



∞ Vampires ∞

"Write, therefore, what you have seen: both what is now and what will take place later."

Revelation 1:19

Paris, a city built on the dreams of some brilliant souls, at the height of the short century, is a wonder to behold. The streets teem with all manner of life, the swish of skirts, the clack of heels, the heady perfumes that mask all manner of other, baser, smells... a better nose than mine could learn the secrets of these people so very easily. I content myself with watching.

I have noticed a waif these last few nights, always floating around the edges of the flower market, a little wilted bunch of lilies clasped in her grubby little hands. There is something unnerving about the child that I cannot put my finger on. Part of it, I think, is how she lurks without interacting with others out in the night market. She is more akin to a ghost, watching, watching, always watching. I have never seen her talk to a single soul. And yet she returns every night with her dead bouquet to watch the comings and goings as the street vendors look to cater to the whims of their own peculiar court.

That first time I wondered if she might be lost, but quickly became obvious that she was exactly where she was meant to be. So if not lost, what was a child, no more than nine or ten summers old, doing out alone this late? Where was her mother? That thought quickly chased down a darker avenue as I imagined what her being along out here

might actually mean, even if she was a child in my eyes, and that was when I decided to watch over her. I can't explain why, but there was something compelling about her. Something almost ensorcelling.

She was no ordinary child.

After a week of watching her skirt around the fringes of the market, I finally saw her usher a young lad over to her corner. They traded whispers. I have no idea what went between them, but the boy followed her as she left, leading him through the streets, across the arch of Petit Pont and through the Templar's streets into the Le Marias. They walked hand in hand, like lovers do, only he couldn't have been more than a year or two older than her. No, not lovers. Something else.

Each street was progressively quieter then the last, until, as we stood in the shadow of the old Templar church, Temple du Marias, we were alone. I crept along behind them, too far away to hear what sweet nothings she was using to entice the boy on, but there was no doubting in my mind that he was a willing victim.

Not alone, I realised, see another figure watching the children from the shadows. Even from distance I felt the taint of the uncanny on the watcher. The shadows masked his features. He made no move to leave the safety of the alleyway. I didn't so much creep and rush around the back of the temple, not wanting to let the children out of my sight for longer than absolutely necessary. The alleyways of Marias reeked of human smells, but more strongly of the foul water of the nearby river and the effluence thrown into it. I hoped to work myself around into a

position where I could watch the second watcher—and if luck was truly on my side, identify him.

I edged towards the mouth of the alley, taking shelter in a doorway that offered the best view of the children. What I saw was a tapestry of horror that defied understanding. For a moment I mistook what passed between them as a kiss, then I saw the blood around her mouth as the girl broke the clinch and looked directly at the man in the shadows for approval. She held the boy's limp body in her arms as though he were some precious rag doll she played with during her loneliest moments. The girl was much stronger than any child of ten ought to be.

Trapped in the pale light her face had a sickly, bloodless pallor, almost as though it had been weeks since she had seen the sun.

The boy wasn't dead, I realised, seeing his hand move to his throat, fingers feeling out the wound where the girl had fed. His head turned towards me, weak on its neck, and he stared with sightless eyes off into the middle distance. I did not know what nature of evil she had worked on the boy, but he wasn't himself.

I should have returned to my lodging house and just left the girl to do her vile business, but no, damn my curiosity.

I lurked, waiting when I should have run.

The stranger emerged from the shadows. He was impossibly tall, cadaverously thin and dressed in the manner of the court. His clothing was immaculately tailored to his body and spoke of serious wealth and privilege. The moon offered little in the way of light to see more than a vague silhouette, but he moved with confidence, placing a protective hand upon the girl's head. She looked up at him for approval, and was rewarded with a nod. His voice didn't carry clearly, but I heard well enough as he told the girl, "You have done well, again, little bird." There was something eerily familiar about the man's voice. I had heard it somewhere before, even if I didn't immediately recognise those gaunt cheekbones and harrowing eyes. "Your brothers and sisters will feed well tonight," he promised her. Together they walked towards the temple.

Not the temple, I realised, as I followed them, but rather an iron gateway set into an archway along the side of river. They led the boy down a narrow set of steps still wet with the splash of sailors feet, and broke the heavy lock that barred the gate, metal grinding on stone as he opened the way into the tunnel. I waited for a count of thirty before I followed them down the slippery steps and inside.

The darkness was disorientating.

Mercifully, as I fumbled my way down the low tunnel I saw a firefly speck of light in the distance and realised they had struck some sort of torch and were going deeper into what appeared to be a warren of catacombs that spread out beneath the city: a Paris Below.

The light guttered away, meaning there was a breeze of some sort down here. The walls, I noted, were roughhewn, but showed the sharp white streaks where the metal had chiselled the tunnels out of the bedrock. In the distance I heard the steady tink, tink tink of water dripping against a metal surface. I followed the sound, edging forward, careful not to scuff my feet because any sound was going to echo on and on and on, betraying my presence.

When the firefly of light disappeared I was cast adrift in a senseless dark with nothing to guide my way.

A glance back over my shoulder told me there was no help forthcoming.

I was alone in the dark.

Utterly lost. I had no sense of what was above me or where there might be more ways into and out of these endless catacombs. I stood absolutely still, listening for any echo in the silence. For the longest time the only sound belonged to my breath. Then I heard voices. Hushed at first, but risking. I had no idea what I had stumbled upon, and upon my life, I fervently wish I had turned and headed back towards the river instead of plunging deeper into the darkness.

The warren I followed opened up into a vast subterranean hall, a cathedral space beneath the city, every bit as awe-inspiring as Notre Dame in Paris Above. The chamber was daunting. Lit by hundreds upon hundreds of votive candles, I saw banked seats that surrounded what I can only describe as a throne, and at the foot of that grand seat, a white-haired albino—no, not a true albino, though her colouring was so pale, she did not have the pink eyes of those strange ones—leaned lovingly up against the leg of her master. She was one of the most hauntingly beautiful women I have ever seen. Beautiful, yes, but more haunted if I had to pick one of those two words to describe her. Her skin was alabaster pale, paler than the finest porcelain and the veins beneath her eyes stood out so profoundly they might as easily have been painted in. But on her face this wasn't a flaw. Behind her, her raven-haired master and lord of this world below, slouched, in the great seat. The steel blade of his great sword shimmered in the light of the unholy candles, lending the weapon the illusion of life.

I'd stumbled into some sort of den, though den of what remained to be seen.

There were maybe a dozen others down here, all of them craning their necks to look upon the man on the high throne, all of them dressed in the manner of the court, though not any court of Paris Above. This was very much the court of Paris Below.

I dared risk edging closer, seeking out a better vantage point from which to spy upon the gathering. All along one side of the vast chamber I saw bars set into the arches supporting the ceiling and realised I was looking at a row of cages, though the shadows were too deep to show what was inside.

More of the pale ones moved into position, clustering around the man on the throne and his painted bride. Another dozen and more, making easily thirty in this peculiar subterranean court. There was something unnerving about these courtiers, but I couldn't immediately place what it was about them that set my skin to crawling until I saw the girl drag the docile boy before them and with disdain toss the limp body onto the ground at her master's feet.

"A toy," the waif said, looking up at the man on the throne expectantly.

"How does he taste?" the master asked, his voice reedy and thin.

"Like the sweetest honey cakes," the girl told him. "Try him."

The man set his sword aside and came down the dais to the floor, and knelt, taking the boy in his arms like the gentlest of lovers, then leaned in. There was no kiss. When the master drew back, his lips and chin were smeared red with the boy's blood. His grin was wicked as he nodded approvingly. "You have done well, little one. He shall make a fine addition to the night's banquet." He gave a signal and the first of the cage doors opened, the iron grating on the stone as the prisoners shuffled into the light. They were broken men. All of them. They didn't look up. There was no defiance left in them. They were damned. I was looking at a banquet of the damned.

The waif didn't step away from the boy.

"What is it, girl?"

"I was hoping... Can I keep him?" she asked.

The master considered this for a moment, looking at the emaciated boy he had just drained to within an inch of his life. He nodded, thoughtfully. "You think you are ready to sire a line of your own, little one?"

She nodded. "It has been eighty years," she said.

Eighty? How could it be so? She looked no older than a child and yet she claimed to be more than twice my age?

This was no ordinary den of thieves.

Feeding on their prey? Drawing blood from open wounds at their throats? Talk of siring?

This wasn't a den, it was a nest.

And the master of this place, the King Below... was no mere mortal...

He was a fiend of the immortal blood, a vampire, and his court were nothing more or less than his gets.

"I forget," the master said. "I look at you and still see the child I saved from that other life, the sickness that would have made death a mercy, and remember your father's plea... but of course, you are so much more than all of those memories now. I have one last question for you, little one, do you understand the nature of the sacred bond that will seal you forever once he tastes your blood?"

"I do," she said as though accepting his betrothal.

I couldn't move. I didn't dare. The slightest sound would betray me. I didn't belong here. This was everything I had ever looked for, a truth that laid the nature of this world of ours bare, and I wasn't in any way prepared for what it meant to everything I had always thought I understood about the nature of life, death, and the beyond.

"Then yes, take him," and this time he nodded, handing her the knife from his boot to open her veins and drip precious dead blood into the open mouth of her first get, the boy she had dragged in from the flower market to play with.

His body convulsed, spasms raking his flesh and contorting every muscle as his failing life rebelled against the creeping death the waif's blood promised.

When his eyes finally opened again, the deed done, he seemed to stare straight through the shadows at me, and only me, as though he knew I lurked there. I was sure that his new heightened senses could smell the stench of my fear swirling around me. I had to get out of there, out and as far away from the damned court as possible.

I knew in that moment I would never be safe again...



❧ Vampires - Unique individuals ❧

"The great mystic Udug has told me that the bloodsuckers are strong and volatile. They could live for thousands of years or they could allow their rages to fester and succumb to their darker tempers and expose themselves to the hunters. When they hunt, people fall like cattle to the wolf. One needs only to listen to the talk on the streets. They are out there still, drinking the nectar of life. All the stories I have heard tell are true, I swear, they are the most fearful enemy, more powerful than any unthinking monster."

In the Year of Our Lord 1706 Charles Ferdinand de Schertz released his work *Magia Posthuma*, published in Olmutz. He claimed in this work to have spent considerable time near the city of Kadam, in Bohemia. From the residents of that place, he writes, he gained a clear understanding of the vampiric curse.

"Vampirism is like a disease. It is transmitted from perpetrator to victim, but only through certain rituals. It is not as virulent as a common influenza. Becoming a vampire is not something you choose, rather it is the vampire who chooses who he wishes to infect with his immortal curse."

He goes on to explain that:

"The thing we call a vampire is a living soul in a dead body. They can live on for thousands of years. Indeed, the oldest of their kind, the true progenitors of the curse, are a remnant of the Great Flood. During my long excursions to the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, I have encountered a wealth of superstition and fact in relation to these blood feeders. I have encountered more than one hoymman who swears they have the gift of transmogrification, and

have it within their power to turn into a vaporous fog and disperse across the air. I have been told by others that they possess a blood bond with those they sire, and should one be slain their entire line is weakened. A priest in Islambol swears that only the eternal flame may kill a vampire."

According to Bulgarian myth, a magician can snare a vampire in a cunning trap by merely pouring human blood into the bottom of an empty bottle, the trick is to deceive the fiend as it takes the form of fog.

In his work *Philosophicae et Christianae Cogitationes de Vampires* Herenberg writes:

"A vampire's unnatural existence can be brought short in a number of ways, including decapitation, removing removing the unbeating heart from its body, or by driving a wooden stake through the chest and heart of the monster, and most assuredly, by burning the vampire. To be completely safe, you should combine at least two of these alternatives, leaving nothing to chance for these beasts are, like cockroaches, hard to kill."

We have in our possession in the archives of the Royal Society unedited pages from the original manuscript of the same book, that include claims from Herenberg which did not make it into the final work:

"Whether it is the same creature that has been affected differently by the disease, or whether we see different creatures with the same disease, I will let the next generation penetrate the riddle. In my search for knowledge about the vampire,

I have found a variety of similar and yet vastly different blood drinkers:

Raspail vampires who have human form but many supernatural abilities,

Nosferatu who has much of the beast in itself but carries human traits,

Strigo and Blautsauger which are essentially the same being, but where Strigo are more sensitive to the cross and sacred relics,

Morii and Mulivampyr who are what one might consider archetypal Romanian vampires, possessed of royal blood and powerful mystics, and



Empusas vampires who are often mistaken for lycanthropes because of their animal-like appearance.

To these should be added the old vampires; Sk. Upiors and the newer ones; Vrykolakas. Upiors are those that do not degenerate but belong to the original genus of vampire. Of these, I believe there are none left, for they died in the Great Flood. Though perhaps in the darkest place, in the deepest loneliness of Babylon, one survives? And last, Vrykolakas, those who brought the infection forth, and who in turn are infected with their vampirism."

Dr. Allard de Chevalier states in a letter to the Royal Life Mediator in 1697 that the likelihood of being infected by vampirism is very small, because, he believes, only certain types of blood can be infected.

What he means by certain types of blood and exactly what types of blood they are remain unclear.

Is it the blood of different races? Or does he mean that people have different types of blood running through their veins?

In a series of articles, rejected by the Alliance of Scientists, Allard argues that very few carry within them the type of blood that can be infected. The rest merely succumb to death when they have been sufficiently drained.

It is said that the vampires hide on the fringes of society, possessive of their secrets. They seek only to be allowed to live on. Immersed in hibernation, they rest for hundreds of years in the earth only to emerge, forced to feed for a few decades before they rest once more. There are unending myths about the vampires, most terrifying and untrue.

Few things stir such disgust at both the people, the Church and the Royal Society as the rumor of a vampire.

Of course, others claim that these enemies hide themselves away for darker reasons, seeking to manipulate society and gain influence from the shadows, until they become the true powers in our nocturnal cities.

Whichever is true, there is one thing we have learned, and that is that these fiends possess countless forms and names and no vampire is like another.

VLAD III DRACUL

Official account of the life and death of the cruel and terrifying Vlad III Dracul record his birth in 1431 and his death some forty-five years later in 1476.

He was a prince in Valakiet whose cruelty and blood-lust was widely known across the Ottoman Empire and beyond. The name Dracul is believed to derive from the knight's order, *Societas Draconistrarum*, which was founded by Sigmund of Luxemburg and which Vlad's father was elected into.

Vlad III Dracul's grim nature and relentless cruelty are widely known throughout the realms, with extensive records surviving.

It is said that he cultivated many dark hatreds while held in captivity, his rage festering day upon day no matter that he was well-treated. The humiliation of being prisoner of the Ottoman Sultan Murad II did not set well with him. Those dark desires are laid bare in accounts of vicious rituals in which Dracul's enemies were skin-ridden, buried alive, forced to eat their own body parts, cooked, and more often than not, beheaded and impaled. On several occasions Dracul is rumoured to have impaled more than ten thousand enemy combatants, still alive, and left them to bleed out on the killing fields.

Dracul's enemies called him Vlad the Impaler, though he always named himself Dracula.

Officially, the Order of Knights *Societas Draconistrarum* was created to protect Christian interests in the region, but what many are ignorant of is that its founder, Sigismund of Hungary, held in his possession a special kind of bat that carried an unusual blood thirst and supernatural powers.

When Vlad's father, Vlad II of Valakiet was adopted, he swore an oath promising his son in exchange for membership of the order, and when the boy was only three years old, he was deliberately infected with vampirism by Sigismund's rare bat.

In the coming days Vlad proved immune to most diseases he was exposed



to, but those around the boy noticed his ever-increasing thirst for blood.

He was no longer a normal child.

The older Vlad became, the more prominent his supernatural powers became until they were undeniable.

The boy was different.

Cursed.

By 1456, the transformation reached its zenith.

Dracula needed a residence where he could live undisturbed and feed his unnatural hungers.

He became increasingly shy of the sun and could no longer bear to reside within proximity of church buildings nor bear the sight of crosses.

Dracula forced a group of servants to build a castle high in the most inaccessible reaches beyond the outskirts of Poenari, a village in the Valakiet mountains.

Vlad Dracula died in battle in 1476.

But death could not hold him now. The curse of the bat flowed through his veins. It was only in death that he truly transformed, coming into his powers, and as a miasma of thick fog he drifted from the battlefield, his

conscious mind racing as he struggled to grasp the true extend of what was happening to him. However, the price of the transformation was high. Dracula was shackled in his castle for endless hours, and only through extensive preparation and great effort could he leave the principality, assuming once more the shape of a man. The hostile terrain and sheer remoteness of Dracula's castle serve to keep him safe, though the good folk of Poenari live in fear beneath the pall of his long shadow. Rumour of his survival has barely begun to filter out of Transylvania, and most of what is claimed about the Impaler is both diluted and distorted, for he is far worse than any tale might tell.

Few who reach the mountain village of Poenari ever leave.

Digging deeper into Dracula's mystery has its price, and the price is blood.

ELISABET BÁTHORY

When Countess Elisabeth Bathory was arrested on December 30, 1610, the authorities could not believe the horrors discovered within her castle, Csejthe, deep in the Principality of Transylvania.

Hundreds of bodies of dead young women were found buried in the moat.

Hundreds more, all girls, had been imprisoned in her dungeons, where they were tortured and gradually drained of blood.

The rumours abounded; an insane Elizabeth, who, ever since childhood was told how beautiful she was and what a divine complexion she had, had bathed in maiden's blood, believing it made her smoother and more beautiful. Countless young girls lost their lives to fill her baths as Elizabeth chased a youth she could not hope to keep.

However, the truth is far darker.

Her first encounter with blood as a restorative had been infected blood; a maiden, struck by Elizabeth's own hand in anger, had taken the tainted blood and smeared it across her mistress's

face, infecting her with the taint of vampirism. Because of her blood type she was not wholly susceptible to the disease, though her thirst for blood became unquenchable. Merely to survive the countess needed several gallons of blood every week.

The more she drank, the more her supernatural abilities developed, as is usual with the cursed blood.

She became so powerful no one dared stand against her.

And in that strength she found madness, giving way to her worst impulses.

An iron maiden was installed in the basement of the castle and served as an effective tool for piercing the girls skin and emptying them of blood as she had come to feel more the traditional

horrors of the bite-and-drain was simply too slow to sate her thirst. She needed to drink great desperate swallows.

When the army under the command of the witch hunter von Dönigs finally managed to seige and storm the castle and reach Elisabeth, she could not simply be sentenced to imprisonment and left to die in her own dungeons. It needed to be more poignant and satisfying for those left behind. Instead of the dungeon, Elizabeth was walled into her own torture chamber with only a simple hatch for delivery of food and water. She could not move around in there, so cramped were the confines. Slowly, slowly, she thinned away to nothing, the meat falling away from her bones, though still she



would not just lie down and die. She persisted.

On the night of August 14, 1614, the Province was hit by the worst storm of memory.

The wind blew through the hallways of the castle, rattling the eaves and chilling the bones of one and all. Witnesses later spoke of how, impossibly, the immense storm raged within the confines of the room Elizabeth sat walled in.

When dawn broke she was found dead.

There was precious little of her body left.

It was as though she had been torn apart by the storm.

Testimonies from her guards say her corpse was completely dehydrated, skin leathery and emaciated, so that she more resembled a bat than a human.

One night, no more than a week after her funeral, two unknown men came to Csejthe and disinterred her remains once more.

They brought her to Ecsed, the Bathory's family seat, and with careful nurturing Elizabeth slowly returned to her state of unlife once again, for she had not been properly slain, which allowed her return.

Over the years, Elizabeth has moved around the region, slowly but surely regaining her former powers and more. Today she is clever enough not to feast from one village, but rather resides in different places across Poland and Russia, though her blood thirst is every bit as fearsome as it ever was.

She claims to be the last survivor of the noble family, calling herself Elina Bathory.

IL CONTE SAVISTANO

In Venice's darkest halls and underground catacombs, what is perhaps the world's oldest vampire lives; today he calls himself Il Conte Savistano. Occultists and scholars of the esoteric believe he owns an older name, one that marks him as the Babylonian.

If the whispers around him are to be believed, he is the only one of his kind to have lived before the Great Flood, and

unlike everyone else, his transformation has been from beast to human and not the other way around.

For thousands upon thousands of years he has adapted, becoming adept at surviving this life on earth where humans, not beasts, rule.

But survival comes at a price.

His body is weaker now than it has ever been, and he lies in deep sleep for many years, only waking to unlife for ever shorter spans of time.

Still, he does not need long to leave his mark.

