

(Excerpt from the forthcoming novel, *Velvet Heaven*,
By Soroya Biela)

Chapter 1:

Hello Stranger

Joey slipped the headphones on, adjusted the volume levels, and swung the microphone into position. She sighed, and then smiled. Close to 40 years of doing talk radio and she still felt a rush as she cued her opening theme song. She caught a reflection of herself on one of the computer monitors next to her. Other than a few wrinkles and the slight graying of her blond hair, she looked very similar to the young woman who had started out in the business so many years ago. The same shoulder length blond hair, same dark eyes, although once brown, were now a deep, vibrant plum color due to her recent change in diet. Being a vampire had its advantages in her line of work, not to mention it made her appear at least 20 years younger than she actually was. *Ironic*, she mused, *all those years everyone joked about me being one of the undead.*

She hadn't been one of the undead for very long. In fact, it was only a few short months ago when all hell had broken loose in the parking lot of the annual Conspiracy Con, which for some ungodly reason had been in Dayton, OH. She remembered how she didn't want to go, how it had felt all wrong, but David, her

husband and producer, assured her it would be the exact resurgence her career needed. That was all Joey had needed to hear, for being the ambitious type, she was in.

"Honey, I really don't want to do this. I just have a bad feeling about it." Joey finished applying her lipstick, and grimaced at her reflection. Her illness was outweighing any lingering ambition she had. The black dress hugged her tall, slender frame, without being too revealing. She had lost so much weight in the last year. None of the countless doctors she had seen were able to give her any clear cut answer as to what was really wrong with her. They speculated everything from chronic fatigue, to some type of auto immune disorder. She had come to one conclusion; none of those damn doctors knew anything. She sighed, her once golden, blond mane was now so shocked with gray that several of her friends had recommended letting it go completely. She couldn't. Some remaining part of her vanity clung to her hair color; it was one of the few things she had left.

Most days she woke up in an extreme amount of pain. Everything on her ached; bones, muscles, some days even breathing hurt. She had tried so many drugs, and while they seemed to work for a little while, eventually they failed. It

was one of the main reasons, besides the obvious financial ones, she continued to do her show, it distracted her. Her show, The Joey Roxy Show, which had been on and off the air in various incarnations for nearly 20 years, was a mix of conspiracy, politics, and the paranormal. Joey had the uncanny ability to tap into whatever people were feeling on any given night. She made a personal connection with almost every caller she encountered. It's what had made her popular to begin with, and what had continued to keep her show on the radar. That, and she didn't look like your average run of the mill talk show host, she looked like a model; tall, blond and statuesque. People had tried for years to figure out exactly how old she was, and she never gave them the satisfaction of a clear answer. It was none of their damn business, besides in her mind, a lady never reveals her age.

Joey was pondering retirement due to her ongoing health issues until the war between the zombies and vampires had erupted. She couldn't have planned for a better thing to happen career wise. *Doesn't get much weirder than that*, she thought, as she remembered exactly how she had wound up there, in a hotel room, in Dayton. She shook her head. Never in all her years on this planet did she expect to live long enough to see a war between what used to be classified as two types of fictitious, supernatural beings. The Holy War of the Undead is what the

major news media outlets were calling it. She privately referred to it in her own head as one giant cluster fuck. She had to hand it to both sides, they were great for ratings. She took one last glance in the mirror, grabbed her purse, and followed her husband out the door.

She stopped him in the hall, looked up into his warm, brown eyes and planted a kiss on him. He was as handsome as he had been on their wedding day. His 6'2" frame, which was largely still muscle, only carried a few more pounds than it had in high school. Other than a few wrinkles and the slight graying of his dark hair, not much had changed. These details mattered little to her, as it was his smile that undid her, still made her weak in the knees anytime he flashed it her way. His smile told her she was safe. She pulled him tighter against her.

"What's that all about?" He asked, breaking their kiss momentarily. She knew why he was asking. She was rarely so affectionate in public. But this time, she didn't care, she felt like it had been days since she had touched him. Had they not been running so late, she would have drug him back to their room and had her way with him.

"I just wanted to thank you for all the things you do for me, for us. I love you David. I couldn't imagine my life without you." He cupped her face, stared into her eyes, and kissed her again. He pushed her up against a nearby wall as their kiss

intensified. Her pulse raced, and again she thought of going back to their room. She hadn't wanted to do this appearance anyway. She sighed as she broke their kiss, remembering all the years he had supported her career, up to and including getting her booked there.

"If we weren't already late, do you have any clue what I'd do to you?" She purred in his ear.

"I've got some idea." He said as he grinned.

"You better believe the second I'm off that stage we're coming back here so I can show you exactly what I've got in mind." Reluctantly, he let her go. She took his hand in hers, and gave it a quick squeeze as they walked down the hall towards the bank of elevators.

She was shocked at the size of the crowd, but even more shocked at where she was going to be sitting. A long, rickety table had been placed in the middle of a stage in the hotel's parking lot. *Well at least I'm not alone in this disaster.* It was her and several other radio "legends", as the obnoxious neon banner proclaimed. Joey noticed the sun was beginning to set. *Just great, didn't it occur to any of these promoters that vampires and zombies love the night?* She was beginning to think her instincts were right and this was all a huge mistake. Then she spotted Johnny. She sighed with relief. He waved and smiled

at her, she waved back. Johnny Graves was one of the men responsible for making overnight, paranormal talk radio into the huge commercial success it was. At one point she had been hired to fill in for him whenever he went on vacation or wanted a day off. That had been years ago, and she couldn't remember exactly how long it had been since they had seen one another in person. *This is just terrific! Johnny and I can finally catch up.*

However, her happiness was short lived. She had to do a double take when she saw the man who was seated just two chairs down from Johnny. Nelson Diggs sat in his chair, surrounded by a crew of five, who were styling his hair, and applying make-up. One of the five had handed him some 3"x5" cards. Joey rolled her eyes. Apparently no one had bothered to tell Nelson this wasn't going to be televised.

Nelson was Johnny's less than stellar replacement, who was notorious for slinging any product the network handed him. Nelson had replaced Johnny when he had been forced into an early "retirement" due to a few differences with the management. Seems the main difference had to do with a pill that promised whoever bought it supernatural powers. That had to be at least 10 years ago now, if memory served her. At the time, they had offered her a chance to fill in for Nelson, as she had previously done for Johnny. She turned them down, not only because she tended to stand behind the products she promoted, but honestly, she had

hated Nelson from the moment she met him. Nelson and his slicked back hair, and 70's porn star mustache. He still made her shudder with repulsion to this very day.

Apparently David had missed the hotel parking lot as the listed venue among the fine print, and that she could let slide. What she wasn't sure she could let slide was where she was to be seated, which according to her name tag on the table, was right between the two men. Whoever the promotions department was, they were either geniuses or complete morons, and she was still on the fence about which. As she headed past Nelson, to her seat, he snickered at her. Not wanting to dignify him with words, she merely glared back at him. Johnny, ever the gentlemen, got up from his seat, and pulled her chair out for her. She sat, setting her purse down under the table. Johnny gently pushed her seat in, and then returned to his chair.

"Hey there, gorgeous, long time no see. How's David?" He leaned over and from his chair and kissed her on the cheek. Joey hugged him back, she was truly happy to see him.

"David's good. How's your wife? And new baby?! I can't believe you have a new baby! You dog, at your age!" She winked at him. His wife was 30 years his junior.

"They're both wonderful and would love to see you. After this thing's finished we should arrange a visit, it's been way too long." He looked out into the crowd, "I never, in my

wildest dreams, imagined a world where we would have vampires and zombies, let alone them being on opposite sides of a war. Well, at least it's good for business."

"Sure is. Johnny, I've got to know, how the hell are you and Nelson on the same stage?"

"Well I figure it like this, at some point you have to let things go. I still hate the son of a bitch, but the way this war is going, doesn't look like any of us are getting out of here alive. Besides, he'll make an ass out of himself as usual, and we'll look great. So it's a good PR move. I need all the PR I can get with a new show, especially at my age." He winked back at her, causing her to grin. He was the same man he had always been, handsome, short cropped hair, wire rim glasses, only difference was a few more wrinkles, and some gray hair. *None of us ever really change, do we?*

She stared out into the crowd, slightly surprised at the sheer volume of people. She hadn't seen this many people at a public appearance since she had been nationally syndicated in the early 00s. There had to be at least 300 hundred people. Staring out into the sea of faces, she noticed all the signs regarding vampires, and their civil rights. *Good Lord, are these beings going to want a Constitutional Amendment guaranteeing their rights? Now I'm gonna have to argue with callers on a nightly basis regarding the plight of the undead to be*

recognized as American citizens. Hell, I probably have some of the undead calling me now as it is. It was too much. Regarding humans, she was all for people being equal, regarding dead folks, she was less than sure. Didn't they, as a country, have to draw the line somewhere?

She noticed the 'don't kill zombies, let's find a cure' poster and sighed. It was going to be a long night. It was then she heard a familiar voice. The voice was yelling her name, fairly loudly. She could almost pinpoint who the voiced belonged to, but not quite. She looked down from the stage. Almost directly in front of where she was seated, several feet below, behind security barricades stood a curvy red head. She was desperately waving her arms trying to get Joey's attention. It had worked. *Suzanne. It's got to be Suzanne.* She smiled.

Joey couldn't be completely sure it was Suzanne. They had never met in person. But given the pictures Suzanne had sent her via email, she was pretty sure that's who she was looking at. They had exchanged countless emails over the last two years since Joey had returned to the airways. They had tried to meet on several occasions, but their plans always fell through for one reason or another. *Of course, Suzanne would be here, it's only four hours from where she lives.* Joey waved. Suzanne waved back. *Wow, I guess we're finally gonna meet. I wonder why she didn't tell me she'd be here.*

The announcer began with the usual formalities, starting with who each of one the panelists were. He didn't get very far, before a gang of vampires began making their way to the front of the parking lot. It was their signs and dress, which gave them away. *Not very subtle, are they?* Joey smirked. But beneath that smirk, she was uneasy. All of this was too familiar, like it had already taken place and she was simply re-living it. She motioned to Suzanne to turn around and look behind her. Suzanne, not being very tall, and not having the higher perspective Joey did, turned around to look, but saw nothing. She shrugged her shoulders as if to say, what? Had she been able to see, she would have noticed the same tall, teenage boy Joey had. His short, black hair was mostly concealed by a skull cap. His faded jeans had holes in their knees, and he wore a t-shirt which read, 'why bother'. On his feet were steel toed Doc Martens. Fingerless black and white striped gloves completed his ensemble. His sunken, dark eyes stared listlessly at the panel. He locked eyes with Joey, and she stopped, mid-sentence in her introduction, before continuing on. She knew him, she was sure of it. She regained her composure, and somehow managed to finish. Her heart started to race. The boy was approaching the stage at an inhuman pace. It was the first time in her life she had seen a *real* vampire. Sure, she had seen them on TV, everyone

had, but she had not, as far as she knew, ever seen one in person.

Everything about this boy was wrong, and he was coming for her. She felt it in her core. The panic in her eyes was becoming so clear that Johnny leaned over and whispered, "What's wrong, gorgeous?" She didn't answer him. She had lost her ability to speak. *Doesn't he see him?* The boy smiled, and she saw his fangs. They were huge, and reminded her of the canines on one of her dogs. But these were sharper, whiter, and so long. *Why are they so long? What the hell does a teenage boy need teeth like that for?* Her eyes frantically scanned the crowd for David, who had been standing next to the stage prior to the start of the presentation. *Where is he?*

She wasn't listening to a damn thing going on around her now, as all of her attention was focused on this boy. She had no clue if anyone was addressing her. The crowd had parted to let him through. He was approaching Suzanne. Joey opened her mouth to scream, to warn her, and nothing came out. That's when she saw the blur coming towards her. He jumped up and onto the stage, in one fluid motion, and stood before her. Joey looked around. *Why wasn't anyone stopping him, don't they see him? Am I the only one who sees him? Where the hell is David, and or for that matter, security?*

"Security!!!" She screamed. He smiled at her, just before he reached his arms out across the table and grabbed her. She stared at him, dumbfounded. Blackness washed over her, as an immense pain began to radiate from her one of her forearms. It felt like a set of knitting needles was being driven again and again through her arm, directly to the bone. She tried to cry out, but before she could, she felt herself being completely drained. She was tired, so tired. *What the hell's happening? It's so cold here. I can't see...why can't I see?*

"You son of a bitch, Josh, get off her! Not her, she has nothing to do with Nikki!"

Joey heard what she was pretty sure was the snapping of bones, but she couldn't tell if they were hers or not. The blackness that had crept into her vision was making it hard to concentrate.

"Joey, punch him in the throat, he'll let go. I'll be there as soon as I can." Suzanne yelled. Somehow, through all the commotion, Joey heard her, and with her remaining strength landed a left hook to his windpipe. He dropped like a rag doll. Everything was in slow motion now, and none of it seemed real. It all seemed like some horrible nightmare. She prayed that any minute she would wake up, and find herself at home, in bed with David and the dogs.

"David? Where's David?" she whispered. She was fading out. She never imagined she would die at a public appearance. She tried desperately to picture her husband's face but came up blank. The face above her was covered in blood, fangs fully extended and snarling. Yet this *thing*, seemed to be protecting her. In the hazy darkness nothing was quite in focus. It appeared she wasn't on the stage anymore, but in some dark room. She tried again to wake herself, this had to be a dream, how could she not be on the stage anymore? Why was no one trying to help her? Why had they left her with *this* thing? Her eyes glanced around the room, and as soon as the world came into focus, the pain was back.

"David's safe, along with most of the rest of the panel. Johnny was only splattered. I'll have to apologize to him for that when I see him later. I can't say the same for Nelson, although, someone may have turned him by now." The voice was attached to the red head, who was sitting on the bed next to where she lay.

"Suzanne?" Joey whispered. Her eyes widened in amazement as the woman nodded at her. Her voice, which was almost inaudible to the human ear, was heard quite clearly by the vampire. Joey felt her panic returning. She remembered the look the boy had on his face when he had approached her. She struggled to get up, she had to run. *Run! Run, damn you!* She ordered herself. As she

attempted to rise, an intense, throbbing pain shot through her whole being. Her body, in its weakened condition, was unable to hold her weight. She collapsed, falling forward into Suzanne, who caught her, and gently wrapped her arms around her. Suzanne was like the boy, and the boy wanted her soul. She struggled again, but unable to get her limbs to cooperate, she stopped. There was no point. It was over now. All the struggling in the world wouldn't change it. She was going to die.

When she finally stopped, she felt Suzanne's arms loosen around her, and ease her back, softly laying her down on the bed. Joey was terrified. None of it made any sense. *How the hell did I get here? I don't understand.* She began to cry. The fear was like nothing she had ever experienced, this waiting for death. *What is she waiting for? Do it already! And these things want equal rights!* Suzanne spoke softly to her,

"Shh...I'm not going to hurt you, I wouldn't dream of it. Listen to me very carefully. You were bit, in your arm, it's bad, I mean, real bad. He drained most of your blood. I'm actually not sure how you're still alive. Josh, the boy from the crowd, attacked you. It happened in an instant and that's why you don't remember any of it. I couldn't get to you in time to stop him. Security was a bitch. I brought you here, to my hotel room, as soon as I could. I'm so sorry, I should have fed first, I didn't know. To the humans it appears you were attacked then

disappeared. We all have enhanced speed, so to speak. But none of that matters. What matters now, is what we're going to do, what you want to do."

"Do? I don't understand. And David, where's David? The boy didn't get to him, not my David!" She was screaming in her mind, yet the voice that came out of her was no louder than a kitten's soft meow.

"Shh...Josh is severely injured to say the least, and with any luck, dead. Either way, he's not coming anywhere near you. You're safe, David is safe. But you have to listen to me. There's no cure for the bite once the saliva has infected you, and by the looks of your skin, it has. With the amount of blood you've lost, you will either die in the next few minutes or I can save you, but you have to decide now."

"All those years I was worried about dying in some embarrassing way, and this is how I go out, getting bit by some teenage vampire." Joey coughed, every inch of her hurt. Her vision was coming back a bit, and for the first time she looked at her friend. Blood covered her face, and was tangled in her hair, but her green eyes looked serene. Suzanne began to softly stroke her hair.

"It's your choice, but I need to do it soon, or else I can't guarantee you'll make it. Once you slip into a coma you won't be able to drink, and you've got to drink, drain me almost

completely, to replenish all the blood you've lost. And Joey, this is not how I pictured our first meeting. I'm so sorry. I never intended for you to ever know I was a vampire." Suzanne was smiling softly at her. Joey felt her fear beginning to subside. Suzanne's touch was gentle, reassuring her that she wasn't anything like the boy.

Memories flooded Joey's mind, as her life flashed by. The thought of never seeing her home, her dogs, or her husband again was too much for her. She felt the darkness slipping back over her. It was so cold there, she hated being cold. As she lay among the shadows of the hotel room, she knew there was only one option. Somehow, she managed to lift her head and clutch the black fabric of the vampire's dress. She locked eyes with Suzanne.

"Do it! Don't leave me here in the cold. I want to go home, I want to see David. Do it, before I change my mind."