

# All Places That Are Not Heaven



# All Places That Are Not Heaven

Tales of Adrian Talbot  
and Genevieve de Monet

Anne Fraser

*Edited and with an Introduction by*  
**Inanna Arthen**



*By Light Unseen Media  
Pepperell, Massachusetts*

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Hardcover Edition

ISBN-10: 1-935303-30-9  
ISBN-13: 978-1-935303-30-5  
LCCN: 2011929674

Published by  
By Light Unseen Media  
PO Box 1233  
Pepperell, Massachusetts 01463-3233

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Printed in the United States of America

0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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# Introduction

If Gideon Redoak comes closest of Anne Fraser's characters to being her fictional alter ego, Adrian Talbot is, in Jungian terms, Anne's Shadow. Jokingly nicknamed "the Brat Prince of Toronto" and "That Actor" (as in, "that...actor"), Adrian is Anne's loveable bad boy. Like Spike on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Adrian has endured suffering, cruelty, and bitter loss, and responds to it all the way we wish we could and know we can't. He falls back on his own egoism and violence as a defense mechanism. But Anne wanted her readers to know that Adrian isn't as bad as he seems to be. As she wrote in a FAQ describing her "Cast of Dozens" in 2001, Adrian is "[v]ain, arrogant, selfish, exasperating, moody and always needing to be the centre of attention; [but he] can also be witty, generous, loving and even selfless." He is a typical romantic "antihero" even though he never appears in a typical romance story (that is, one with a happy ending).

Adrian was irresistible to Anne's co-writing friends, and is featured in more long multi-author fiction than any other single character from the "Cast of Dozens." As a result, he has a more chameleon-like and inconsistent personality than most of his cohorts in Anne's fictional universe. While Anne described him as "enthusiastically bi-sexual, with a slight preference for women," she wrote almost exclusively about Adrian's male partners and love interests. Her co-writers, on the other hand, almost without exception paired Adrian with their own female characters, and Anne agreeably went along with their plotting. Unfortunately, the vast majority of fiction starring Adrian can't be included in this collection because so many authors collaborated on it.

Anne had fun at Adrian's expense far more than she did with most of her other creations. She co-wrote, with various friends,

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extremely silly fiction in which Adrian takes one pratfall after another until his dignity is but a dim memory. Granted, the most outrageous of these occurred during group fiction writing marathons called v-parties, where minor inconveniences like canon, consistency and the laws of physics were cheerfully erased from the board. But it often seemed as though Anne, having created such an insufferably Narcissistic character, simply couldn't resist poking his inflated ego with a pin just for the satisfaction of seeing him fly wildly around the room.

Early on, Anne wrote a scene in a group fiction which established that Adrian and Gideon Redoak had met at some time in the distant past and consequently, loathed each other. It's Gideon who refers to Adrian as "that actor." Anne only got around to filling in a backstory for their mutual aversion much later, but no one was startled at her instinctive assumption that these two characters would automatically dislike each other.

The stories included here represent Anne's most serious, and most personal, takes on Adrian Talbot. The first four tales describe Adrian's origins, his unrequited attraction to the ruggedly handsome graduate student Jake Fowler, and how he gets some come-uppance in Toronto and dials his arrogance down a few notches. "Speak Easy," the centerpiece of the collection, relates an episode from Adrian's more recent past in the 1920s. Anne once called this novella "the best damn thing I ever wrote."

A Toronto resident, Anne amused herself with a few in-jokes in the stories she sets there, inserting real-life locations, situations and, without names, people. She leaves it to her readers to figure out the clues.

Genevieve de Monet is among the few female characters that Anne developed to any great extent. In her early appearances, Genevieve is a highly idealized figure. She's breathtakingly beautiful and a brave survivor of a tragic past that includes children dying of plague and an assassinated vampire husband. She owns several estates, is skilled with horses and wine production, fights better than most men and commands reverence and respect from almost all who know her. But Genevieve at first plays the role of wise mother and counselor to the more fallible male characters whose stories seemed to interest Anne much more.

In the last years of Anne's life, however, she began changing Genevieve's history as part of several long co-written fiction projects, and the character became very important to her. For this reason, I've included two Genevieve stories in this volume. The earlier one, "Watch and Ward," I've updated to make consistent

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with the new directions that Anne was taking Genevieve as a character. “A Babe in Arms” relates how Genevieve meets and falls in love with her partner, Jean de la Mare. Theirs is among the very few heterosexual relationships to evolve past simplistic formula in Anne’s fiction, and represents a significant shift in Anne’s writing.

This collection and its companion, *The Cliff Road Chronicles*, offer readers a full picture of Anne’s fictional universe, with its three centers in Fletcherville, Maine, Toronto, Ontario and France. Together, both volumes form an incomplete, but representative portrait of the complicated, vivid and entertaining imaginary realm that Anne created.

*Inanna Arthen*  
May, 2011

# Tales of Adrian Talbot

*"...when all the world dissolves,  
And every creature shall be purified,  
All places shall be hell that are not heaven..."*

*Christopher Marlowe*

# The Rosedale Vampires

(1994)

Jake hurried to the lecture room, wanting to ensure himself a good seat. For him, this meant the front of the room, unlike many of his fellow students. He didn't want to miss anything, because he needed some new ideas.

"For my thesis," he had told his roommate when explaining why he'd be late that night.

Max had given him that look that said he didn't believe a word of it. "For your novel."

A sheepish nod confirmed this. Allegedly writing his thesis on anthropology, Jake was spending more time on his vampire novel...to his advisor's despair.

The notice on the anthro department bulletin board had caught his attention. "Professor Adrian Talbot, a noted expert in folklore, will speak on vampires in folklore." It gave the date, time and place, and Jake was determined to go.

Even though he'd never heard of Professor Adrian Talbot.

There were already people in the lecture room. Three of them. He really only noticed the female. She was gorgeous. Long, fawn-coloured hair fell to her waist but did not obscure her tall, graceful figure. Her complexion was pale, but her eyes glowed when she looked at Jake. She wore a wine-red pants suit that must have cost a fortune. Lips the colour of her outfit parted in a slight smile.

"But look," she said in a husky voice with a European accent. "We already have a student to hear Adrian's lecture. Welcome. What is your name?"

Jake looked around, wondering if someone else had come in. But there was only himself besides the other two men and the

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woman.

"Uh, Jake," he said. "Jake Fowler."

"Hello, Jake Fowler," she smiled again. "I am Anya. This is Paul," here she pointed to the man fiddling with the microphone, "And this is Marek." She indicated the man slumped two seats away from her. "Adrian has been delayed. But you are early. Come, sit." She patted the chair beside her.

The man she'd introduced as Paul gave Jake a hard look, so he slid into the chair beside Marek. Paul was 6'5" at least, and had a build that suggested muscle. He was blond, blue-eyed, and looked like a skiing instructor or something equally exotic that attracted women. He made Jake, no pygmy at 6' tall, feel inadequate with his dark brown hair and brown eyes. Jake knew he wasn't handsome, but next to Paul, he faded into obscurity.

On the other hand, Marek was smaller than Jake or even Anya. A slight, non-descript man with lank hair of no particular colour that fell over his face, he sat huddled in his cheap clothes and smiled at Jake.

"I am Marek," he said unnecessarily, with the same accent as the stunning Anya. "You like vampires?"

"Marek," said Paul sharply.

The small man scrunched down deeper into his faded black sweater. "If Jake did not like vampires, he would not be here."

"It's for research," Jake explained, getting out his notebook. The lecture notice had warned against tape recorders and cameras.

Paul finished setting up the lectern and microphone, and sat between Jake and Anya. Other students began coming in, most stopping to greet Jake, and let their eyes linger over either Anya or Paul, depending on their personal preference. As time for the lecture grew closer, the air of anticipation grew. Eyes were drawn to the three strangers at the front of the room, wondering if Paul was the lecturer. Jake was the only one who had been introduced to the threesome.

But when Professor Adrian Talbot did come in, no one doubted his identity. He was shorter and slimmer than Paul, but had more...presence. His hair was black and wavy. Frost had settled at his temples although his face was unlined. His features were a matinee idol's—strong and handsome down to the regulation cleft in his chin. A trench coat hung from his shoulders in the continental style. His clothes fit perfectly, the sort of tailoring that cost more than tuition. An audible feminine sigh rippled around the room when the professor shed his coat like an opera

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cape and stepped up to the microphone.

"Good evening," Professor Talbot said. He had an English accent that spoke of public school, stately homes and titled ancestors. "Thank you all for coming tonight." Without further ado, he launched into his lecture.

It was nothing Jake hadn't heard before, yet he was mesmerized. Adrian Talbot seemed to give the material a fresh twist, or something. As he furiously scribbled down notes, Jake found himself wishing that he'd had Talbot for one of his pros.

All too soon, the talk ended and Talbot indicated that he was available for questions. Jake's hand shot up.

"Do you think the traditional folkloric vampire is evolving with today's fictional vampire?"

Talbot blinked. "A very good question. There is no doubt that the modern fictional vampire is a very different creature from the folkloric one, or even from the fictional monster of the last century. Yet, do you not feel that today's novelist or screen writer could not have made those changes without the myth?"

"No," Jake said. "Without the original myth, there'd be no Dracula, let alone Lestat."

"Precisely. Yet if folklore does not change with society, it becomes stale and invalid. Look at so-called urban folklore. Everyone knows the stories of the choking doberman or the vanishing hitchhiker. Folklore is not dead, it is evolving. Today's culture needs Lestat, as much or if not more than it needs the lurching, bloated corpse of some poor peasant."

Jake looked pleased. Prof. Talbot smiled at him, quite a brilliant smile. When he'd answered the other questions and dismissed the students, he came over to Jake's chair.

"That was an intelligent question. I would like to speak to you some more, if you have the time. What is your name?"

"Jake Fowler, sir."

"Do you have to be anywhere right now, Jake Fowler, sir?"

"Uh, no."

"Good." Talbot flashed that smile. Jake was pretty sure that the amount of wattage he used was illegal on campus. "You will dine with us. Perhaps you would be good enough to recommend a quiet place?"

Quiet places around campus were scarce. Jake named a fake English pub that the undergrads couldn't afford, and Talbot nodded.

"Then we go," he said.

Jake found the professor a little puzzling. An expert on

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folklore that he'd never heard of? A man who delivered a lecture on a tired subject but made it sound fresh and exciting? Despite the polished English accent and the very English name, Prof. Adrian Talbot had an odd, almost foreign way of speaking.

Shrugging his questions aside, Jake led his four new acquaintances to the Hound. It had once been the Hound and Horse, but the owners had grown tired of hearing it called the Dog and Pony, so they had changed the name. As Jake had suspected, only a few regulars drowsed over their pints or played desultory darts in the pub. It was growing late, but the Hound catered to students and served meals until 1:00 a.m.

"Satisfactory." Talbot nodded his approval, leading his little flock to a corner table.

He flirted outrageously with the waitress who brought them their menus and she ate it up. Jake had once tried flirting with the same waitress and had had his beer sloshed "accidentally" into his lap. But then, he didn't look like Adrian Talbot.

It was amazing that Anya, the lone woman in their group, seemed firmly attached to the Nordic-looking Paul. Marek was definitely the odd man out.

"So, Jake," said Marek cheerfully, "Is this your favourite restaurant?"

"It would be, if I could afford it."

Marek glanced at the prices on the menu and whistled. "I see what you mean," he grinned. "Too high for students or a poor working stiff."

"Marek," said Paul in his freezing tone.

Predictably, Marek shrank down. Jake couldn't figure out what he'd said to offend Paul, unless it was the implication that the pub was too expensive to have brought visitors to.

But Talbot said, "Order whatever you like, Jake. I am in an expansive mood this evening, and I shall stand the treat."

"Thank you, Professor Talbot," Jake replied. "That's very kind of you."

"Not at all. And since I am buying you dinner, you must call me Adrian. My companions you know."

Jake wanted to say, No, I don't know them at all, not even their last names. Are they your friends, your fan club, or what? But all he said was, "Are you going to be in Toronto long?"

"That depends," the professor said.

The waitress came and took their orders. All four of the visitors ordered salads and wine, which made Jake feel guilty about asking for shepherd's pie and dark ale. Adrian waved his attempt

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to change his order aside.

"I told you, have what you please," said the handsome lecturer. "So, you are interested in folklore?"

"Yes. I'm an anthro grad, and I'm writing my thesis on folklore."

"On vampires?" Anya leaned forward.

Jake ignored what her leaning forward did to his blood pressure. "No, the subject's been done to death. Pardon the expression. It's on other aspects of folklore. But my novel is about vampires."

"Oh, yes," Adrian smiled. "Your novel." He cocked his head to one side, like the dog in the commercial. His eyes were intense. "Tell me about your novel, Jake."

Their orders arrived just then. Jake took a mouthful of his shepherd's pie and scalded his tongue. It had never been served that hot before. He swallowed painfully and doused his burning tongue with dark ale.

"Sorry," he gasped.

"Not at all." Adrian signalled the waitress. "Another ale for my young friend."

Jake didn't bother to protest. If Adrian wanted to get him drunk, it was fine, as long as the professor paid. Was Talbot trying to seduce him? Gay men had made plays for Jake before, but never like this.

There didn't seem to be anything between Adrian and Paul, or Adrian and Marek, or Adrian and Anya, for that matter. What were those three doing attached to the professor?

Adrian was leaning forward now, ignoring his salad although he took occasional sips of wine. "You were going to talk about your novel?"

Jake drank more ale. "It's about a vampire who's a stage magician. He makes everyone wonder why his tricks seem so much more magical than everyone else's. Of course, he never does television appearances or afternoon matinees."

"Of course." Adrian smiled.

"His assistant is in on his secret, but she's not a vampire. He's mesmerized her into helping him. But she falls in love with this other guy..." Jake's voice trailed off. All four of his listeners were staring at him incredulously. He blushed. "It sounds pretty lame, I know."

"Not at all," Anya assured him, patting him on the hand. "What is it called?"

Jake glanced at Paul, who was glaring, and gently reclaimed

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his hand before the big blond decided to do something permanent. "I can't really think of a good title. I'm calling it *Blood Magic*, but that's so obvious."

"A dangerous title," Adrian remarked cryptically. "So, you are interested in vampires?"

"Yeah, sure. I like reading vampire novels. Rice is my favourite, but I like pretty nearly everything, except the real crap."

"I enjoy Rice, but I prefer Yarbro," Adrian said. "You Canadians have produced some promising authors, such as Tanya Huff."

"I've met her," Jake volunteered. "She used to work at Bakka." Seeing their blank looks, he explained, "The science fiction bookstore in town. I don't like her books that much, but they're better than some. So, yeah, I guess you could say I like vampires. In books, at least."

Adrian pushed aside his untouched salad. "Suppose, Jake Fowler, that I were to tell you that vampires exist outside of books? That they are real? That they dwell in this city, likely enough in your university? What would you say?"

Jake blinked. "Get out of town!"

"I am in earnest."

"It's been real nice talking to you, professor. Thanks for dinner. I've got to go home."

Jake started to stand up. Anya, sitting on his left side, put a hand on his arm.

"Adrian is not mad," she said softly. "Sit. Listen. You will believe."

Sitting reluctantly back down, Jake flicked his eyes to Adrian. "So talk," he grunted.

"Once," Adrian began, "I was a sceptic like yourself. I was not uninterested in the vampire myth, but I did not believe such creatures roamed the earth. I was engaged to be married to a beautiful young woman named Belinda." He paused, and took a sip of wine. "Just her name is music, do you not agree? She was an art instructor at the same university where I taught folklore."

Jake, absorbed in the story, forgot to ask the name of that institution.

"As an engaged couple, Belinda and I were frequently invited to faculty parties. We were always meeting new people, so we thought nothing of it when, on one particular night, we were introduced to Safelli." The sheer hatred he packed into his pronunciation of that name made Jake pull back in his chair. "He was an art instructor, as well, of adult evening classes." A little scorn entered his voice there, and Jake decided that Adrian was

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a snob. "Naturally, he and Belinda fell into a discussion of art. Art!" Talbot snorted. "The man painted in acrylics! *Plastic* paint! What would he know of art?" He broke off. "Your glass is empty again, my friend."

Jake, feeling the effect of two pints on little food (he'd forgotten about his shepherd's pie), made a feeble protest that was ignored. A snob that paid for three pints of dark ale was an okay snob in his book, he decided when the beer came.

"Belinda started seeing Safelli after that party. She was drawn to him. Oh, he was handsome, I suppose," he said, damning with faint praise, "But we were going to be married! Still, I loved her and trusted her, and did not protest when she went off alone with him.

"But I began to wonder about Safelli. I never saw him in daylight, and could find no one who had. Most of his students were attractive women. Men and plain women did not last long in his classes. If questioned, his students were full of praise for the master; but his art was mediocre and his teaching methods poor. Yet his pupils spoke of him as if he were Michelangelo!

"And Belinda was caught in his web. She was a better artist than he, but she went to Safelli for 'private' lessons." The professor reached for his wine glass with a hand that shook.

"Poor Adrian," said Anya.

"There's a bug in my salad!" Marek exclaimed, pushing his plate away from himself in horror.

Adrian looked into the salad bowl, apparently grateful for the subject change. "Where?"

"There!" Marek pointed at a dark spot on a lettuce leaf.

Adrian examined the spot. "That is a sunflower seed," he said patiently, popping the offending seed into his own mouth. "Eat your tomatoes, Marek, they're good for you."

Marek speared a tomato and looked at it dubiously. "It is red," he said, and looked about to say something else, but caught the glare Paul shot at him and meekly ate his tomato.

"I was speaking of Safelli and Belinda," Adrian went on as if there'd been no interruption. "I grew suspicious of their meetings when Belinda became ill. She was *never* ill. Yet suddenly, she was pale and listless, tired all the time and she had lost interest in parties and outings. I noticed blood on her collar and she tried to tell me she had cut herself trimming her hair! I pulled the bandage off and saw the truth. Safelli was what I suspected him to be."

"There really were fang marks on her neck?" Jake asked.

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"There were," Adrian confirmed. "But by the time I knew enough to act, my beautiful Belinda was dead, and Safelli had escaped. That was ten years ago. I became an expert on vampires—*real vampires*—in order to know my enemy. Then I tried to track him down. I finally traced him here, to Toronto."

"What are you going to do?"

"He must pay for killing my Belinda, and who knows how many others. He is a monster. He must be destroyed!" His voice rose on that last note, so that heads turned.

"Adrian," said Paul. "You are overwrought." His voice was quiet.

"We should go back to the hotel," Anya put in.

"You are right," the professor nodded. "Jake, forgive me. I promise to make more sense, if you promise to meet us here again tomorrow night."

"Why?" Jake asked.

"I need your help. You know this city. I need you to help me find Safelli."

"Me? But..."

"Please, Jake. Meet us here at nine tomorrow night."

Those eyes...Anya's eyes...Marek was looking at him like a hungry pup...even Paul looked hopeful.

"Okay," Jake sighed. "I'll come."

"Thank you." Adrian reached across the table and gripped Jake's hand briefly. He signalled to the waitress, paid the bill and left a lavish tip, and departed with his followers.

Jake remained at the table and asked for another beer...and then another.

When Jake finally went home, he was very drunk. He tripped on the throw rug in the hall and fell heavily, waking Max. His roomie came out in his pajama bottoms and looked down at what was left. Jake was a big-boned young man who played football. Max was skinny and not into athletics.

"Up," Max prodded Jake with his toe. "I can't carry you to bed."

Somehow, Jake got to his feet. "Hi, Maxie," he greeted his disgusted friend.

"You certainly are," Max agreed, steering him into his bedroom.

Jake woke up with an eight-horse-hitch team of Clydesdales tap-dancing across his brain cells while at least one alien was giving birth in his stomach. Why was he lying on top of his bed wearing nothing but a pair of jockey shorts? His red ones?

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Groaning, he emerged shakily from his bedroom after struggling into a pair of sweat pants. Max was in their tiny kitchen, stirring a pot of something that smelled nauseating. Jake made it to the bathroom just on time.

"Next year, I get a new roomie," Max threatened when Jake finally re-appeared. He didn't mean it, and Jake knew it. "And why did you come home drunk last night? You're not a frosh anymore."

"I know, I know," Jake winced. "God, what are you cooking? It smells awful."

"I'm not cooking, I'm washing your sweat socks," Max quipped. "Where *were* you last night? Out with Grace?" Grace was Jake's sort-of girlfriend.

"I wish. No, I went out with the professor who gave that lecture. He offered to buy me dinner."

"He did? Jake, I never knew..."

"Piss off, Max. You know I'm not gay. I don't think Adrian is, either. But he talks a good story."

"And got you drunk. Are you sure he wasn't making a pass at you? You got on a first-name basis with him, I notice."

"He told me to call him Adrian, yes I'm sure, and I got myself drunk."

Max ladled out some of the glop from the pot he was stirring into a bowl and handed it to Jake. "Here," he said, "Eat this."

"Not if you paid me."

"It's only chicken soup. Eat it."

Jake kept his comments about Jewish mothers to himself. Max's mother *was* Jewish, and Jake liked her.

"So, this professor bought you dinner and enough beer to drown in," Max said as they ate their soup, which tasted better than it smelled. "You don't think he's gay, so why the largess?"

"He said he needs my help to track down the man who killed his fiancée," Jake said.

"Whoa! Time out! You are *not* a private detective, a bounty hunter, or a psychic. Why your help?"

"I know the city, and I asked a good question which made Adrian notice me."

"Keep your mouth shut, next time."

"I intend to. But I'm sort of committed. Adrian seems pretty serious about this. I think his fiancée being killed sent him a little off the rails. He thinks her killer's—get this—a vampire."

Max looked at him steadily. "No wonder you want to help him."

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"I don't believe in vampires. Adrian *almost* had me believing last night."

"After how many beers?"

"That's beside the point." Jake yawned. "Anyway, I'm meeting Adrian and his sidekicks at the Dog tonight. Want to come?"

"No, thanks. I have to go study tonight. It's an interesting concept. You might try it sometime."

"I am heading for the library as soon as I finish this...what did you say it was again?"

"Sweat sock à la Fowler."

"What, no grilled jock strap on the side?"

"That's for dinner."

Jake grinned, finished his soup, jumped into the bathroom ahead of Max, and took a lengthy shower. He did leave Max *some* hot water. He dressed hurriedly and departed for Robarts Library, popularly known as Fort Book.

"This," he remarked to himself as he stalked through the new ground-floor entrance, "Is one shit-ugly building. I could believe there were vampires in here."

He grinned as one of the staff members—a short, slightly chubby woman in her mid-thirties, wearing a bat t-shirt—gave him a very startled look. He'd been thinking out loud, not a good sign. Luckily, he knew this technician. They'd talked vampires before.

"Don't mind me," he called out to her. "It's the pressure."

"I've heard *that* one before," she chuckled, and went on her way.

"Nice t-shirt," he yelled after her, drawing disapproving looks from other library denizens. "Oh, lighten up," Jake told them, and threaded his way through the maze they'd made of the first floor to the elevators.

Fortified by Max's chicken soup and two forays down to the unspeakable cafeteria for vaguely coffee-flavoured sludge, Jake put in a full afternoon's work on his thesis. A pounding headache and a growling stomach finally encouraged him to gear out of serious student mode and go home. Max was out, but had left food to be nuked in the microwave. (Jake, if pressed, could open cans and heat the contents. He did the housework). He zapped his meal, ate it while studying *The Journal of Gypsy Folklore*, then tidied up the apartment.

Another hour until he had to be at the Hound. Jake worked on his novel for a bit, introducing the assistant's love interest, a university grad who was studying...anthropology.

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“Write what you know,” Jake quipped to himself as he made the character dashingly handsome, athletic, clever and rich.

Satisfied with himself, he left to catch the bus that would take him to the Hound.

Adrian and his...what? Admirers? Flunkies? Assistants? were already ensconced in the same corner when Jake arrived. A map of Toronto was spread out before them. Tonight, all four of them had forgone even the pretense of eating salads. Only wine glasses littered the table.

“Ah, Jake,” Adrian turned the full wattage of his powerful smile on the young man. “So glad you could join us. May I buy you a drink?”

“Just a coke,” Jake said.

Adrian looked at him sharply, no doubt spotting the signs of inebriation.

“You stayed here drinking last night,” the professor said, sounding like he was going to produce a switch and put Jake over the back of a chair. “You should not have done that. You need your rest.”

Jake studied the bottom of his coke glass. He felt very foolish. “Sorry,” he mumbled. Damn it, he was over 21! Why was he apologizing to this stranger for getting drunk?

“This is a big city you have,” Marek observed, looking at the map. “And such strange street names. Yonje? Spadeena?” He made the common errors of mispronouncing “Yonge” and “Spadina”.

“That’s Yonge,” Jake corrected, “Like young man, and Spadina. Spa-DIE-na.” He glanced at the colourful array of streets, subway lines, GO train routes and highways that made up Metro Toronto. “Why are there red circles on the map?”

“I can sense Safelli’s presence,” Adrian replied, “But only to a point. My instincts tell me he’s in one of these areas. I depend on you to tell me which is the most likely.”

Jake sat and studied the circled areas. He thought that it was sad that Adrian had bought so deeply into his sick fantasy. *Better humour him*, he thought. He’d never thought of Toronto as a venue for likely vampire hidey holes before—no matter what they said on *Forever Knight*.

“Scrap this,” he pointed to one circle. “It’s right downtown, very noisy, and near a subway/bus stop. There are people coming and going all the time.”

Adrian conferred briefly with the others, then crossed out the downtown red circle. “Nowhere noisy,” he said.

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Jake regarded the map again. "This is a ritzy neighbourhood," he remarked, tapping another circle. "It's the good end of Rosedale. Million-dollar mansions, very quiet. A stranger acting strangely would be noticed and reported to police."

"But if the stranger acted normally? Moved into a vacant house and behaved as any new neighbour would?" Adrian said. "If the only odd thing was that he was never seen in daylight, and he had some plausible explanation?"

"Well, I guess..."

"Safelli would not settle for a tiny bungalow or an apartment. Million-dollar mansions would appeal to him. Are any of these other circles expensive neighbourhoods?"

A quick nod confirmed that Rosedale was the only expensive address circled.

"This is where he will be," Adrian said. "Now, I and my friends will be busy tomorrow making certain preparations. We must rent an automobile, for one thing. So, if you do not mind, there are some things I would like you to get."

"Sure," Jake said. "Whatever you need."

"I need half a dozen wooden stakes and a hammer," Adrian said calmly.

Jake blinked. He should have expected that one, but he hadn't.

"Ummm..." he hedged, and Adrian looked at him. *Humour him*, he reminded himself. "No problem," he grinned weakly. "Anything else? Garlic? Holy water? Crosses?"

"No!" Adrian almost shouted.

"Adrian," said Paul softly. "Be calm. The boy cannot know."

"Such fripperies are worse than useless," Adrian said, calm again. "They would only make Safelli angry."

"Oh," said Jake, still resenting being called a boy.

"You might bring a flashlight, and if you can obtain ash wood stakes, so much the better."

"Ash wood, right."

"You will be rewarded for your assistance. We will come and pick you up at eight tomorrow night. Show me where you live."

Jake pointed to the appropriate place on the map, and wrote down his address and phone number on the paper Adrian produced. He then took his leave of the quartet of vampire hunters and made his way back home.

"Max," he said to his roomie when he arrived, "I need a reality check."

"Why?" Max asked. "Living in an alternate reality never

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bothered you before.”

“I agreed to help Adrian go vampire hunting in Rosedale.”

“In Rosedale? There go the property values.” Max looked at him closely. “Don’t tell me you actually believe there’s a vampire in Rosedale.”

“I don’t know what to believe. I have to go out tomorrow and buy six wooden stakes. And a hammer.”

“No crucifix?”

“Adrian says it would just make Safelli mad.”

“Oh, an atheist vampire. You be careful, Jake. Adrian sounds like he’s stark raving.”

“Yeah, he does. I’m going to have a nice, long bath and think about this.”

“Have a shower. Vampires can’t cross running water.”

“Funny.”

“If your rubber duck goes for your neck, just scream.”

Jake didn’t deign to reply, but went into the bathroom and ran water into the tub. There was nothing like a long, hot soak to ease aching muscles or work out a knotty problem. He didn’t have a rubber duck. There was, however, a large plastic frog that lived on the side of the tub. It had been a gift from Max.

The bath left Jake relaxed and sleepy, but no wiser as to what course to take. Adrian was mad, there was no question. Did Safelli even exist? Suppose they raided a house in Rosedale and drove a stake through the heart of some perfectly innocent citizen? Jake would be an accessory to breaking and entering at the least, murder at the most.

No, both Paul and Anya seemed to have their heads screwed on straight. They wouldn’t let Adrian commit murder. Even Marek wouldn’t go that far.

He dreamed about vampires that night.

Jake went back to the library in the morning, and sought out his favourite staff member.

“Hypothetical question,” he said, leaning against the counter.

“Another one?” she grinned. “I’m still reeling from the last one you asked me.”

“Go on. You know I make your day with these questions.”

“Well, certainly no one else ever asks me if vampires could perform stage magic.”

Jake winked at her. “See?”

“Okay, shoot. What’s today’s question?”

“If you were a vampire hiding out in Toronto, would you choose Rosedale?”

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She frowned. "The poor part or the rich part?"

"The rich part."

"Sure, why not? It's quiet, everyone minds their own business, you'd live in luxury yet not be that far from downtown... beats the Junction."

"Thanks. You're a doll. I'll buy you a coffee sometime."

"We're not allowed to accept tips," she laughed.

Jake chuckled and walked away. It had been a total surprise to him the day he'd checked out a pile of vampire non-fiction and had had the technician (not a librarian, she'd been quick to tell him) launch into a serious discussion of their merits. They'd developed a sort of friendship based on a mutual interest in vampires, but he didn't even know her name. One of these days, he'd have to con it out of her. He didn't think he'd have to try too hard.

He slaved on his thesis all day, surprising the hell out of his advisor when she stopped unexpectedly at his carrel. Carmen predicted that she'd turn Jake into a Ph.D yet, a fate he pretended to regard as worse than death. She patted him on the head. Jake watched her walk off, and decided he'd better call Grace if he survived the night. He was paying far too much attention to other women lately.

At 4:00 he left and went to a lumber supply shop. They didn't even blink when he asked for half a dozen ash wood stakes. He bought a hammer, too. He already had a flashlight.

After he and Max had eaten dinner, Jake changed into a dark sweatshirt and sneakers. He packed the stakes, hammer and flashlight into a gym bag.

"Here," Max handed him something that glittered when he came out of his room. "You might need this."

Jake glanced at the object in his hand. "It's the wrong one, Max," he said, holding up the Star of David.

"Take it for luck," Max insisted.

"Thanks. Um.... if I don't come back, you can have my frog."

"If you don't come back, I'll kill you."

"Gotcha." Jake pocketed the talisman just as a knock sounded on the door. He opened it to find Marek looking expectantly at him.

"Are you ready?" Marek asked.

"Sure. Just let me get my bag." Jake was about to invite Marek in to meet Max, but there wasn't time. Instead, he picked up his gym bag, waved to Max, and followed Marek out of the building.

The others were waiting in a dark car that wouldn't attract attention in Rosedale. They'd been smart to spend the extra

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money for a luxury model.

Paul was driving, Anya beside him. Jake found himself wedged between Adrian and Marek in the back. He fought against a panic attack, wondering if this had all been an elaborate kidnapping plot. But his parents didn't have any money, so he calmed down. Before he could start worrying again, Paul was asking for directions. Jake was kept busy telling Paul how to get to Rosedale, so he had no chance to panic again.

At last they were prowling the quiet streets, gazing at the mansions. The area was almost park-like, with its tall trees and well-kept lawns. Jake was certain that the residents were all racing for their phones at the sight of a strange car after dark, but no cruiser showed up to tail them.

"Here!" Adrian barked so suddenly that Jake shot up and hit his head on the car roof.

The professor was pointing at a large Victorian-style house with a real estate sign placed very discreetly on the front lawn. A "sold" sticker had been plastered over the "For sale" line. There were no lights on in the house.

Paul pulled into the driveway and sat looking at the house. He did not ask if Adrian was sure. He just turned his head and said, "Let's go. Do not forget the stakes."

They all got out of the car. Jake was certain that the sound of his heart hammering in his throat could be heard blocks away. Looking up at the dark, spooky mansion, it was suddenly a lot easier to believe in vampires.

"Try the side door," Adrian advised.

Jake realized everyone was looking at him. "But..." he began, thinking of motion detectors, silent alarms, guard dogs...

"It will not be locked," the professor assured him. "Safelli is not concerned about burglars."

Bracing himself, Jake tried the side door. It was unlocked. He stepped through, fishing the flashlight out of his bag. The beam showed him a small landing, with the stairs leading up into the kitchen and down into the cellar. He looked back out and saw the other four staring in at him.

"Are you coming in, or what?" he asked them irritably. "This was *your* idea."

All four of them immediately crowded in on the landing.

"Good thing I remembered a flashlight," Jake said, after fumbling a light switch and getting no result.

"Where do we look first?" Anya asked.

"The cellar," Adrian said.

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“Not the cellar!” Marek protested. “In every vampire story, the coffin is in the cellar. No real vampire would live in the cellar. We should look in the attic.”

“In the attic?” Adrian shook his head. “No, we look in the cellar.”

They went down the stairs. At one point, Jake dropped the flashlight.

“Ouch!”

“That was my toe!”

“Who did I just walk into?”

“Ugh! A spider’s web!”

“Find that flashlight!”

“Watch where you put your hand!”

“Sorry, Anya.”

“You had *better* be sorry...”

“Here it is!”

The flashlight beam snapped back on, revealing some very embarrassed expressions. A quick search proved there was no coffin or other sign of occupation in the cellar.

“Very well,” said Adrian in resignation. “We try the attic.”

“I don’t mean to tell you your business,” Jake said as the five of them went up the stairs, “But do you really expect to find Safelli in a coffin? I mean, it’s night. He’d be up and around, wouldn’t he?”

“Quite right,” Adrian nodded. “He’ll be awake. And he knows we’re in this house.”

Jake hadn’t thought of that. He’d have been much happier if Adrian hadn’t mentioned it. If Safelli existed, he was certainly aware of their presence in the house. Even if he wasn’t a vampire, he wasn’t going to be happy.

The kitchen was damp and empty. Cupboards gaped open, showing their bare shelves. There were no appliances, and the room looked strangely forlorn without them.

“There’s no one living here,” Anya said, looking in a drawer.

“No,” Adrian agreed, “No one *living*.”

They carefully checked all the ground floor rooms. There was no furniture in any of them, let alone a coffin.

“Upstairs,” said Adrian. “Stick together. This is where it becomes dangerous.”

“Becomes?” Jake blinked. But Adrian was already half-way up the stairs.

Despite the warning that Adrian had given, the hunters scattered when they reached the second floor. Jake wasn’t quite sure

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how that had happened, or how he had ended up holding the flashlight but minus his bag of stakes. He was not happy.

“Adrian?” he whispered. “Paul?” He’d settle for Anya, or even Marek, come to think of it. He waved the flashlight beam around the empty room he found himself in, revealing only the dusty floor and faded wallpaper.

This must have been the master bedroom, he thought, noting its size. Another doorway beckoned, and Jake gathered up the courage to look inside. It was a bathroom, the fixtures still in place. Had the water been turned off? He could use a drink. He reached to try the cold water tap in the sink. Even as he noted that there was no vanity or other mirror, someone tapped him on the shoulder.

The flashlight dropping into the empty bowl of the sink made a horrible noise that clattered and rang through the huge house. Jakes’ heart, on the other hand, wasn’t making any noise because it seemed to have stopped working.

“Muh-Marek,” he gasped. “If t-that’s you, that’s not funny.”

“I do beg your pardon for frightening you,” said a polite voice. “But what are you doing in my house?”

Jake grabbed the flashlight and turned. He beheld a man, dressed in a business suit, who looked to be in his late thirties. The man was about Jake’s height, slim, and might have been described as handsome if Jake’s main concern hadn’t been whether or not he could be described as dangerous.

“If this is some student prank,” the man continued, “First, let me say you seem a bit old for that sort of thing. Second, despite the rumours, this house is not haunted. Now, kindly leave before I call the police.”

“Um, s-sure,” Jake hastily ducked past the man. (Safelli? Did it matter?). “J-just let me c-call Adrian and the others.”

A hand like a vise clamped down on the collar of his sweatshirt, gathering up material and a fair portion of skin. Jake squeaked as he was lifted a couple of inches off the floor. The executive type hadn’t looked that strong.

“Did you say *Adrian*, little boy?” the stranger growled, shaking Jake slightly.

Jake’s heart stopped again. “Oh, shit,” he moaned.

“Put him down, Safelli,” Professor Talbot’s measured tones commanded from the doorway. “He’s mine.”

Safelli—for it must have been him—dropped Jake unceremoniously to the floor. “Adrian,” he said genially. “How very nice to see you again. How did you get in?” He nudged Jake with his toe.

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"Wait, don't tell me. You talked this stupid breather into asking you in. I never suspected you'd stoop to such a low trick."

"Precisely why I used it. The breather doesn't concern you, Safelli."

"And you think *you* do?" Safelli shook his head. "You always had an inflated notion of your own importance, Adrian."

Jake, forgotten in the verbal sparring, crawled over to a corner of the room where he could watch in safety. He had no illusions about being able to escape. All he had was the flashlight. Not much protection against *two* vampires.

Anya, Paul and Marek—in that order—came running at the sound of rising voices. Safelli laughed at the sight of them.

"If it isn't the cavalry!" he chuckled. "Is this your court, Adrian? You mean to take over from me with this pathetic following?"

"It is a beginning," Adrian replied calmly. "And none of *your* court are here to protect you."

"There are *rules* of combat, Talbot." Safelli dropped all pretense of geniality. "No assistance from your get."

"No," Adrian agreed. "They will not assist. They are here to witness and testify that it was a fair battle."

"Then you officially challenge?"

"I do."

Jake watched, too numb to be frightened or repelled, as the two vampires engaged. Claws and fangs rending and tearing, they fell on each other like animals in one of the rawer nature films. Paul, Anya and Marek made no move to help Adrian. Marek did take one of the stakes and the hammer out of the gym bag, but Paul shook his head at him. Hugging his knees to his chest, Jake tried not to throw up as the proceedings on the floor grew increasingly bloody. He could only think of three things:

His novel was pretty tame compared to the real thing.

His friend the library technician would have killed to be in on this.

He wasn't going to survive the night.

At last it was over. Adrian, no longer handsome and suave but resembling some primitive beast covered with blood, slowly stood up. He threw back his head and howled his triumph.

"Marek," he said hoarsely. "The stake."

Marek scurried forward and gave over the requested item. Adrian hammered the stake into Safelli's unresisting body, and the other vampire shuddered and lay still.

"It is done!" Adrian rasped. "Toronto is *mine!*"

He looked at Jake. The young man pulled himself more

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tightly into a fetal position and wondered what the police would tell his parents.

“Jake.”

That was Anya’s voice, not Adrian’s. He dared to lift his head and saw the beautiful lady looking at him in concern.

“You’re all vampires,” Jake whispered.

“Yes, dear, we are.” Anya smiled, and he saw fangs.

“Even Marek? Or is he your Renfield?”

She frowned. “He is my brother. He was always so fond of me that when Adrian turned me, I had to turn Marek.”

“Where does Paul come in?”

“Adrian turned him, too.”

“Oh. And now I join the...court? Is that the term?”

“No, Jake.” Adrian was beside him now. He’d moved so quickly and so quietly that Jake hadn’t noticed it. “I honour my word, unlike Safelli.” He spat at the corpse. The spittle came out as blood. There was a gaping wound in Adrian’s neck, the right side of his face had been laid open to the bone, his clothes were in shreds...he should have been dead.

Oh, right, he *was* dead.

“There never was a Belinda, was there?”

“Not a fiancée of mine, no,” Adrian smiled through the ruin of his face. “There may have been a Belinda. Who knows the names of Safelli’s victims?”

“You just wanted Safelli’s territory.”

“He had been...what is the term you breathers use? Bloodmaster? Head vampire? Yes, head vampire. He was that too long. I was strong enough to challenge him. Now I am head vampire.”

“Until someone challenges you,” said Jake, who suddenly wished he hadn’t.

“You are very intelligent. One reason why I chose you.”

“For your court.” Jake shivered. “Suddenly, I’m not all that interested in vampires anymore.”

“No, Jake. You would not make a good court member. I would have to constantly watch you. And I promised to reward you for your assistance. Your reward is that I allow you to live, with your memories of this night intact.”

“Adrian...” Paul began.

The new head vampire held up a bloodied hand. “Allow me to finish,” he said, and Paul shut up. Adrian effortlessly lifted Jake to his feet. “But, Jacob Fowler,” he whispered, “If you ever tell *anyone* what transpired tonight; if you ever try to hunt any

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of us, I will know, and I will come looking for you. Let this be my warning to you."

He bent and kissed Jake on the neck. The young man gasped as a wave of pleasure almost drove him to his knees. Only Adrian's arms steadied him. Telling himself that it was a *man* giving him this kiss didn't stop the signals his body was receiving. The cold sharpness of fangs and the gentle sipping—not the rending and sucking he'd always imagined—terrified and delighted him all at once. He felt himself going hard, much to his embarrassment. But before Jake even began to feel faint from loss of blood, Adrian withdrew. His bloody lips brushed Jake's briefly.

"Now I have the taste of your blood," the professor said. His wounds started to close before Jake's fascinated stare. "I can read your thoughts. If you betray me, I *will* find you." He pointed to the door. "Go!"

Jake didn't know if his knees would work, but somehow they did. He staggered out of the room, past the four vampires—the king and his court—and out of the house. No neighbours had come to investigate the noise, and no one had called the police. Safelli's death had gone unnoticed in Rosedale.

Jake made his way out of the neighbourhood mostly by instinct, and leaned against the first bus stop sign he came to. He got on the bus, barely noticing its destination. The bus driver looked at him closely, but he had bus fare, so she let him on. Somehow, he got home.

When he walked through the door, a frantic Max rushed at him. "What the hell happened to you?" he demanded of his filthy, tired, bloodied friend. "No, don't tell me, just go clean up. Or should I call 911?"

Jake looked at himself in the mirror. There was only a little blood on his neck, and two neat little puncture wounds.

"Oi," said Max. "There really was a vampire?"

"No. That was all a joke. They took me out to Rosedale and dumped me there. Anya gave me this hickey to remember her by."

"Some joke," Max grumbled. "My good luck charm doesn't seem to have worked."

Jake slowly took the Star of David out of his pocket. "On the contrary," he said, and gave it back. "It worked just fine."

The next day, Jake went to the library wearing a turtleneck. He sought out his friend.

"You remember what I asked you?"

"Sure. You asked me if I thought there were vampires in Rosedale."

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“Well, there aren’t.” Jake turned around and walked out, leaving a very bewildered library technician sitting behind the counter, staring after him.

“And people think *I* need a reality check,” she sighed, and went back to reading her e-mail.

*Fun facts:*

*Rosedale exists. The house does not. The Robarts library exists. It is one shit-ugly building, the cafeteria is unspeakable, and there is a staff member who fits the description in the story (extra points for guessing her name). The Hound Pub does not exist. It is based on actual pubs around the University, however.*

—Anne Fraser