

They walked for a minute or so in silence, Callan speculating whether the boy would come clean about his injury when he got home. Given he was sick already, he might try to hide it. Callan recalled doing something similar himself.

“What’s your name?”

“Tommy Lucas. Me and my mom just moved here from Chicago last week, she’s an oncologist, and I go to school at the church.”

“Really? I didn’t know they had a school there.”

“It’s new, for kids in special situations like me. I have a blood disorder they say is cancer but it’s really an anomaly, a curse on my bloodline.”

“That so?”

“Yes, I come from a line of vampires.”

“You don’t say?”

“Nobody believes me, but it’s true.” He bared his teeth.

“Those are some biters, all right.”

“I have a cape and a casket in my room too.”

*Were kids nowadays always this chatty?*

“It’s a 4-D player when I’m not using it for a bed or streaming TV. Standard adult model, serial number zero-nine-seven-B-two-M-six-D. It’s way cool.”

Callan narrowed his eyes. “You’re really not joshing me, are you?”

“Nope.” Tommy hopped over a groove in the sidewalk.

“What grade are you in, Tommy?”

“Third, supposed to be in fourth, but Mom and Sister Madeline didn’t want me to stress out this year because it makes my red blood cells explode.”

“Really? That sounds painful.”

“Not so much. I just have to aim straight when I take a leak at Grandma’s.”