

(Excerpt from the novel *Velvet Hammer*, book two in the Joey Roxy vampire trilogy, by Soroya Biela)

Chapter 1

Joey sat at her desk in her new studio in Sunset Valley, Arizona. She adjusted her headphones, brushing her long blond hair out of her eyes as she did so. She was half listening to the current caller, who continued to blather on about the rights of vampires. The call had been going on now for just about 30 minutes. She had tried several times to politely encourage the caller to wrap it up, but to no avail. They just kept right on talking. She sighed heavily.

It wasn't just the caller that was bothering her, but the live video of herself, which was streaming on a monitor to her left. It wasn't streaming to anyone but David, who was testing it out for the local high school football games he was going to be broadcasting via the internet. But it upset her nonetheless. She looked old, and tired. *I thought being a vampire gave me eternal youth? Yes, but after being up damned near every night for the past week, you think you're still going to look 45?*

The truth was she knew exactly what was causing her to look close to her real age. She hadn't fed on a human in months. Yes,

she and David still fed on one another; but in such a small town it was dicey, at best, to lure unsuspecting victims back to their lair. She laughed out loud. *Lair, yeah, right, because you and David are so scary.* Looking around her studio it was even more ridiculous to try and say this place was a lair of any kind. Old 45's lay in boxes everywhere, not to mention what little decoration she had put up since moving involved old radio stations and a few gold records she had managed to steal. She forgot that anyone else could hear her, and laughed even harder when the caller stopped dead in mid-sentence.

"Excuse me Joey?!" The caller blurted out.

She attempted to quiet herself before answering, but as soon as she saw David's expression from the other room, across the hall she knew it was a lost cause. She stuck her tongue out at him in response to his feigned look of shock. He, on the other hand could easily have passed for 45. He had started working out again at a 24 hour gym a few towns over. She tried to encourage him to work out in the gym they had at home, but he kept telling her it was good to be out among the humans. *And apparently he had no reservations about snacking on a few of them either.* For a moment she wondered if he was sleeping with any of them, and then dismissed the thought when he smiled warmly at her.

It would serve you right if he were, after that damned thing with Chris (who was now going to be a part of their lives forever because he was David's maker). The very thought unnerved her. Why did it have to be him? Chris would also be paying them a visit in the near future. David had told her that he needed a recharge, that he was long overdue. And by a recharge, he means the blood of his maker. If only I could do that. Yeah, right after I renounce the throne and teach Suzanne a very important lesson about putting me in positions of power without... She didn't get a chance to finish her thought. The caller persisted.

"Well, Joey, what exactly do you find so amusing?"

"You see Joanna, it's like this," she paused before continuing, and considered just outing herself as a vampire so the pro-vampire calls would *finally* end. But they wouldn't, there'd just be more calls and questions about who she was and why she had faked so much hatred for her own kind. She sighed heavily, and very deliberately, for dramatic effect. After this many years in the business she knew exactly what she needed to do.

"You know my stance on this issue so why you insist on calling my show and carrying on about this night after night is *beyond* me." David just rolled his eyes, and then bit into a

blood pack. She motioned for one as well, and he tossed it to her through the open doorway. She caught it with one hand, as her dexterity had greatly improved in the last six months. The only thing that seemed to be directly impacted by her lack of fresh blood was her appearance, and that had only waned in the last few days. She bit into and took a drink before she continued.

"What, no response?" It was Joey's turn to persist.

"It's just, you're usually so open minded on every other issue, why regarding vampires, do you differ? I mean, how is that any different than, say Civil rights, or Gay rights for that matter?"

"Look, I'm all for living, breathing human beings having equal rights. But c'mon, where does it end? Next you'll tell me you also support zombie equality!" She waited, knowing full well she had the caller exactly where she wanted her.

"Yeah, well you're just a live-ist!" The caller shouted and hung up.

"A live-ist? Just what in the hell does *that* mean? If it means that I *only* support the rights of the *living*, than yes, I'm a live-ist. That's cute. Let's see here, who do we have

next? And remember if you want to call the show the number is 88-88-ROXY, as in me, your host, Joey Roxy."

Her heart, if it still could beat, would have erupted into a thunderous roar, after seeing the name which was flashing on her screen. *David must have made a mistake, it can't be her. I mean she wouldn't dare, would she?* Joey pressed the button and was connected with the caller.

"My eyes must clearly be deceiving me because the name on my screen here says Suzanne, but you can't possibly be *that* Suzanne because she hasn't called me in months. So, tell me caller, where are you from?" She asked in her sappiest, sweetest voice.

"Well, now just how many other Suzanne's call your show? Of course it's me. So, how ya been, your Highness?"

Joey's mouth hung open in disbelief. More so that she could be so damned cheeky on air, and out her to this whole crowd of people. But then she remembered, all of them still thought she was mortal.

"Cat got your tongue? That's really surprising considering how you lambasted the last caller for merely expressing their sympathy towards the vampire plight. And I, for one, just happen to support their views, but you knew that already, didn't you

Joey?" She heard male laughter in the background, and knew it instantly. Suzanne was with Chris. *That son of a bitch, he's known where she's been this whole time.*

Joey swallowed hard, and resisted the urge to lay into her about just where in the hell she'd been these last six months.

"Now Suzanne, this surprises me, unless there's something you aren't telling us?"

"Well Joey, much like you, I enjoy my privacy, so I am going to abstain from answering such personal questions on air. Mainly I just called to say hello, and to apologize for my absence of late. I have been extremely busy promoting my book, and well, just trying to stay alive." She giggled. But it was a fake giggle and one that just about pushed Joey over the edge.

"Your book? I didn't know you were writing one. What's it about? Do you want to share the title with us?" Joey thought she'd play along.

"Oh, it's called 'The Reluctant Queen'. It's about this vampire queen who inherits a throne she really doesn't want, hence the title. I thought I might capitalize on the whole vampire craze. But it's still being edited, and they aren't so big on the title, they think it lacks imagination. I tried to explain to my editor that I write what I know, but she just

didn't go for it." Joey fumed. *Two can play at this game.* David caught her eye, and he mouthed the words, 'don't do it'. But she did it anyway.

"So my audience would never forgive me if I didn't ask, as I am sure they are all wondering, are you in fact, a vampire Suzanne?"

"One could ask you the very same question *Josephine.*" Suzanne almost purred as she said Joey's real name.

Joey could hear David's voice in the background telling her, no practically yelling at her to terminate the call. *The audience must be on the edge of their seats right now. The drama, the suspense, my real name; right now hundreds of people are typing variations of my name into whatever search engine is handy.*

"I suppose one could, *Suzanne.* And since you won't answer *that* question, will you at least tell me why you support this *ridiculous* movement?"

"Well, because I believe in equality for all, except maybe the zombies. I'm not quite sure what to do about *that* problem. Perhaps we could gather them all up until a cure can be found."

"A cure?! You've got to be kidding me! And by that logic then there should be a cure for vampirism as well, right?"

"Perhaps there is." Suzanne's voice grew quiet, just before she exploded in a fit of evil sounding laughter.

"I'm just kidding. Vampires, as you know, have existed for thousands of years, really as long as humans have, possibly even longer. It's a pity the human race still does not know its' true origins, or for that matter its purpose."

"Our true origins?" Joey was no longer playing along; she was truly interested in what Suzanne had to say.

"Well yes, you don't actually *believe* what's in the bible, do you?"

"I don't know that I feel one way or the other about it. Spirituality is extremely personal, and however someone finds their faith is truly a gift."

"I suppose. But live long enough and you will begin to doubt the very existence of God; or at least the one in *that* book. I mean how could *we*, I mean *they* exist if God does? The ability of vampires to be alive and yet dead at the same time is beyond God, in my opinion. So it puts us on a more even playing field with him."

Joey paused. She knew the barrage of calls she would get after Suzanne's. Most of her audience just happened to be a faith based crowd.

"You said 'we' Suzanne. I think I have the answer I was looking for regarding my earlier question. But regardless, you're making some pretty wild claims here, vampires, on par with God?"

"Well, just suppose for a moment that you were a vampire. Being a woman of faith, wouldn't you struggle at times with your own existence? Question it, ponder it? Give it enough time and you will grow to curse it, I promise you. And once you experience the miracle of creating an immortal being yourself, you might just see God differently.

By the way, I didn't mean for this call to get so serious. I just wanted to let you know, that I was still out here, and apologize again for not calling sooner. I had a few loose ends to tie up. They have now been dealt with and we will be in touch more regularly, I promise." And before Joey could answer, the line went dead. David motioned for her to go to commercial.

She did, and after taking off her headphones, immediately marched into where he was sitting.

"Honey, I know what you must be thinking, but I swear to God I didn't know she was with Chris. Ok, maybe that's a bad choice of words right now, given your last conversation." He

smiled at her trying to soften the blow. She stared at him coldly, narrowing her eyes as she did so before speaking.

"Just what in the hell was all that bullshit about religion? Is she trying to cause all the zealots to call me at once? Jesus, I'm going to spend the next hour debating with folks about vampires and God. Not to mention her, 'we'll be in touch more regularly' comment. It's a damned good thing she isn't here right now..." Joey was interrupted before she could go any further.

"Or what?" Suzanne said with a smile, as she stood in the hallway, just outside of the room they were in. Joey jumped, startled, almost landing directly in David's lap. He just continued to smile at her as she regained her balance.

"You son of a bitch, you knew she was there, didn't you?" She muttered then playfully smacked him on the shoulder.

"She just kind of appeared in the hallway after you came in. I expected it to be Chris, and was just as surprised as you were. She motioned for me to be quiet, so I did. And besides, with your *supersonic* hearing I'm surprised you didn't hear the car pull up in the driveway. I mean its right outside your studio window for God's sake."

He was right, and she knew it. She was still shocked to see her. Shocked, relieved, and pissed. She looked at the veins on Suzanne's neck, wishing that she had more than two minutes before she was back on air. She cursed herself too, because she should have known her maker was close. She had smelled her blood during their phone call, but convinced herself it was just wishful thinking. But now, as Suzanne leaned casually on the door frame, her long, dark auburn tresses cascading down her back, her pale skin so deliciously accentuated by the dark blue of the sundress she wore, Joey found that she wasn't so much angry, as hungry, fucking famished to be exact. *And I'm not waiting.* She walked the few feet to where her maker stood, took Suzanne's hand in hers, and led her down the hallway to the bedroom.