attic. You can sit by your brother’s coffin and wait for him to wake up. You can even bring your brother a human to suck on for breakfast.”

Charis slumped in her chair and sat in silence.

Hank, sensing her unhappiness, assured her that things would be alright.

“No. No it won’t be alright. I can feel that something bad is going to happen. Matthew’s going to get into trouble and I won’t be able to help. He doesn’t know about the advances in vampire hunting and blood diseases. He’s awakening into a whole new nightmare.”

“He’ll be fine.”

“And that’s not the only problem.”

“There’s more?” he asked, still trying to take her concerns seriously.

“He’s going to wake up very very hungry.” Her thoughts turned to the most absolutely delicious human she knew, Luke Culture. She had marked him as ‘hers’, but that didn’t mean a blood starved teenage vampire would pay any attention to common courtesy.

Matthew yawned and stretched. His arms crashed into the soft velvet inside coffin lid. He shoved the top open, sat up and looked around.

He maintained the age of a thirteen-year-old human, but he was much older

than that. Still, he was considered a young vampire. In the year 1893 he'd felt the need to sleep. Luckily his older sister had found him a nice resting place in the attic of a new house being built on Park Avenue in Savannah Georgia.

The busted attic windows, smelly dust and spider webs confirmed his suspicions; the house he'd laid down in was no longer the majestic home it had once been. But the rundown sleeping accommodations were better than the time his parents hid him and his sister in ancient Egyptian storage room. What a terrifying awakening to find themselves in the middle of the Battle of Kadesh with Rameses' armed men surrounding the building. Fortunately, their parents had been nearby to rescue them.

Matthew had no doubt, although Charis wasn't present, she was close.

He was familiar to waking up after a long rest, and he knew to expect changes in the world. He liked the surprise of discovering what the foolish humans had been doing while he slept. It was like being born again into a strange unpredictable world.

He climbed out of the coffin and stood on unsteady legs. He did a series of exercises to get his muscles working and his blood flowing.

He could see in the dark and found his black cloak that his sister had packed away for him. He wrapped it around his shoulders, and walked to the busted attic window. He removed a few of the slats and peeked out.

The street looked empty except for a few odd-looking iron things with wheels. He guessed them to be advanced models of what he'd known as Edgar Duryea's 1893 gasoline powered automobile.

"This is going to be fun," he said. He opened his cloak and swooped down into the darkness to find a human to feed upon.

He found Jerome seated at a bus stop on Water's Avenue. Matthew didn't like to feed on males, but he was famished and this was his only available food choice.

Jerome was about twenty-five, strong and healthy. He was looking at a thin flat object in his hands and punching the keys with his thumbs. He looked up when Matthew sat down beside him. "Yo dude," Jerome said with a friendly smile.

"Hello."

"Bus is late. Should be here soon."

"Oh, good that gives me plenty of time."

"Yeah right." Jerome went back to his key pressing and never would remember what happened after he hit 'send'.

Matthew placed his teeth in the sweet spot of Jerome's neck vein. He drank quickly, and not so carefully. Blood dripped down his chest and dribbled off his chin. Blood flowed down Jerome's neck and stained his shirt on the left side.

Matthew did not suck all of Jerome's blood because that would obviously kill him. Instead, Matthew would allow Jerome to live and get stronger. In the future, whenever he wanted blood, he could summon Jerome.

Matthew needed clothes to blend in with the current human population. He stripped Jerome down to his plaid boxers. The clothes were oversized and baggie, but at the moment, Matthew wasn't overly concerned about making a fashion statement. He walked away from the bus stop unnoticed by anyone.

He required at least two more humans to meet his necessary nourishment before he'd return to his coffin.

Chapter Three

The CAT Prowler (Chatham Area Transit Prowler) bus stopped in front of

bus stop #7 on Water's Avenue. Sam, the bus driver, opened the door and nodded a greeting to Jerome.

Jerome was a regular rider. Five nights a week Jerome got on at #7 Waters and got off at Reynolds Square, for his job in the kitchen at The Pink House.

Sam looked again at Jerome and thought it odd that he would be seated on the bench dressed only in his boxer underwear. And then Sam took a closer look and saw blood on Jerome's chest.

"Oh Lord! Jerome's done been shot!" he said and raced down the bus steps to check if Jerome was dead.

"Somebody call nine one one! Jerome's been shot!" Glen, a regular rider who got on at #3 Victory Drive and rode to his momma's on Price Street for dinner every night, used his cell phone to call the police.

With his fingers pressed on Jerome's wrist, Sam announced, "I'm getting a faint pulse."

Pete who got on at Memorial Hospital to get home to his place on Lincoln Street rushed off the bus to help. He wasn't a doctor at Memorial, but he was an orderly in the emergency room. He'd seen his share of shootings, accidents, and sick people. He was no stranger to gore, guts, and death. Of all the people at the scene, he was the most qualified to lend a helping hand.

"What ya think?" Sam asked Pete.

Pete leaned in for a closer look and noticed the stream of blood coming from two holes in Jerome's neck. "Looks like he's been hit twice with a twenty-two."

"Where's his clothes?" Glen asked from the safety of the bus.

"Did you call nine one one?" Sam asked.

"Yep. They're coming. What happened to Jerome's clothes? He ain't wearing nothing but his underwear. That just ain't like Jerome to be like that."

"He's been shot and whoever shot him stole his clothes," Pete concluded.

"That's just flat out stupid," Glen stated.

"Jerome! Jerome can ya hear me?" Sam asked and gently tapped Jerome's

right cheek.

Jerome eyes rolled up white to the back of his head and he smiled in happy dreamy contentment.

"Don't worry Jerome, you're gonna be just fine. We called an ambulance. Help's on the way," Sam assured him.

"Ya just hold on Jerome," Pete said.

"Hey Jerome!" Glen called out. "What happened to your clothes?"

"Will you shut up about his damn clothes. He could die!" Sam snapped.

They heard the wail of the police and the sound of the approaching ambulance as help arrived.

Two Savannah-Chatham police officers got out of the cruiser. Office Terrance told the rookie to go direct traffic around the bus, and then he stood back to assess the situation. He wasn't a paramedic, and if the truth be known, he didn't care too much about touching dead folks, or in Jerome's case, a soon-to-be-dead folk. "Anybody see any of this?" he asked.

"Nope. I stopped the bus, looked out the door and saw Jerome sitt'n here just like this: shot twice in the neck with a twenty-two, blood dripping down his chest, and wearing nothing but his boxers," Sam explained.

Office Terrance leaned over and studied Jerome's neck. "Who said that was a gunshot wound from a twenty-two?"

"I did. I work in the ER at Memorial. I've seen what a twenty-two shot looks like," Pete said.

"Doesn't it seem odd that the entry holes are so close together?" Terrance pointed out. "Looks more like a bite mark from some sort of animal."

"A snake ya think?" Sam asked.

"A vampire bat!" Pete announced his new diagnosis.

"Are there vampire bats in Savannah?" Sam asked Office Terrance.

"Not that I know of," Terrance answered. He then started taking down names and took their statements. He wrote everything in his little black

notebook.

The ambulance came to a stop and two paramedics jumped out. They rushed to Jerome and asked questions nobody knew the answer to: how old is he? What's his full name? Where does he live? How much does he weigh? Does he have health insurance? Any allergies?

They put Jerome on the pop-up stretcher, wheeled him into the ambulance, closed the doors and drove away.

Glen shook his head and asked, "do you suppose somebody shot Jerome just for his clothes?"

"That wasn't a gunshot wound. It was a vampire bat bite," Pete corrected him and took his seat on the bus.

Sam took his seat behind the steering wheel. He closed the bus doors and they sealed tight with a loud suck. "Y'all police better be on the lookout for vampire bats." He called out to officer Terrance

Officer Terrance and his new rookie partner watched the CAT Prowler continue down Waters Avenue.

The rookie was from Savannah and he knew better than to question anything he saw on the night shift. He knew that unusual things happened in Savannah all the time, and the night-time was unusually spooky. Rookie Brown was already brown-nosing the chief to get him on the day-shift.

Officer Terrance liked the night-shift. He'd worked the night-shift for over seven years, and just when he'd thought he'd seen it all, Savannah surprised him and he saw something unusual and unexpected.

Terrance didn't know it yet, but before his -shift ended he would respond to an emergency call for college art student suffering from two suspicious bites on her neck. And he would find a drunk man on River Street with the same two bite marks on his neck.

Strange and unusual, even for the most haunted city in America; Savannah.