

MOIRA TRIPS

A PRELUDE TO
THE CHILDREN OF LILITH

C. DAVID BELT

Moira MacDonald sat quietly in the Assembly Hall on Temple Square in Salt Lake City and listened as the high school choir sang English Christmas carols. *English* carols. It seemed to Moira that all the best carols were English or French tunes. None of the old Scottish tunes. *At least we own New Year's*, she thought. *The English cannae claim "Auld Lang Syne."*

The choir was charming. The girls wore sparkling, long blue dresses, and the boys wore black tuxedos with blue vests and ties. They looked as if they were having a grand time singing. There was even some light choreography. Their hearts pounding . . . and their scents . . .

Moira checked her thoughts immediately. *Focus on the music, lassie.*

Moira enjoyed the music. She *always* enjoyed Christmas music, even if it was mostly dominated by the bloody English and the French. She loved these light concerts. A few years ago, she'd attended a Tabernacle Choir Christmas concert, but she'd had to Persuade an usher to let her in without a ticket. Well, it wasn't Persuasion exactly . . . he just found her request hard to refuse. She'd stood in the back, not taking anyone's seat. That concert was grand and glorious and beautiful, but she didn't like to have to use Persuasion or her *charms* to her advantage. So, lately she'd stuck to the lighter fare . . . unless she managed to get a ticket.

The choir transitioned from a light-hearted song of winter romance to the haunting strains of "Coventry Carol". It was, of course, not the original tune, but the music was fitting, given the subject matter.

*Lully, lullay, Thou little tiny Child,
Bye, bye, lully, lullay.
Lullay, thou little tiny Child,
Bye, bye, lully, lullay.*

*O sisters too, how may we do,
For to preserve this day
This poor youngling for whom we do sing
Bye, bye, lully, lullay.*

The singing was nearly flawless as the choir performed it beautifully, but of course, this particular carol tore at Moira's heart. *Do they nae know they're singin' about the Slaughter of the Innocents?* she wondered. *This song, 'tis about loss and sorrow and the death of hope.* Moira knew all too well the death of hope.

*Herod, the king, in his raging,
Charged he hath this day
His men of might, in his own sight,
All young children to slay.*

*That woe is me, poor Child for Thee!
And ever mourn and sigh,
For thy parting neither say nor sing,
Bye, bye, lully, lullay.*

Moira wiped tears from her eyes. *'Tis indeed odd to hear such a melancholy song at this season of the year. We should be singin' of joy at the birth of the Christ, nae the loss of the bairns.* She wiped at her eyes again, weeping for those long-dead

mothers of so long ago... and for the children Moira could never bear.

Her nose wrinkled at a less than pleasant smell. It wafted pungently every time someone opened the doors at the back at the hall. Moira surmised it was coming from the young woman sitting in the back row. Glancing behind her, Moira judged the girl was sorely in need of a bath and a change of clothes. *A change of fashion would nae hurt either, she thought as she took in the leather accoutrements of the punk-rocker-wannabe. Does anyone really dress like that anymore? She cannae think 'tis attractive!*

Ah, rebellion, she thought. 'Tis ever so appealin' to the young. 'Tis a shame they know nae what they're rebellin' against. So often, 'tis a rebellion against their own better natures.

After a few more songs, the choir finished their performance to polite applause from the audience—comprised mostly of parents—in the hall. Moira would have liked to stay to hear the next group, but the assault on her nostrils was too much. Moira rose and walked out of the hall and into the cold, crisp, night air.

She meandered slowly through Temple Square, admiring the lights. She was drawn to the display of the Nativity on the grass between the Tabernacle and the North Visitors' Center. She walked around to the north side to watch the presentation. The Christus statue, visible through the window of the North Visitors Center and framed against the Creation mural, was glorious to behold. Moira turned her back on that scene as the presentation of the Nativity began. A dramatic, recorded voiceover and music accompanied the display as various parts of the scene were illuminated in sequence while the tale was recounted.

Others gathered to watch, and Moira began to be overwhelmed with the sound and scent of so many human bodies so close. She mused that perhaps she shouldn't have come here on an empty stomach. She decided to move along.

Soon she found herself standing on the temple grounds, not remembering having wandered inside the metal fence surrounding the great granite temple. She was mildly surprised, but it always seemed she ended up here, close enough to the temple walls to touch them. She gazed up into the black, overcast sky, and snowflakes, illuminated like millions of fireflies, floated and danced downward. It was almost as if they originated from the brightly lit spires above her.

And, as she always did when she found herself here, Moira MacDonald reached out her hand to touch the granite stone of the temple wall. And, as always, her hand stopped an inch short of the stone and would go no further. Though she pushed with all her might, she could get no closer. Moira was not certain if her inability to touch the wall of the temple came from the temple itself or from some limitation her own mind imposed on her. Still, she stood there, yearning to be able to push just one inch farther and touch something truly holy.

After several minutes, an elderly gentleman, wearing the characteristic name badge identifying him as one of the missionaries on Temple Square, approached her and said genially, "It's beautiful, isn't it?"

Moira withdrew her hand and pulled her cloak close around her. "Aye, 'tis beyond beautiful." She favored him with a smile. She heard his throat catch.

She did have that effect on people.

Moira sighed. "I have travelled to many sites of worship all over the world, but in all my years, I have ne'er seen any place so lovely as these temples."

"Are there any questions I can answer, miss?" He seemed to have recovered his wits.

Mostly.

"Nae, I'm grand." She flashed him another smile, wished him a merry Christmas, and walked away from the House of God.

As she left Temple Square, she pulled her hood up, casting her face into deeper shadow. It was a cold night, and there was snow on the ground, except for where the snow had been cleared away, but there was little moisture in the air. A gentle breeze began to blow. However, the cold did not burrow deep into the marrow as it could on a wetter, more blustery night.

Not that it would have bothered her terribly if it had been wet and windy. It was a fine winter night. Perfect for walking.

And walk she did. She began her walk north toward her home, though she didn't travel a direct route. She turned this way and that as she wandered. She was in a pensive mood and didn't pay strict heed to where she was going.

She reflected, as she often did at this time of year, on why Christmas had such an effect on her. The birth of Christ (who was not born in December, she was certain) could have

no direct effect on her. Once, long ago, but no longer. It was a season to celebrate peace and hope. She'd made a kind of peace for herself, but she had no hope. There could be none for her. Still, there was hope for *them*, and that gave her comfort. If Christ could do nothing or *would* do nothing for her, at least there was hope for the rest. The peace she'd made with herself was an acceptance of her own damnation, balanced by a fond hope for the redemption of those around her and the chance to do some good in this world while she remained in it.

Her thoughts turned to Donald, *her* Donald; although he was hers no longer and never could be again. How she missed him at this time of year! His time on this world and their time together had been brief, and she prayed in her heart that he was with God and that God had found someone else—someone more fitting—for Donald in His kingdom. She wanted Donald to be happy. She didn't think her prayers went anywhere, but as long as she prayed for Donald and not for herself, perhaps God would listen. Perhaps.

She wished she and Donald had married, and she could have born him a child. Maybe if she had, she wouldn't have gone down the path she'd taken. Maybe, if she'd had someone else to care for, she wouldn't have been so consumed with her grief and anger. Maybe then she wouldn't have been destroyed by her desire for vengeance. Perhaps. None of that mattered anymore. Her fate had long ago been sealed. And by her own hand.

Her sensitive ears heard what sounded like a muffled scream. It was close by. Interrupted from her reverie, she

focused on the source of that scream. It was coming from the backyard of a house nearby. She could hear four people. She moved quickly toward the sounds, using her best stealthy run, pulling her cloak close around herself to muffle the noise.

The gentle breeze was at her back. Otherwise she'd have already been made aware of any intent to do violence; she'd have caught the scent of *evil*.

As Moira quietly rounded the corner of the house, she took in the scene: There was no direct light in the yard. In the darkness, three men held a woman to the snow-covered ground. One pinned her arms. Another covered her mouth. A third was nearly on top of her. She recognized the scent of the young woman from the Assembly Hall mingled with the scent of the girl's terror. But it was the scent of the animals that were assaulting the girl that overwhelmed Moira.

Evil.

Rage filled her, consumed her. This would not happen tonight. The predators were about to become the prey.

In an instant, she was on them. A blow from each fist sent the men holding the young woman's arms and mouth sprawling. Moira then lifted the man who was on top of the girl into the air by the collar of his coat. His pants fell around his ankles. It was his turn to scream. She tossed him aside like so much rubbish. Then she pounced and had him by the throat, holding him in the air.

The other two men were rising to their feet. Still holding one man above the ground, she fixed each of the other two in turn with a stare and said with all the Persuasion she could muster, "Stop!" They froze in their tracks. The man she held clawed at her hand, beat upon her

arm, kicked at her with feet tangled in his fallen trousers, and wriggled like a worm on a hook, all to no effect. She fixed him with her stare and he froze, gazing at her in terror. She did not intend to Persuade this one. She simply let him stare into her blazing green eyes and at her face with her lips pulled back into a snarl, revealing her now extended fangs.

“What a great man ye are,” she snarled. “All o’ ye! It takes three of ye lads tae take on one defenseless lass. Oh, ye’re brave men, ye are.” She took a quick glance at each of the other two. The Persuasion held: they stood staring at her, unmoving.

She fixed the would-be rapist with her eyes. “Ye meant tae make her yer prey, but now *I’m* going tae feast on yer worthless, wasted lives. I have nae taken a human life in two and a half centuries, but ye are nae *human*, are ye? Ye’re vermin! Rats! The world would be better for the loss of a few rats.”

She lowered her prey to his feet. His legs trembled as if they’d give way. Moira gripped him tightly behind his neck. “What’s yer name, rat?”

He struggled, but she dug her thumb and index finger into the pressure points at the base of his skull. He cried out and then tried to punch her in the face. She caught his wrist easily in her free hand, never moving her eyes from his. She waited a moment and then snapped the wrist like a dry twig.

He screamed in agony.

“What’s yer name, rat?” she demanded again. Her tone was harder, more feral. She shook him like a cat shaking a

mouse. He fumbled with his good hand inside his shirt and brought forth a large gold crucifix.

Moira instantly released him and cowered back. He hesitated for just a moment and then advanced on her, holding the cross in front of his chest at the full length of its chain. A huge, wicked grin spread across his face as he leered at her. "Not so tough are you now, bi . . . ," he began, but trailed off when Moira straightened up and smiled malevolently at him. Her face was bent down, casting it into shadow. Her eyes and her teeth would've been all that he could see.

She reached out and took the cross from his trembling hand and yanked the heavy gold chain from around his neck. He cried out as the chain broke. Moira held the crucifix in her dainty hand. "Just teasing ye, wee rat," she said, relishing the mounting horror on his face. "Wee ratty has some *bling*," she hissed, putting as much contempt into the last word as she could. She lifted her head and showed him an expression of mocking pity. "Oh, did ye think this piece of jewelry could protect ye from me?" Her face hardened again, and she stared into his widening eyes. "This symbol does nae have any power over me. It represents naught save yer greed. 'Tis over-compensation for yer complete and utter inadequacy as a man. Ye are nothing. Ye dinnae believe in Him, and neither He nor His angels would protect ye from me." Then she crumpled the heavy cross like tin-foil in her hand and dropped the mangled thing at his feet with contempt.

She took him by the back of the neck again. "Do ye know what I am?"

His breath came in ragged gasps, but he said nothing.

“I am Death.

“I am Hell.

“I am Damnation.

“I am Corruption Incarnate.

“I am a Daughter of Lilith.

“Look into my eyes and see the hellfire that awaits ye.”

She heard a sound that she knew none of the mortals could hear. It was an unmistakable sound. “Oh, poor wee ratty,” she mocked. A stench reached her nostrils, but it didn’t overwhelm the sweet scent of his evil blood. “Wee ratty has gone and soiled himself.”

She paused. “I like tae play with my food before eatin’ it, but since ye could nae hold yer bowels, I’m done playin’ with ye. Spoils the taste.” She bent his head to the side and sank her fangs into his neck. Hot, sweet, evil blood filled her mouth and she drank slowly, relishing the honeyed corruption. Her victim’s face took on a look of utter rapture as her saliva entered his bloodstream and the resulting euphoria spread across his face. He moaned with pleasure as she drank his blood. How sweet it was! The nectar of pure evil!

Moira took only a quart or so. Then she licked his neck clean, her saliva closing his wounds. When she released him, he cried out and offered his neck to her. She pushed him to the ground.

Moira glanced quickly back the girl. She was still on the ground. She hadn’t moved, not even to cover herself. She stared at Moira in wide-eyed horror. *She must be in shock, poor lass, Moira thought to herself. Her heart’s still beatin’. I’ll see tae her after I’ve dealt with the vermin.*

“What’s yer name, rat?”

“D-D-D-Daniel.” He looked at her from the snow with sick longing, his pants wrapped around only one leg now.

“Daniel, sit there for a bit while I deal with yer wee friends.”

Then she turned to the first one, the one who’d held the arms of the girl. Fixing his gaze with her own, she released him from Persuasion. He crumpled to his knees. She descended on him and lifted him up.

“Ye are nae even a rat,” she mocked. “Ye are naught but a frightened wee mouse.” The thug began to cry. “What’s this? Tears? Are ye naught but a wee bairn? Are ye goin’ tae soil yer pants too, ye wee babbey?”

“Don’t k-kill me,” he sobbed. “I’m s-sorry.”

Moira reached up and grabbed a fistful of his hair.

“Are ye pleadin’ for *mercy*?” She drew her lips back, making her fangs more prominent. “I have nae mercy for rapists.”

“P-Please!” He was blubbering. “I’ve never d-done this before!”

“Liar!” she spat in his face. She could *feel* the lie. “Ye are a lyin’ piece of filth!” Then she locked eyes with him and commanded with Persuasion, “Confess! How many have ye taken against their will?”

“Three!”

She released him from Persuasion.

“I’m s-so, so sorry!” His words were barely intelligible through his sobs.

“Do ye wish tae know *why* I became a vampire?”

He sobbed and trembled, but gave no answer.

“I became a vampire tae hunt down the men who killed my betrothed and the men who murdered my parents and raped me.”

His trembling became a violent shaking.

She lowered her voice to a whisper. “Rapists get nae mercy from me.”

And then she took a quart from him.

Moira left him in the snow, moaning for more.

She turned to the last of the three men and released him from her Persuasion.

The instant he was free, he turned to run.

The girl, still lying exposed in the snow, watched as Moira rose into the air, borne aloft by huge, white-feathered wings.

Moira alighted in front of the fleeing man, the wings folding up and vanishing behind her as if they’d never been there. The man slipped in the snow and fell at her feet. She grabbed him by the hair and lifted him off the ground. He shrieked as she pulled him close and sank her teeth into his neck. Then his struggling ceased as her saliva did its work.

She threw him to the ground in disgust after taking far less than a quart.

“Ye have AIDS. I can taste it in yer blood. ’Twill nae harm me. Nae disease can survive in *my* body. But *ye*, ye wee toad, ye are goin’ tae die a horrible, slow death. ’Tis far less than ye deserve. I’d wager ye did nae get HIV from any woman. I’d wager ye dinnae even *fancy* women.”

She seized him by the collar and dragged him over to where Daniel lay. She collected the third man and deposited him with the first two.

She fixed each of them in turn with her eyes and Persuaded them. "Ye will seek out the nearest policeman. If necessary, ye will flag down a police car. Ye will confess *all* yer crimes tae the police. Ye will confess in *detail* and as many times as it takes tae convince the authorities tae lock ye up. Ye will nae tell them about *me*. Ye will nae tell *anyone* about me. And until the day that ye die, ye will dream of me every night. Ye will live both in terror of me and in longin' for my touch. I will torment yer dreams. Ye shall ne'er have a night's peace so long as ye live." She paused. "Oh, and, D-D-Daniel? Pull up yer pants. Naebody wants tae behold what a poor wee excuse for a man ye are."

As one, they lurched to their feet, turned, and staggered away to carry out her commands, with Daniel pulling up his pants as he went. She watched them go until they rounded the corner of the house and disappeared from sight.

She turned to face the girl, who eyed Moira with naked terror from where she still lay on the ground. Moira forced her fangs to retract, and she smiled her best smile at the girl. Moira extended a hand.

"Easy now, lass," she cooed. "I'll nae hurt ye." The girl didn't move. "I just saved ye, did I nae?"

Am I going to have to Persuade her as well? Moira had had enough of usurping the free will of others for one night.

"Come now, dearie. Let's get ye safe and warm."

Hesitantly, the girl reached for Moira's proffered hand and took it. Moira helped her to her feet and then she brushed the snow from the girl's back.

"What's yer name, dearie?"

The girl dropped her eyes and said, "L-L-Lucy."

“There now, Lucy. That’s better than having me call ye, ‘Lassie,’ and, ‘Dearie,’ all night.” She took off her cloak and put it around the girl’s shoulders.

Moira sighed. *One last bit of Persuasion to help the lass.* Moira stared into Lucy’s eyes, eyes that were rimmed with far too much black makeup.

“Lucy, calm down. Relax. Forget what ye saw me do. I shouted at those men and they ran away. That’s all.”

Lucy turned her head away. “No, you didn’t. You threw them around like dolls. You drank their blood. You . . . flew.”

Ach, nae, Moira thought, *this one has a very strong will.* She tried again. She took Lucy’s face in both her hands and said with all the Persuasion she was capable of, “Nae, ye saw nary a thing. I screamed and they ran. Nae more than that.”

This time Lucy stared back and said, “You’re a vampire.” It was a simple statement of fact, not an accusation.

Moira smirked. “Ye are a strong-willed, stubborn wee thing, are ye nae?” *So much for Persuasion.* “Let’s get ye home. Where do ye live?”

Lucy’s shoulders hitched, and silent tears rolled down her cheeks.

“Ach, nae. Do ye nae have anywhere tae go?”

“I’m staying with a friend . . . sleeping on her couch,” she whispered, “but she has her boyfriend over, so I have to find someplace to hang out until they’re done.”

“And when, lass, will that be?”

A silent sob wracked her. “Probably tomorrow.”

“Do ye nae have anywhere else to go on this night of nights?” Moira knew the answer even as she asked.

Lucy shook her head.

“What about yer family?” Moira thought she knew the answer to that one as well.

Another shake of the head.

“Nae family at all?” Moira could sense the lie.

“I’m not welcome there.” It was barely a whisper.

“And why nae?”

“My parents don’t approve of me. They’re ashamed of me. They don’t love me.” She paused and sniffed.

“Nobody does.” It was barely a whisper.

“And how can that be, nae tae love their own daughter?”

Silence.

Moira sensed the truth and prodded, “Is it *ye* that they dinnae approve of, or is it, perhaps, yer *choices*?”

More silent tears and then a shrug. And then, “I’ve done some bad stuff. I’ve really messed up my life.”

Ah, thought Moira. This was something she understood only too well. *I, myself, am the Queen o’ Bad Choices*. She decided to change tack a bit.

“Are ye hungry, lass? Could ye use a bite tae eat?”

Lucy gave a snuffle and a shrug.

Placing an arm about the girl’s shoulders, Moira led her away. They walked together in silence.

As they crossed South Temple, Moira noted with some satisfaction that Daniel and his two cohorts were frantically flagging down a police cruiser.

Sometime later, Moira and Lucy sat at a table in a small Asian restaurant south of Temple Square. Lucy ate slowly, mostly picking at her food. Moira sat with an untouched glass of water in front of her. She waited for Lucy to speak. Lucy had said nothing, but Moira could tell that she was working up her courage to say something.

Moira waited patiently.

When Lucy finally spoke, what she said wasn't anything like Moira had anticipated.

"Can you eat anything, I mean, besides blood?"

Moira stifled a laugh. "Ach, nae, dearie," she said, smiling. "I can handle a bit of tomato or grape juice mixed with blood, but I cannae keep anythin' else down. Nae even sae much as water."

"When your wings appeared, you looked like an angel. They were white."

Moira smiled sadly. "Angels dinnae have wings, lass. Only demons do."

"You're not a demon." Lucy hesitated. "You *saved* me." Another pause and then, "You're so beautiful."

"Ye see, lass, the Bard got it right: 'For the devil hath power to assume a pleasing shape.' The better 'tis to tempt, to lure . . . to corrupt." Moira let out a long, sad sigh. "I *was* beautiful once. *Truly* beautiful. I was beautiful on the outside as well as inside. I was loved, and I loved in return. He was a good man, was my Donald. He loved me, and I loved him. And I was *truly* beautiful." Moira's sad smile faded. "But he's gone to heaven, and I'm damned to earth. I shall ne'er see him again. He's in God's hands."

She needed to get back to what mattered at moment.

“Lucy, did ye know those men?”

Lucy’s eyes dropped, and she stopped pretending to eat. “No. They just grabbed me off the sidewalk. I couldn’t fight back. They were so strong!” She paused. “I’m not strong. Not strong . . . like *you*.” She looked up with *hopeful* eyes.

Moira’s green eyes hardened. “Nae, Lucy, ye dinnae want to be like me.”

Lucy became animated. “Yes! Yes, I do! I want to be strong and beautiful, so no one can ever hurt me again! Not those men! Not my ex! Not my father! Not *any* man!”

“Yer father? Did he . . . *touch* . . . ye?”

“No! Nothing like that. But, he *hurt* me. He never understood me. He never *approved* of me.”

“Listen to me, Lucy,” Moira began. “I *am* strong, but my strength comes at far too high a price.”

“I would give *anything* to not be hurt ever again!” She looked so earnest that Moira believed her.

Moira looked at her with profoundly sad eyes—eyes that were both ancient and young. She hadn’t told her *full* tale to a mortal since she’d confessed to a priest of the kirk two and a half centuries ago. That priest had told her that she was damned. He was right. She’d spent the intervening centuries trying to atone for her sins, and little good it’d done. Perhaps, however, she could do some good here.

“Let me tell ye the tale,” Moira began, “of how I became . . . what I am.

“Over two and a half centuries ago, I was to be a bride. I was happy. I was loved. I dreamed of marriage and of giving my Donald a son. Then came Bonnie Prince Charley. He was raisin’ an army of hielanders to overthrow the

Hanover king and place his father or himself on the throne. My Donald went to fight for his king and Prince Charley. He kissed me good-bye, and then he marched away. 'Twas the last I ever saw of him. One night I dreamed he'd died.

"Later, word reached our village that he'd been wounded and captured at Culloden. He'd been executed. After that, the English came, and they took great reprisals against us. They slaughtered my mother and my father. They burned my roof, broke my walls, and then they took me and raped me. There were forty-six of them. They left me bleedin' and bruised and exposed. They left me to die. I very nearly *did* die." Moira's voice got suddenly quiet. "I truly wish that I had died. But, I did nae.

"I vowed that I would have my vengeance. I sought out a Daughter of Lilith who haunted the kirkyard. I begged her to make me as she was. I performed the Ritual. I swore the Oath. I drank of her blood and she drank of mine. I received the Ordination at her hand. And, after three days of deathlike Sleep, I rose on the third day to wreak my terrible vengeance on the English.

"I tracked down and slaughtered all forty-six men. I drank their blood, one man each night, until the garrison was decimated and they fled. It was sae easy! I followed them and killed them each one by one. Then I slew their captain last of all, for, though he had nae forced me, he stood by and watched as his men defiled me. Before he died, I Persuaded him to tell me where to find those who'd executed my Donald. I hunted *them* down as well, one by one, and drained their lives until at the last I tracked down

the sergeant who'd led the soldiers that hanged my love. He was the sole survivor."

Lucy's eyes never glanced away as Moira told her tale. Moira could see that she was at once fascinated and repulsed by the story.

"'Twas on Christmas Eve, seventeen-forty-seven that I finally located the sergeant. I remember it well. The snow was deep and blowin', and the wind was howlin' when I broke down his door. In a trice I had him by the throat, holdin' him up against the wall of his wee cottage, while his wife, with a babe in her arms, and his wee son watched in mute horror.

"He pleaded for me tae spare his wife and children. I told him that I would show him and them as much mercy as he'd shown Donald MacDonald when he hanged him for a traitor. He gasped and gurgled and choked as he said that he done naught but serve his king and country, he'd done naught but his duty. His wee son grabbed at my knees and pleaded with me nae tae kill his father.

"I ignored him.

"And then he bit me.

"The wee laddie bit me on the back of the leg. I dropped his father and wheeled around and raised the brave, terrified, screamin' child intae the air. I think I was about tae dash the lad's brains out when the father pleaded with me tae take *his* life, but spare his child.

"I stopped. What had I become? A monster who'd slaughter a child for the sins of the father? And what of the father? Had he nae served his king as my Donald served his prince? Were they sae different?

“I placed the lad back on the ground and fled intae the storm and the night.

“From that day tae this, I’ve nae taken another human life. I went tae a priest of the kirk, but he told me that I was damned, that there was nae hope for redemption in this life or the life tae come.

“I struggled tae survive. I could nae die, but I hungered for blood, and I became weak from the lack of it. I tried tae feed off animals, but received nae nourishment. Only human blood would suffice. I would haunt the hospitals and the homes of the dyin’, and drain the blood from the newly dead. On occasion, like this night, I would chance upon a murderer, a highwayman, or some other villain in the act of committin’ violence, and I would stop the crime and take some blood for my trouble, but I have ne’er taken another life.

“I have tried tae atone for my sins, but I cannae replace the lives I’ve taken. I cannae purge the demon inside. I cannae touch anythin’ that is truly holy.

“I’ve paid a terribly high price for my vengeance. Ye dinnae want this livin’ hell that I must endure till I die, only then tae be consigned tae the eternal pit.”

Moira paused for a moment.

“Eventually,” she continued, “I journeyed tae the Americas. I settled here in Utah, decades ago. I like it here.”

Lucy shook herself as if she were being released from a trance. “Not me. I hate it here. I *hate* the Mormons.”

Moira blinked. “I moved here *because* of them. With all their faults, I love them.”

“They’re all *hypocrites*. There isn’t a true Christian among them.”

Moira gave Lucy a quizzical look. “Ye are a Mormon, are ye nae, lass? Or ye were.” Lucy said nothing. “They have their faults and their hypocrites like any other people, but by and large, they’re tryin’ tae follow Christ.”

Lucy was silent.

“Let me show ye something,” Moira said. She rose, paid for the half-eaten meal, and led the girl out of the restaurant and into the night.

As they walked, Lucy tried a few times to get Moira to talk, but the vampire simply urged her forward to the as-yet-undisclosed destination.

When it became apparent that they were approaching Temple Square, Lucy began to hesitate, but Moira took her firmly by the hand and walked on.

Moira led Lucy to the grounds of the temple and stood in her usual spot. Then she said, “Let me ask ye this, Lucy: Ye say that ye have done terrible things. Have ye murdered anyone? Have ye raped anyone?” Moira did not look at the girl to see her reply.

Lucy whispered, “No.”

The vampire nodded. “Then ye can be forgiven. Ye have done wrong, but ye can repent.

“Most stories and movies depict my kind as fearin’ the cross. The cross has nae effect on us. ‘Tis a symbol of evil and nae of good. ‘Tis most certainly nae the symbol of Christ.

“I have entered into places of worship all over the world. I have been in chapels, synagogues, mosques, and

cathedrals, but I cannae enter one of these temples. Nae even so far as the lobby. I've tried."

Lucy lowered her eyes. "I can't enter either."

"Ye cannae *now*, but ye *could* enter someday. Ye are damned *now*, but ye dinnae have to remain that way. All that ye've done that is wrong or stupid or petty or evil can be erased." Then Moira grabbed the girl's arm and forced her hand forward.

Lucy tried to pull back, but Moira was far too strong for her. The vampire forced the girl's hand forward until it was touching the wall of the temple. Moira held it there.

"Lucy, I cannae touch these walls. I can touch a Bible or a Book of Mormon or a crucifix, but I cannae approach God where He dwells. I'm damned for eternity and there is nae hope for me . . . but there *is* hope for *ye*. Ye can touch the truly sacred. Ye can go home to yer Father in Heaven. If ye just trust in Him, His Son can lead ye home."

Lucy began to cry, silently at first, but then with huge, wracking sobs. Moira took the girl in her arms and held her close until Lucy's sobs quieted.

Softly, tenderly, Moira said, "Go home, Lucy. There are people in this world that love ye. Go home and start tae heal. Go home and put yer trust in the Lord and take the steps that ye need tae take tae reconcile with Him. That is why He came tae Earth: tae save *ye*. He came tae save *ye*, Lucy. And ye are precious in His sight."

Lucy continued to cry quietly and said nothing.

"Let me call yer parents. I just know they want ye back. They love ye in spite of everythin', and they want tae help ye tae heal."

Lucy said nothing.

“Can I call them?”

The girl hesitated, then nodded.

Moira flew Lucy home and delivered her into the arms of her parents. Then Moira returned to Temple Square. The gates had long since been shut, but Moira flew over the walls to sit on the temple grounds and pray.

She'd long ago given up praying for herself, but she prayed constantly for others. She prayed for Lucy and her parents. She prayed for her Donald to be happy.

Dawn was coming soon, and Moira would need to seek refuge from the sun. Damned though she was, she was not ready to abandon her life while she thought there was still some good she could do – not for herself, but for others. She rose, went to her usual spot, and stared up at the spire above her. The breeze was gone, and the snow fell straight down, dancing on the air.

It was so beautiful.

Then, as she turned to go, Moira caught her foot on a stone, and did something she hadn't done in centuries.

Moira tripped.

Without thinking, she reached out a hand and caught herself before she could fall. She looked at her hand and saw that she was supporting herself . . . against the wall of the temple.

Moira gasped.

She leaned against the temple, staring at her hand.

Her hand.

Touching the House of God.

Then she straightened up, spread her wings, and rose into the swirling, dancing snowflakes. She flew quickly home. And as she flew, one word repeated itself over and over in her mind.

Hope.