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The Chronicles of Rightfire, Texas



Glenn Slade Clark, Jr.

Ray's Decision

**The Chronicles of
Nightfire, Texas**

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The Chronicles of Nightfire, Texas

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Tom Johnson tried to compose himself. “Ray, it’s...” He gave up. There was no getting away from this. He’d been caught red handed cheating on his wife with the new secretary—caught by someone whose opinion of him meant the world to him.

“I’ll see ya, Tom,” Ray said icily, as he turned and walked away.

Tom just watched him leave, feeling sick inside, wondering what the hell to do next.

After Bradley and Sam had gone home, Valen made his way to Mary Jean’s trailer, Raksha following at his side. He knocked on the door. “Come in,” came the voice of his friend.

Valen opened the door carefully and peeked in shyly. It was not his custom to let himself into other people’s homes. He found Mary Jean sitting at her

table (her “work” table), pondering the weak flame of a single candle. He turned to Raksha. “Wait out here.”

“I’ve been waiting for you.” Mary Jean didn’t even glance at him.

Valen allowed the door to fall closed behind him, his face barely outlined by the meager light. “I came to see how you were.”

“And?” Mary Jean asked without looking up from her candle.

“And to discuss the situation...with the ghosts.”

“Ah, yes.” At last Mary Jean looked up with a smile. It was neither a friendly nor a cruel one. It was a habitual smile. “They are not in agreement with each other; the boy and girl.”

“What do you mean?”

“They have different ideas about how they ended up as they did; different ideas about where to place the blame. They argue over *you*.” She studied him, as his face visibly paled in the darkness. “Tell me what happened. Why should Clenda be so upset with you?”

Nervously, Valen hesitated, then answered weakly, “Someone...killed the boy.”

“Augustin.”

Valen averted his eyes. “Yes.”

“Tell me.”

Valen met her stare, his eyes filled with tears. “It was...unforeseen. I...” He looked away. “I have to go.”

Mary Jean watched the vampire make his escape. From what? Most likely from the past more than the present. It wasn’t the question that had wounded him. It was the answer that he kept locked away in his

heart, safe from all the world. But he wasn't safe from *it*. A black cat leapt up into Mary Jean's lap. "Vincent," she cooed. "There is a way to solve Mr. Alexas' problem. But he alone has the key. He alone has the information. The confession? The details to sort them all out. The only possible resolution is for Valen to tell them that story in his own words. The tale of young Augustin's death."

The next day, Ray was putting the finishing touches on installing the new alternator in what had formerly been Audri Stevens' car. It was the only thing he could do to take his mind off of things, and it wasn't working. The box containing his treasure was less than a foot away from him underneath the car. It was less than a foot away from him at all times and had been for the past two weeks. Now, as if his encounter with 'Count Dracula and the Freemasons from Hell' hadn't given him enough to worry about, he also had to wrestle with his feelings over finding Old Tom cheating on his wife. Then of course, there was Dori. Sometimes Ray just wanted to disappear, or at least walk away from the world and watch how it all turned out without him from a giant window outside of the universe.

"Ray, is that you?"

Ray slid out from beneath the car and was startled to see Jenny. "Jeez, doesn't anyone knock anymore?"

"Oh, shut it. You haven't been to work in two weeks. Old Man Morris wanted me to come by and

see how near death you were. Looks like he guessed it right. You're fakin' it."

Ray sat up. "Thanks for comin' by to spread your sunshine, Jenny, but I've got lots to..."

"What's going on, Ray? Can we just be serious for a minute? You *have* to show up for work. You're clearly not sick. What's the deal?"

Trapped, Ray sighed, "It's...complicated. I have personal things I'm trying to take care of." He looked at her pleadingly, which was an alien expression for him. "Don't tell Old Man Morris?"

She raised an eyebrow, clearly ready to make him beg. "I don't know. What's in it for me?"

"My eternal gratitude."

"How 'bout dinner?"

"Uh..." Why did women do this to him? Ray wasn't sure what to say. Jenny was a really fun girl and all, but he was dating Doris. Wasn't he? Actually, they were *just* dating...sort of. No one had made any commitments. Still, he wasn't in any position to go out with anyone at the moment. "I've got something with the kids tonight."

"Kids?" she asked skeptically.

"Bradley, my housemate, has two younger siblings. It's their house actually. Haven't I told you all this?"

She smirked. "Odd Couple meets Brady Bunch?"

"Sort of." He shrugged.

"You never stop surprising me, Ray. Dinner. Maybe not tonight, but some night. Your treat."

"Well, the kids..."

"Old Man Morris."

"Sounds great. I'll let you know when I'm free."

"You'd better." She smiled as she turned and walked out of the garage.

Ray watched her get in her car and drive away. "I've gotta start closing the door when I work out here."

Bradley and Sam walked into Dan Parker's with a mission. They found Clarissa Jordan sitting at a table interviewing Ned Tyler, the town's resident dirty old man. "It's a man made lake, you see. Used to be their territory. That's why the whole thing never did surprise me," Ned was saying.

"So did you know any of the men who were killed in the massacre?"

Ned laughed. "All of 'em. They all had it comin'. Messin' with Indian spirits ain't a smart thing to do."

Bradley motioned to Sam and made his way to the bar to order a Dr. Pepper. The bartender was not a very familiar face. He was a cousin, covering for Vicky while she was away on her cruise. Dan Parker's had remained a family business since the middle of the last century. "Hi." Bradley nodded. "Dr. Pepper?"

The man handed Bradley a bottle and took the money the teenager had put down on the counter. Sam caught the man's eyes then. "I'll have the same."

As if Sam should have known better, the man replied, "That was the last one. Sorry, boy."

Sam wasn't quite sure whether or not to be troubled by the way the man had said *boy*. He didn't want to jump at shadows the way that Mary and his family did. Racism wasn't inevitable. It wasn't in every word a white man spoke. He was young, he *was* a boy as far

as this man was concerned, and they were out of Dr. Pepper. "That's okay." He considered. "I'll just have water."

The man shrugged. "Faucet's broke. This just ain't your day, boy." The man turned away.

Sam tried to put it out of his mind. Bradley handed him the bottle. "Here, have some of mine. Promise I don't have herpes."

"Naw, I don't need it. There's not enough in one bottle to really share. Thanks though."

"You know," Ned was saying to Clarissa, "I could tell you a lot more about this town's spooky history, Miss Jordan. I've been around." He winked. "In more ways than one. The lake massacre was nothin' compared to the werew..."

She sat up straight. "What...is that your foot?"

Ned cackled a bit. "Sorry 'bout that. I can't control him. He's just friendly."

She stood and extended her hand. "Thank you for your time, Mr. Tyler. You really are a tremendous resource. I've got to get to another interview."

Ned cackled some more. "An absolute pleasure, Miss Jordan."

Bradley and Sam stopped Clarissa on her way out. "What are you doing tonight?" they asked in unison.

Clarissa laughed, "No plans. Writing, I guess. Why?"

"We hoped you'd come see Valen with us," Bradley explained.

"What for?" She smiled at the thought of Valen.

"Well," Sam said, "we actually want to try and set y'all up. You seem to like each other. Valen just

doesn't know what to do when it comes to this sort of thing."

Clarissa giggled. "Oh, and you two are the experts?"

They both offered wide grins and said, "Yes." They all laughed.

Clarissa nodded. "Sounds like a plan. I do like him. He's one hundred percent tasty."

Bradley and Sam giggled at this.

Clarissa turned to the bartender. "Can I get a Dr. Pepper for the road?"

The man put a bottle on the counter and took the money that Clarissa handed him.

"Wait a minute!" Sam was now sure that he wasn't imagining things. "I thought you said you were out!"

The man shrugged. "Try that little ol' place on Buxton Road, boy. I hear they got plenty to drink."

Sam's eyes went wide. "Oh, the *black* part of town? I get it. Wait till I tell Todd about this."

"Here, Sam," Clarissa said, handing him the bottle. "I don't really want it anymore."

Sam took the bottle, considering throwing it at the bartender's head. "I don't want it either." He handed it back and walked out.

Bradley and Clarissa exchanged a look. "Jackass," Bradley assessed the man as they left.

The man wiped down the counters, pretending as if no one had said a word.

Ray took a walk out to the mailbox, leaving his treasure behind for only a minute. A car pulled up, and

one of the two men Ray had met the other night at Alexas Mansion got out. "Hi, Ray."

"Leave," Ray said.

The man held up his hands in surrender as he slowly made his way to the mailbox. "I wanted to apologize for the other night. Nathan's a little bit overeager." He offered his hand.

Ray just looked at it, then met the man's gaze.

The man put his hand down at his side. "My name's Jude Sinclair. We didn't have the opportunity to make introductions."

"Right," Ray said. "There were guns involved. Makes it sort of hard to get all nice and cuddly."

"As I said, I *am* sorry about that. We just want to protect it...to protect *you*. From the Nephilim. They have an agenda of their own, you know."

"Actually, they tell me the exact same thing about you. And just who exactly are you trying to protect it from anyway? The people? Are you afraid it'll destroy the Church? I mean, considering the implications..."

Jude laughed out loud, "No. Not that. We couldn't give less of a damn about whether or not this hurts the Church. In fact, *that's* who it needs to be kept away from. As well as some others. The Nephilim for one. The Nephilim would corrupt the scroll's message. The Church would destroy it. What are *you* going to do with it?"

"Right now, I couldn't say. Wasn't planning on using it to corrupt or destroy anyone. At least not today."

"Ray, give it to us! We can take care of it. We can take care of you. We've been at war with the

Nephilim for ages. They read minds, consult demons. We can protect you.”

Now it was Ray's turn to laugh. “All this shit about angels and demons is the real joke here. Do you have any idea what's actually on the scroll, or are you just guessing? Because nothing about it verifies either of your organizations' beliefs. There is nothing divine or damned in this world to speak of. We're all just what we can see with our own eyes. I *read* the scroll. I know! It's older than the oldest known copy of the gospels, and it blows them right out of the water.”

“I'm comfortable with that,” Jude said evenly. “Ray, the scrolls they found at Nag Hammadi, the Dead Sea Scrolls, all shed new light on the canonical scriptures. True light. But the one you have, it wasn't among those found. It's the most important secret the modern world could ever learn. Who knows you have it?”

Ray smiled. “Leave.” He turned to walk back to the house.

Jude sighed. “We'll stay in touch.”

Ray turned back suddenly. “Wait a minute. I can't keep going on like this.”

Jude's entire stance shifted with anticipation. “I'm listening.”

“Meet me at Dan Parker's tonight at 9:00. Bring that other jack ass too.”

Jude smiled, exposing his perfect teeth. “You got yourself a date, Ray.”

As Jude drove off, Ray found himself hoping that he knew what he was doing.

Bradley, Helen, and Sam stopped to pick up the girl they'd found for Sam. "I'm not sure about this, guys."

Helen slapped Sam playfully on the arm, "You'll like Shawna. She sits with me at lunch. She's fun."

"I'm just...I feel like I'm cheating on Mary."

Bradley turned to Sam. "Mary dumped you. It's over. Time to get back on the horse." He grinned. "So to speak."

Sam shook his head incredulously as Helen got out and got Shawna. Sam gave Bradley a look of approval as Shawna approached the car. The girls got in, and Shawna slid right next to Sam and started petting his leg. "Mmm. You look good. We gonna have fun tonight."

"I hope so," Sam said.

"You hope so? I *know* so!" She called up to the front, "Bradley, you gonna let us use the car for a while, while you in the house?"

Bradley gave Helen a look of *did she just ask me that?* Helen shrugged, bewildered.

"Uh...no," he answered.

"It's okay, baby. We can find someplace else to get down."

"Wow," Sam offered uncomfortably. "You are one crazy person."

Bradley inwardly cringed at Shawna's behavior, hoping that Sam wouldn't kill him.

Ray walked into Dan Parker's at just after nine and smiled at the sight of the four men seated at the table in front of him.

"Ray," Christian Rivers said. "It looks like you've set us up for a party."

Jude Sinclair offered Ray a nod and a less-than-friendly glare.

"Sorry I'm late," Ray offered. "I had to drop the kids off at a friend's house for the night." He took a seat between Dominic and Nathan. "I've made a decision."

All eyes were eagerly upon him.

"We're listening," Dominic said.

"I've decided that there seems to be only one way out of this mess. I've decided to burn the scroll."

The Sions reacted in panic, while the Nephilim each just offered Ray a hard look. "You can't..." Jude spat. "You haven't...?"

"No, not yet," Ray said. "But it's the only way out. The world's been without this document for about as long as it's existed, and we all seem to be getting along just fine."

Nathan glared daggers at Ray. "I wouldn't make any rash decisions, if I were you."

Ray looked over at him. "I think that goes for all of us." He smiled. "There is an alternative."

"Give it to us," Jude pleaded. "It's the only way."

Dominic and Christian simply exchanged a look and waited for Ray to continue. He found himself

almost wondering if it were true that they could read minds.

Ray went on carefully. "If I choose not to put the fire to this thing, there are certain conditions that *must* be met by all of you."

"Conditions?" Jude was outraged.

"Please continue," Christian said with a calm smile.

"You can't give it to *them*." Jude insisted. "That's what you're planning, isn't it? That's why they're so calm. They're reading your thoughts!"

"Nonsense. That isn't his plan at all," Christian said, amused. "This is just our way. Accept what is. Remember what was."

"Prepare for what is yet to be," Dominic finished for him.

"Oh, we are *very* prepared," Nathan said dangerously.

"Actually, I was thinking I'd hold onto it a while," Ray interjected.

"Well, that gets us nowhere," Jude said.

"Oh, but you haven't heard me out, Jude. Let me lay out my terms, otherwise it burns tonight."

Jude forced himself to sit still, though his nervousness was evident. "We're *all* listening."

"I want you *all* to leave town. Tonight." He looked to Nathan and Jude. "Valen Alexas is clearly on your side in all of this. He can keep an eye on me on your behalf." He looked to Christian and Dominic. "For your part, the Nephilim will send Lee back home. You've apparently won him over. He can represent your interests." He looked around the table. "I keep the scroll for now. You all leave Nightfire. You

each have someone here to keep tabs that I don't anticipate killing any of the people that I live with before I make up my mind who I *am* going to give it to. Everybody's happy."

"Sounds fair," Dominic said.

"Very sound," Christian added.

"No!" Nathan said, standing, reaching for the gun inside his jacket.

"Nathan, wait!" Jude tried to calm his associate. "He means it. We don't need to read his thoughts to know them. He's never held back before. He really will burn it. We have to take him at his word. And, though I'm not happy about it, it *is* a sound plan. Valen has sided with *us*. Who better to have looking out for our interests? Your father will see the reason in it."

After a moment of angry contemplation, Nathan removed his hand from his jacket, empty, and sat down. "Agreed."

Valen scratched Raksha on the head nervously, as he visited with the four teenagers in the den. How did he get himself into these things? It provided him some comfort that Sam seemed just as unhappy as he was.

"I'm gonna go get another soda. Anyone want anything?" Sam asked as he quickly stood up from the couch and escaped the wanton clutches of Shawna Smith.

"I'll come with you." Shawna rose.

"No, no." He actually pushed her back down on the couch. "Let me bring you something."

"I'll come with you then," Valen offered. I want something too, and you've only got two hands."

Bradley and Helen added nothing to the exchange, because they were lost in each others kisses, just as Sam had predicted they would be.

Sam and Valen entered the kitchen and sighed simultaneously, then they started laughing. "Talk about your nightmare dates," Sam said. "She won't keep her hands off me."

"I know. Maybe we should just not go back in."

"But your date hasn't even arrived yet."

"Exactly."

They laughed some more.

The doorbell rang.

"I thought you liked Clarissa."

"I do," Valen said. "I just don't know what to do about it. I'm more *drawn* to her than anything else. But I'm not a good bet romantically. I don't want to get involved with anyone."

"Why not?" Sam asked suspiciously.

Valen looked at him, then answered quickly, "Because I'm rich."

They laughed again, and Valen finally went to answer the door.

He opened it to find Clarissa looking as radiant as he'd ever seen her. He inhaled sharply.

"Nice to see you too," she said.

As the night progressed, Valen found himself ever more drawn to Clarissa. She reminded him so much of his lost Clarenda and the happiness they'd known so very long ago. But the more he allowed himself to enjoy her company, the more things started happening around her.

Clarissa yelped and dropped her cards, as she avoided the liquid now racing across the table. "That's the third time tonight! And we're not even drinking alcohol. How do I keep doing that?"

Valen nervously handed her some paper towels. After the second spill, he had decided to keep them on hand.

"I didn't even see you touch it!" Bradley said. "And I was staring right at you. It's like your glass just fell over."

Sam exchanged a look with Bradley.

"What?" Helen asked. "I think she's just doing it so she doesn't have to show us her losing hand." She fanned herself with her cards and leaned up against Bradley.

"Stop cheating," he said, as he pushed her away.

"Oh my god!" Shawna stood up and pointed to the painting behind Clarissa, as it began rocking back and forth, just before it fell.

Clarissa turned and avoided the collision at the last moment, then stood up, "Oh, my...god."

Matilda Preston was loading the groceries in her car. Now that she was working, her parents had made it clear she was to help out with expenses as long as she stayed under their roof. Her mother was old fashioned and insisted it was already time for Mati to settle down and find a husband. Mati wondered if that's what Dirk had in mind when he had flirted with her the day before. Or did he have something else in mind entirely?

"Lookin' good these days, Mati."

She turned and saw one of the most gorgeous male bodies in Nightfire undressing her with his eyes. “Rubin? What’s up?”

He shrugged, holding a bag in each of his muscular arms. “Just picking up a few things. Need any help?”

“Oh, no, I got it.” She smiled at him.

He winked. “Well, give me a call if you change your mind.” He walked on to his own car with a whistle.

Mati shook her head at the encounter. “My planets must just be all lined up this week, or somethin’.”

“The house has...foundation problems,” Valen offered. “It’s very old.” Nervously, he looked at his watch. “Look at the time! How did it get to be...?”

“Not this time, Valen,” Clarissa said evenly. “There *is* something going on in this house, and you don’t want us to know it. You don’t want me to put it in my book.”

Panicked, Valen tried to keep his cool, though he could feel the sweat on his brow. “What would you write, exactly? That you mysteriously kept spilling your drink?”

She simply pointed to the painting. “Foundation problems?” She let out a long breath. “Fine, I just won’t drink. Lets play cards.” Just then, she yelped and reached for her hair, having felt a sharp tug. She grabbed her shoulder. “Ouch! Something just bit me!” She rushed to the bathroom without another word.

Closing the door behind her, Clarissa let out a scream from the very depths of her heart. In the mir-

ror behind her own reflection, the mad-eyed ghost of Clarinda Richardson stared back at her with unbridled hatred.

Next: The Journal of Valentinus Alexas Revisited

Ray's Decision

Raymond Don has been hiding the treasure he brought back to Nightfire ever since his return from Europe, and the struggle is beginning to take its toll. With members of two secret orders trying to wear him down and the children of the Stevens home where he is staying potentially caught in the crossfire, Ray finds it necessary to make a decision about his treasure, the Nephilim, and the Prieuré de Sion once and for all. Once the decision has been made, however, the question still remains as to whether or not his enemies will agree to leave him in peace.

Glenn Slade Clark, Jr. is the author of three books. He lives in Dallas, Texas, where he is the youth program director at White Rock United Methodist Church.