

## PREFACE

The warm rain gently rinsed away the dried blood as Brenda's eyes gradually opened to a night sky complete with thunder and lightning. She pulled herself to a sitting position. Every muscle she moved complained at the treatment it had received over the last few days.

She pushed a bit of wet undergrowth out of her face. Across the long yard she could see the house. She had to take her time, and force herself to recall how she got here. She remembered hiding from the police and firemen; something about having just killed someone. Her shoulder throbbed in agony. Brenda placed a hand over the gunshot wound. Why had she been shot? Why was she sitting in the underbrush of a wooded area?

Brenda held out her hands, and filled them with rainwater. She splashed her face, then rubbed her temples until her mind seemed to come back into focus. She tried to stand up. On the third attempt, she managed to pull herself upright with the assistance of the tree she had been leaned against.

She glanced around checking to see if she was alone. Brenda took a couple of tentative steps, then walked more confidently toward the back of the dark house. The smell of a recent fire hung over the entire area. The gentle rain continued to have a therapeutic effect on her as she pulled her fingers

## Allan Gilbreath

through her hair. Squeezing gently, she washed away blood and sheet rock. Apparently, she had not had a good day.

The fire fighters had propped a sheet of plywood over the door they had removed in order to put out the fire. Brenda bluntly shoved the obstacle out of her way. She was in no mood for finesse right now. Memories of the day flooded back as soon as she stepped inside. The fire had mostly gutted the center of the house. The firemen had done their part to add to the damage, but they hadn't done most of the destruction. To be honest, Brenda had to admit to herself that she had actually been responsible for the lion's share of it.

The office should be right across from the scorched hallway, she thought. Amazingly, it stood mostly intact. Her purse sat exactly where she had left it. Covered in wet dust and soot, it still held her identification, credit cards, and other personal effects. In short, it held her life. She looked around the once ornate desk and credenza. With her new strength, locked drawers only provided a temporary annoyance to her search. After what he had done to her, he owed her. He owed her the entire rest of her life.

Finally, a small metal box rewarded her. It had been in the back of a locked pencil drawer. Brenda glanced at the combination and shrugged. She lifted up slightly on the corner of the lid, then pulled harder until it peeled back. She pulled the cash out and put it in her pocket. He wasn't coming back so he wouldn't miss it.

## Dark Chances

To her surprise, she found the bathroom actually had water pressure and her closet still held undamaged clothing. Brenda took a look at her injuries in the mirror. The rotten bastard had been right about a few things. She was certainly healing faster than a normal human. Even the gunshot wound hurt less now.

She cleaned up as best she could and dressed casually, as if she had just been out shopping. She needed to think. She would walk down the road a bit, then call a cab on her cell phone. She would go back to her old life until she could figure how to make it as a living vampire.