

excerpt

THE NYMPHOS OF ROCKY FLATS

Gilbert's eyes shifted from my face to the bottom of my neck. He must have noticed the makeup smeared against the inside of my collar. According to popular lore, vampires weren't supposed to be able to endure sunlight. Thankfully, popular lore didn't take into account the modern miracles of sun block, vitamin supplements, and cosmetics.

"If you don't mind me asking, what's with your eyes and the makeup?"

"Gulf War Syndrome," I replied. "The second Gulf War. Operation Iraqi Freedom."

His expression became anxious. "I read that it's not contagious. Is it?"

Not unless I bit him. "No," I reassured him. "But I was exposed to every suspected agent. Got the notorious anthrax vaccine. The latest issue of the *Gulf War Review* says that I could have leishmaniasis or mycoplasma. During battle we drove through the smoke of burning enemy tanks that we had destroyed with depleted uranium penetrators. God knows what we inhaled."

"Try beryllium, americium, and plutonium besides the depleted uranium," he said. "Those rounds were made of U 238 dross from the enriched stuff we processed here."

"So it's ironic that I'm here," I said.

"Irony has nothing to do with it. And neither does depleted uranium, I don't think. I asked for you because of your credentials."

"So I gathered. When you sent a check for twenty grand and a request for an interview, I figured there was more to it than you asking how I've been. This is about Rocky Flats, right?"

"It is."

"Then I don't understand how you expect a civilian investigator, an outsider, to accomplish anything here considering your safeguards and security requirements."

"Felix, it's precisely because you're an outsider. A known quantity I can trust. For example, three weeks after you took the Blanford case, you traced them to their hideout in St. Lucia and found their stash of embezzled monies on Vanuatu."

"How'd you learn about that?" I asked.

"The Patriot Act," Gilbert replied smugly. "Ask the right questions and it's amazing what can be learned. Your reputation is impressive."

"Okay, so I can do a good job," I said. "What does this have to do with me being here?"

Gilbert walked to a map of Rocky Flats on the wall adjacent to his desk. He pointed with his pen to a collection of black rectangles inside a crooked trapezoid on the map. "This is the Protected Area."

"The 700 series of buildings," I said. "Where you manufactured plutonium detonators from enriched uranium. I did my homework."

"Good. The situation..." he drawled, his pause indicating situation as in *problem*, "began here." He tapped his pen against the rectangle labeled Building 707.

"And this situation is?"

Gilbert turned from the map. "We were finishing the final survey of Building 707 for decontamination and demolition when..." Gilbert cleared his throat. "We had an outbreak of nymphomania."

Nymphomania? Rocky Flats was getting weirder by the minute. I cupped my hand behind an ear and tipped my head. "What? Run that by me again."