

What to Kill For

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PART I

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CHAPTER 1

What do vampires kill for? Blood.

What do cannibals kill for? Human flesh.

What does Winnie the Pooh kill for? Honey.

What do single ladies over the age of thirty-five in Los Angeles kill for?

A husband.

Single ladies in Los Angeles? *That's right.* Not in Avalon, Georgia; not in Monroe, Louisiana; not in Bandera, Texas. But in Los Angeles, California.

What about Los Angeles?

Okay, let us tell you a little bit about Los Angeles.

First of all, it's the second largest city in the United States, with the first being New York. Having a population of four million people jammed into the five hundred-and-three square miles it covers, it is one of the most populous metropolitan areas in the world.

People move to big cities for various reasons, but primarily to pursue such things as a career, or seeking inspiration, and so forth. In Los Angeles, there is also the fabulous weather. The year-round warm climate encourages sunbathing on the sandy beaches, beach volleyball,

and bike-riding on a path that overlooks the ocean even in January, while people in other parts of the country freeze and suffer from blizzards and other undesirable precipitation.

L.A. does sound pretty nice, doesn't it?

And, of course, one of the main attractions for many people to move to Los Angeles is Hollywood. Yes, dreamers who want to become the next Hollywood star pour into this place like water from a faucet; or in some cases, pour out like sewage down the drainpipe after spending all their life savings, or whatever they managed to scrape together, for acting classes and expensive filmmaker courses, that are designed specifically to take advantage of those poor dreamers.

Let's say you live in Georgia and you're visiting Los Angeles. You'd think this town has got big money. The real estate is three times more expensive than in Georgia. All the fancy cars racing in the streets and people with *pricey wardrobes and snooty attitudes* dropping hundreds of dollars at stylish bars night after night, as if their credit cards were nothing but pieces of worthless plastic. Somewhat intimidating, but you'd feel awed at the same time when taking a glimpse of this luxurious town filled with *beautiful* people. You'd most likely exclaim, *Wow, what a life!*

Well, what if that were all an illusion?

The truth is, Los Angeles is filled with so many poor people, it's no laughing matter. If you followed the people with those fancy cars, most of the time, you'd end up in front of a stinky apartment building, watching them wrangle into the tiniest tandem parking spot. And check out those stylish *nightlifers'* credit card statements. You would doubt your eyesight, and may start to suspect that those people might be purposely spending as much money as possible to accumulate huge credit card debts in preparation of a well-planned bankruptcy. A lot of people also don't own any real estate. People might *wow* you if you did.

So, yes, with the five-bedroom house that you own and your sweet savings for retirement, you Georgians are far richer than the shiny, empty-pocketed Angelenos.

So, now you may have your first clue about the urban metropolis called Los Angeles. But, hey, did you know this?

How many depressed ladies reside in this town?

Well, since there are no US Census Bureau data about depressed women, we couldn't give you an exact number, could we? But we can tell you this: *a lot*.

Shannon was, indeed, *one of them*.

CHAPTER 2

Shannon was thirty-eight years old. She didn't move to Los Angeles like a lot of others because she was born there, a native Angeleno. She was pretty, young-looking, and never missed her facial and nail appointments. She was an Episcopalian princess, and she always dreamed of marrying her Prince Charming. One day, he'd ride up on his white horse to her castle and give her a true love's kiss—just as her *fairy godmother* once told her when she was five, or at least, that's what little Shannon always thought. Shannon often wished upon a star to grow up and be an adult as fast as possible, so she could meet her handsome prince *as soon as possible*. She couldn't wait.

Boy, did that wish come true!

When she woke up the next morning, after going to bed at five years old, she found herself suddenly a fully grown adult. And not just an adult—but a thirty-eight-year-old, unmarried adult.

What? Did she time-travel, and manage to skip three decades?

No, no. This isn't a science fiction story. That was only what Shannon *felt* like.

The awful night that Shannon turned into a thirty-eight-year-old woman, she was sitting in a booth at a stylish bar in Los Angeles. Her face was hidden, covered in hair like a ghost in a horror film.

In front of her lay several tarot cards. All the bad cards were flipped—the devil, death, and other ominous figures.

A big, red, glazed eye with exposed sclera emerged through the hair, emanating the eeriest glow. *Please note this isn't a horror story, either.* Except Shannon felt as if she were one of the characters in a horror film.

Suddenly, the tarot cards were scooped up and shuffled into a pile as Shannon stared on.

A pretty lady sat down with her hand on top of the pile, eyeing Shannon closely. This woman was Shannon's best friend forever, Kirsten. She was one of the rare species of this town—a married woman. *And* she also had two kids. Her husband was a soft-spoken introvert who had no interest in socializing. It pleased him when his wife went out with Shannon for their girls' night out.

"Stop doing that. It's making you depressed," said Kirsten.

"I have a legitimate reason to be depressed," Shannon argued, stretching her hand over the pile like a drug addict reaching for her *chiva*, which Kirsten swiftly dodged.

"I need to ask the universe one more thing," Shannon begged.

"No. We're done with this."

Kirsten sharply denied her further access to the tarot cards like a mother taking away a video game controller from her child. Shannon didn't need to feel more depressed than she already did.

"Do you want another tequila shot?"

Kirsten knew that was the only thing that could distract Shannon from her obsession with the tarot cards.

"What happened to those guys who offered to get us drinks?" She wondered aloud as she looked around.

The guys she referred to were spotted standing at the bar. Waving at Kirsten, one of them pointed at the busy bartender. It looked like they were still waiting to order drinks for Shannon and Kirsten.

"Drinks are coming. Hang in there," said Kirsten, as if Shannon were fatally injured and anxious for the paramedics to arrive.

Now, let's take a peek at what was *really* going on at the bar at that moment, shall we?

The two guys hung around the bar, sipping their beers, when they noticed Kirsten, who was looking at them. They waved and flashed fake smiles.

“Dude. Whatever you do, do not make me go back there! I beg you. It’s scary energy over there,” said one guy.

“What should we do then? They’re expecting us to return with drinks. You’re the one who offered to buy them,” said the other guy.

“My bad, man. It’s way too depressing. Just pretend like the drinks haven’t been ordered yet.”

“Awesome idea.”

The two guys hid their beers and pointed at the bartender as if they were still waiting to order the drinks for the women.

The two ladies patiently waited for the paramedics that would never arrive.

“I’m going to be a sad, single, old maid who dies alone. I wish I were a man. Men can enjoy the single life as long as they want and have kids whenever they choose. Charlie Chaplin had one at seventy-three. And so did Mick Jagger, for God’s sake.”

Shannon breathed a long sigh, indicating her deep depression as she slumped her head down on the table.

“You still have time. You look super young. Just look at you,” Kirsten chirped. “Women have children at age fifty nowadays. Easy-peasy.” A little lie was permitted to save a friend from dying of misery.

“You know when you’re a teenager, it’s so much fun being a girl. Twenty something, even more fun. All the benefits girls can get. Then the big three-oh, and the world still doesn’t quite end yet. Until you hit— ”

Shannon paused in a dramatic way. If this were a movie, it would have been an ECU—extreme close up—on her horrified eye.

“I don’t mean to ruin your show, but I’m your age, too, you know.” Kirsten had to cut in—her best friend was becoming slightly overdramatic.

“You’re married. You have kids. That’s a whole different animal. If I were a bison, you’d be a worm.”

“A worm? Why would you even pick that for me?” asked Kirsten with a furrowed brow.

Shannon abruptly grabbed a drink from the next table and downed it. She was completely lost in between dimensions. *The world was ending...* Snatching a drink from a stranger was nothing compared to that. Shannon whispered with her very last breath, “It hits you in every possible way from all angles. Thirty-eight... What a ridiculously annoying number. And why was I ever born a girl?”

Shannon raised some interesting questions here.

First of all, let’s take a look at the dreadful number, thirty-eight. (Why thirty-eight? Why not thirty-seven? Unsure—it was just her scary age.)

According to the US Census Bureau, thirty-eight is officially *middle age*. Health insurance premiums skyrocket like hell. Perimenopause also kicks in and some women should be caged when they’re PMSing. Never mind that it is also the age when you eat and actually get fat. The mothers of the women in question tactfully start suggesting artificial insemination with a donor sperm, while their gynecologists recommend freezing their eggs.

Yikes. That sounds pretty exasperating, doesn’t it?

It appears fairly understandable why Shannon would condemn being born a girl.

Shannon often wondered about reproduction and why and how every living thing on earth had two genders. How curious that living beings branched into male and female? She would ponder about the whole reproduction system, where new life couldn’t exist unless two different genders mated.

Cells knew how to reproduce themselves. In unicellular organisms, one cell reproduced itself by dividing and thereby creating a new individual. In multicellular organisms, i.e., *us*, it wasn’t that simple.

Why can’t multicellular organisms reproduce new individuals on their own like unicellular organisms do?

Once her mind was occupied with the mysteries of science, Shannon could not stop. Life originated from organic molecules. She wondered how that could have happened. Our complex bodies that functioned so amazingly well—like literally, works of art—were formed and evolved

from simple carbon atoms? And how exactly did those wind up dividing into male and female—two types of animals: one equipped with millions of complex emotions and the other one without them?

Enough with science. We all know Shannon never found answers to those questions. No matter how long she debated the biology of male and female contrasts, the reality was unchanged—at thirty-eight years old, she was still single. She was supposed to meet her prince on his white horse ten years ago and live happily ever after.

So, what happened? What went wrong?

The answer to that was as foggy to her as rocket science and just another question she would never know the answer to.

However, no matter how ill-fated Shannon was—in *her own world*—doomed, she didn't lose hope. She had a daily agenda and stuck to it like a disciplined soldier. It required her to remain available on a dating website, *MarryAndBeMerry.com*, in her quest for her future husband, which she managed to do for five hours a day, every single day. She never compromised on her agenda, no matter how tired she was, no matter how badly she suffered from monthly cramps, or how severe the blizzard was—*wait, you never get blizzards in Los Angeles*.

Okay, that was *her* being overly dramatic...

She was a strong soldier, however, and didn't give up hope for survival even when she was surrounded by the enemy, having shoulder-fired missiles aimed right at her (*in her imagination, that is*). But she did get discouraged at times. Well, all the time, actually. *What do you expect?* She was only human. An animal controlled strictly by her emotions—a *woman*.

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