

From Night World 2
A Sneak Peek from

Soulmate

The First Vampire

Hannah Snow under hypnosis:

Dr. Paul Winfield: "I want you to see yourself as fifteen years old, see yourself as fifteen. Go back to the time when you were fifteen. And now I want you to see yourself at twelve years old; go in your mind to the time when you are twelve. Now go farther back, see yourself at nine years old, at six years old, at three years old. Now go back and see yourself as a baby, as an infant. Feel very comfortable and see yourself as a tiny baby."

Hannah couldn't help but listen. She *did* feel comfortable, and her mind did show her pictures as the years seemed to turn back. It was like watching a film of her life running backwards, herself getting smaller and smaller, and in the end tiny and bald.

"And now," the soothing, irresistible voice said, "I want you to go *farther* back. Back to the time before you were born. The time before you were born as Hannah Snow. You are floating in the red light, you feel very

relaxed, and you are going back, back . . . to the time when you *first* met this man you think of as Thierry. Whatever that time might be, go back. Go back to the first time.”

Hannah was being drawn down a tunnel.

She had no control and she was scared. It wasn't like the near-death tunnel. It was red, with translucent, shining, pulsing walls—something like a womb. And she was being pulled or sucked through it at ever increasing speed.

No, she thought. But she couldn't say anything. It was all happening too fast and she couldn't make a sound.

“Back to the first time,” Paul intoned and his words set up a sort of echo in Hannah's head, a whispering of many voices. As if a hundred Hannah's had all gotten together and murmured sibilantly, “The First Time. The First Time.”

“Go back . . . and you will begin to see pictures. You will see yourself, maybe in a strange place. Go back and see this.”

The First Time . . .

No, Hannah thought again. And something very deep inside her whimpered, “I don't want to see it.” But she was still being pulled through the soft, red tunnel, faster and faster. She had a feeling of unimaginable distance being crossed. And then . . . she had a feeling of some threshold being reached.

The First Time.

She exploded into darkness, squirted out of the tunnel like a watermelon seed between wet fingers.

Silence. Dark. And then—a picture. It opened like a tiny leaf unfolding out of a seed, got bigger until it surrounded her. It was like a scene from a movie, except that it was all around her . . . she seemed to be floating in the middle of it.

“What do you see?” Paul’s voice asked softly from very far away.

“I see . . . me,” Hannah said. “It’s me—it looks just like me. Except that I don’t have a birthmark.” She was full of wonder.

“Where are you? What do you see yourself doing?”

“I don’t know where I am.” Hannah was too amazed to be frightened now. It was so strange . . . she could see this better than any memory of her real life. The scene was incredibly detailed. At the same time, it was completely unfamiliar to her. “What I’m doing . . . I’m holding . . . something. A rock. And I’m doing something with it to a little tiny . . . something.” She sighed, defeated, then added, “I’m wearing *animal skins!* It’s a sort of shirt and pants all made of skins. It’s unbelievably . . . primitive. Paul, there’s a cave behind me.”

“Sounds like you’re *really* far back.” Paul’s voice sounded in stark contrast to Hannah’s wonder and excitement. He was clearly bored. Amused, resigned, but bored.

“And—there’s a girl beside me and she looks like Chess. Like my best friend Chess. She’s got the same face, the same eyes. She’s wearing skins, too . . . some kind of skin dress.”

“Yeah, and it has about the detail of most of the past-life regressions that are in this book,” Paul said wryly. Hannah could tell he was flipping pages. “You’re doing *something* to *something* with a rock. You’re wearing *some kind* of skins. The book’s full of descriptions like that. People who want to imagine themselves in the olden days, but who don’t know the first thing about them,” he muttered to himself.

Hannah didn’t wait for him to remember that he was talking to a hypnotized patient. “But you didn’t tell me to *be* the person back then. You just told me to see her.”

“Huh? Oh. Okay, then, *be* that person.” He said it so casually.

Panic spurted through Hannah. “Wait--I . . .”

But it was happening. She was falling, dissolving, merging into the scene around her. She was becoming the girl in front of the cave.

The First Time . . .

Distantly, she heard her own voice whispering, “I’m holding a flint burin, a tool for drilling. I’m boring holes in the tooth of an arctic fox.”

“Be that person,” Paul was repeating mechanically, still in the bored voice. Then he said, “What?”

“Mother’s going to be furious—I’m supposed to be sorting the fruit

we stored last winter for the Spring Gathering. There's not much left and it's mostly rotten. But Ran killed a fox and gave the skull to Ket, and we've spent all morning knocking the teeth out and making them into a necklace for Ket. Ket just *has* to have something new to wear every festival."

She heard Paul say softly, "Oh, my God . . ." Then he swallowed and said, "Wait--you want to be a paleontologist, right? You know about old things . . ."

"I want to be a what? I'm going to be a shaman, like Old Mother. I should get married, but there's nobody I want. Ket keeps telling me I'll meet somebody at a gathering, but I don't think so." She shivered. "Weird--I've got chills all of a sudden. Old Mother says she can't see my destiny. She pretends that's nothing to worry about, but I know *she's* worried. That's why she wants me to be a shaman, so I can fight back if the spirits have something rotten in mind for me."

Paul said, "Hannah--uh, let's just make sure we can get you out of this, all right? You know, in case that should become necessary. Now, when I clap my hands you're going to awaken completely refreshed. Okay? Okay?"

"My name's Hana." It was pronounced slightly differently, Hah-na. "And I'm already awake. Ket is laughing at me. She's threading the teeth on a sinew string. She says I'm daydreaming. She's right; I wrecked the

hole for this tooth.”

“When I clap my hands, you’re going to wake up. When I clap my hands, you’re going to wake up. You will be Hannah Snow.” A clap.

“Hannah, how do you feel?” Another clap. “Hannah? Hannah?”

“It’s Hana. Hana of the River People. And I don’t know what you’re talking about; I can’t *be* somebody else.” She stiffened.

“Wait--something’s happening. There’s some kind of commotion from the river. Something’s going on.”

The voice was desperate. “When I clap my hands--“

“*Shh*. Be quiet.” Something was happening and she had to see it, she had to know. She had to stand up. . . .

* * * * *

Hana of the Three Rivers stood up.

“Everybody’s all excited by the river,” she told Ket.

“Maybe Ran fell in,” Ket said. “No, that’s too much to hope for. Hana, what am I going to do? He wants to mate me, but I just can’t picture it. I want somebody *interesting*, somebody *different*. . . .” She held up the half-finished necklace. “So what do you think?”

Hana barely glanced at her. Ket looked wonderful, with her short dark hair, her glowing slanted green eyes, and her mysterious smile. The necklace was attractive; red beads alternated with delicate, milky-white teeth. “Fine, beautiful. You’ll break every heart at the gathering. I’m

going down to the river.”

Ket put down the necklace. “Well, if you insist—wait for me.”

The river was broad and fast-flowing, covered with little white-capped waves because it had just been joined by two tributaries. Hana’s people had lived in the limestone caves by the three rivers for longer than anyone could remember.

Ket was behind her as Hana made her way through new green cattails to the bend in the river. And then she saw what the fuss was about.

There was a stranger crouching in the reeds. That was exciting enough—strangers didn’t come very often. But this stranger was like no man Hana had ever seen.

“It’s a demon,” Ket whispered, awed.

It was a young man—a boy a few years older than Hana herself. He might have been handsome in other circumstances. His hair was very light blond, lighter than the dry grass of the steppes. His face was well-made; his tall body was lithe and muscular. Hana could see almost all of that body because he was only wearing a brief leather loincloth. That didn’t bother her; everybody went naked in the summer when it was hot enough. But this wasn’t summer; it was spring and the days could still be chilly. No sane person would go traveling without clothes.

But that wasn’t what shocked Hana, what held her standing there

rigid with her heart pounding so hard she couldn't breathe. It was the rest of the boy's appearance. Ket was right--he was clearly a demon.

His eyes were wrong. More like the eyes of a lynx or a wolverine than the eyes of a person. They seemed to throw the pale sunlight back at you when you looked into them. But the eyes were nothing compared to the teeth. His canine teeth were long and delicately curved. They came to a sharp and very non-human point.

Almost involuntarily, Hana looked down at the fox tooth she still held in her palm. Yes, they were like that, only bigger.

The boy was filthy, caked with mud from the river, his blond hair ruffled crazily, his eyes staring wildly from side to side. There was blood on his mouth and chin.

“He’s a demon, all right,” one of the men said. Five men were standing around the crouching boy, several of them with spears, others with hastily-grabbed rocks. “What else could have a human body with animal eyes and teeth?”

“A spirit?” Hana said. She didn’t realize that she was going to say it until the words were out. But then, with everybody looking at her, she drew herself up tall. “Whether he’s a demon or a spirit, you’d better not hurt him. It’s Old Mother who should decide what to do with him. This is a matter for shamans.”

“You’re not a shaman yet,” another of the men said. It was Arno, a very broad-shouldered man who was the leader of the hunters. Hana didn’t like him.

And she wasn’t sure why she had spoken up in favor of the stranger. There was something in his eyes, the look of a suffering animal. He seemed so alone, and so frightened--and so much in pain, even though there were no visible wounds on his body.

“She’s right, we’d better take him to Old Mother,” one of the hunters said. “Should we hit him on the head and tie him up, or do you think we can just herd him?”

But at that moment, a high, thin sound came to Hana over the rushing of the river. It was a woman screaming.

“Help me! Somebody come help! Ryl’s been attacked!”

Hana turned and hurried up the riverbank. The woman screaming was Sada, her mother's sister, and the girl who was stumbling beside her was Ryl, Hana's little cousin.

Ryl was a pretty girl, ten years old. But right now she looked dazed and almost unconscious. And her neck and the front of her leather tunic were smeared with blood.

"What happened?" Hana gasped, running to put her arms around her cousin.

"She was out looking for new greens. I found her lying on the ground—I thought she was dead!" Sada's face contorted in grief. She was speaking rapidly, almost incoherently. "And look at this—look at her neck!"

On Ryl's pale neck, in the center of the blood, Hana could just make out two small marks. They looked like the marks of sharp teeth--but only two teeth.

"It had to be an animal," Ket breathed from behind Hana. "But what animal only leaves the marks of two teeth?"

Hana's heart felt tight and oddly heavy at once—like a stone falling inside her. Sada was already speaking.

"It wasn't an animal! She says it was a man, a boy! She says he threw her down and bit her—and he drank her blood." Sada began to sob, clutching Ryl to her. "Why would he want to do that? Oh, please,

somebody help me! My daughter's been hurt!"

Ryl just stared dazedly over her mother's arm.

Ket said faintly, "A man . . ."

Hana gulped and said, "Let's take her to Old Mother . . ." But then she stopped and looked toward the river.

The men were driving the stranger up the bank. He was snarling, terrified and angry—but when he saw Ryl, his expression changed.

He stared at her, his wounded animal eyes sick and dismayed. To Hana, it seemed as if he could hardly stand to look at her, but he couldn't look away. His gaze was fixed on the little girl's throat.

And then he turned away, his eyes shut, his head falling into his hands. Every movement showed anguish. It was as if all the fight had gone out of him at once.

Hana looked back and forth in horror from the girl with blood on her throat to the stranger with blood on his mouth. The connection was obvious and nobody had to make it out loud.

But *why?* she thought, feeling nauseated and dizzy. Why would anybody want to drink a girl's blood? No animal and no human did that.

He must be a demon after all.

Arno stepped forward. He gripped Ryl's chin gently, turning her head toward the stranger.

"Was he the one who attacked you?"

Ryl's dazed eyes stared straight ahead--and then she suddenly seemed to focus. Her pupils got big and she looked at the face of the stranger.

Then she started screaming.

Screaming and screaming, hands flying up to cover her eyes. Her mother began to sob, rocking her. Some of the men began to shout at the stranger, jabbing spears at him, overcome with shock and horror. All the sounds merged together in a terrifying cacophony in Hana's head.

Hana found herself trembling. She reached automatically for little Ryl, not knowing how to comfort her. Ket was crying. Sada was wailing as she held her child. People were streaming out of the limestone cave, yelling, trying to find out what all the noise was about.

And through it all, the stranger huddled, his eyes shut, his face a

mask of grief.

Arno's voice rose above all the others. "I think we hunters know what to do with him. This is no longer a matter for shamans!" He was looking at Hana as he said it.

Hana looked back. She couldn't speak. There was no reason for her to care what happened to the stranger--but she did care. He had hurt her little cousin . . . but he was so wretched, so unhappy.

Maybe he couldn't help it, she thought suddenly. She didn't know where the idea came from, but it was the kind of instinct that made Old Mother say she should be a shaman. Maybe . . . he didn't want to do it, but something drove him to. And now he's sorry and ashamed. Maybe . . . oh, I don't know! she thought.

Still trembling, she found herself speaking out loud again. "You can't just kill him. You have to take him to Old Mother."

"It's none of her business!"

"It's her business if he's a demon! You're just co-leader, Arno. You take care of the hunting. But Old Mother is the leader in spiritual things."

Arno's face went tight and angry. "Fine, then," he said. "We take him to Old Mother."

Jabbing with their spears, the men drove the stranger into the cave. By then, most of the people of the clan had gathered around and they were muttering angrily.

Old Mother was the oldest woman in the clan—the great grandmother of Hana and Ryl and almost everybody. She had a face covered with wrinkles and a body like a dried stick. But her dark eyes were full of wisdom. She was the clan’s shaman. She was the one who interceded directly with the Earth Goddess, the Bright Mother, the Giver of Life who was above all other spirits.

She listened to the story seriously, sitting on her leather pallet while the others crowded around her. Hana edged close to her and Ryl was placed in her lap.

“They want to kill him,” Hana murmured in the old woman’s ear when the story was over. “But look at his eyes. I know he’s sorry, and I think maybe he didn’t mean to hurt Ryl. Can you talk to him, Old Mother?”

Old Mother knew a lot of different languages; she’d traveled very far when she had been young. But now, after trying several, she shook her head.

“Demons don’t speak human languages,” Arno said scornfully. He was standing with his spear ready although the stranger squatting in front of the old woman showed no signs of trying to run away.

“He’s not a demon,” Old Mother said, with a severe glance at Arno. Then she added slowly, “But’s he’s certainly not a man, either. I’m not sure what he is. The Goddess has never told me anything about people like him.”

“Then obviously the Goddess isn’t interested,” Arno said with a shrug. “Let the hunters take care of him.”

Hana gripped the old woman’s thin shoulder.

Old Mother put a twiglike hand on Hana’s. Her dark eyes were grave and sad.

“The one thing we *do* know is that he’s capable of great harm,” she said softly. “I’m sorry, child, but I think Arno is right.” Then she turned to Arno. “It’s getting dark. We’d better shut him up somewhere tonight; then in the morning we can decide what to do with him. Maybe the Goddess will tell me something about him as I sleep.”

But Hana knew better. She saw the look on Arno’s face as he and the other hunters led the stranger away. And she heard the cold and angry muttering of others in the clan.

In the morning the stranger would die. Unpleasantly, if Arno had his way.

*Hannah soon learns that she has had hundreds of past lives shared by her best friend Chess, and this stranger Thierry. She also learns that she has never lived to see her seventeenth birthday. A beautiful, mysterious woman known only as Maya appears to warn her that Thierry will kill her—but why does Hannah instinctively mistrust her? Who is Thierry really, and what does he want from Hannah? (From **Night World 2: Soulmate.**)*

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