

Vampires

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As I enter this little ghost of a town, I recall everything as it was when most buildings were standing. Now all is in decay and ruin. I turn towards the area that I used to call home. As I stop before a once proud and busy inn, I breath in the night, closing my eyes. As I do, my childhood plays out before me, flowing back through the years like the haunted melody of a bard's song.

I remember playing dolls and loving my first puppy. I grew up doing chores as did most girls my age. My family had built a prosperous inn. One of the rooms was arranged just for me.

Every year on this night, I return to this very spot to pay respect to my past, as people do when paying respect to a grave.

I cannot help but smile as I am taken back in time to a particular night long ago, when a chilled breeze entered my room, waking me from blissful slumber.

I looked toward the windows, and found they had blown open by a gust of icy wind. I quickly arose from my bed and ran over to them, pulling them shut. Quickly, I locked them, teeth suddenly chattering.

The snowfall was heavy that night. In fact, I do not recall a more persistent winter since then.

I remember turning about to find the comfort of my bed, only to be met by a man standing before me, yet on the far side of the room. He bowed gracefully.

For some reason, I did not scream . . .

. . . It was his eyes which invited me in, so warm, so kind. Taking a chair, I sat down across the room from him, not knowing what else to do. Feeling rather uncomfortable, I smiled at him.

"Why do you smile milady?" he inquired in a voice that instantly reminded me of fresh woven silk. At his inquire, I became self conscious, lowering my eyes.

"Sir, I must have left my door unlocked. You have the wrong room." He smiled at me, eyes sparkling in the dim light of a half burned candle. I turned and looked out through the window at the snow fell thick upon the window sill outside. I heard the music of his soft flowing laughter then, and it released any fear I had of there being a stranger in my room. I relaxed and continued admiring the

snowfall in its intensity.

Pulling up another chair, he joined me, watching the quiet of the storm without. As we both looked on, a section of thickening snow fell from the eave of a roof across the street. Looking over at him, I noticed he was leaning against the back of the chair, arms crossed, chin resting upon his arms.

He seemed to understand me.

Suddenly, he intrigued me; drew my attention more than any other I'd ever met. With eyes yet focused on the window he spoke almost in a whisper.

"I do love the snow. I love the rain and the . . . sun that used to shine upon my days when life was warm and soothing. I loved the sunsets, and the glorious radiant sunrises as well." There was such passion in his words, mingled with a sorrow that nearly caused me to weep.

I asked if he was hungry, and he nodded with a flickering smile that gave me hope that he would stay but a while. And so I ran down in to the dudgeon and retrieved some cheese, bread and aged apple drink. I brought it back to him, finding him yet before the window, arms yet folded across the back of the chair, chin resting upon his arms.

"I have brought you some things from downstairs sir." He turned, stood and smiled ever so slightly down upon me as I neared. I could feel my face flush, and so lowered my head in the pretense of retrieving the food for him.

"You did not have to go to all this trouble, but thank you milady." He was so cordial, and I relished it. I wanted him to continue talking, just so I could listen to his voice.

"It is my pleasure", I told him, not knowing what else to say. I handed him the bread and cheese, then poured him a cup of drink. He ate all I brought him, and then shared the drink with me. I had come of age, and so gladly accepted his offer. Soon I was more relaxed, talking away the night with a stranger I trusted and loved.

At one point in our conversation he paused and looked at me for the longest while. As he did this, I gazed back into his eyes and said nothing. I did not know what else to do. I was nervous, yes, but he was kind and gentle, and his eyes invited mine to stay with his. At length, I lowered my eyes as did I always.

"Why do you look away?" I kept my eyes down.

"Sir, I am merely the daughter of a simple innkeeper."

"Simple," he whispered, almost as if he had said it to himself.

"Yes sir," I replied. Slowly, he reached under my chin and raised my head.

"Sit up straight and never look away from another. Never let pride take you in its pitfall of vanity, yet keep enough to aid you in your walk of life. Look up, look up", he stated passionately, "life is all about you. Do not let it slip away and grow old." I focused on his encouragement, taking it to heart. He was so sure, and had such conviction. He then gifted me with a warm smile.

"Tell me this milady: If I could show you a new life that would make your now existence seem ever so small and insignificant, would you take a step into such a blessed world?" I was confused at his manner of question, yet his voice drew me so, and I merely nodded, thinking of how I had been here in this little town for the past seventeen years; how I had never experienced the outside world.

"I would love to see the world you speak of," I stated with enthusiasm. His eyes lit up light two blessed stars in the night. Pulling his chair over to mine, he reached a gentle hand in through my hair, sliding his thumb gently along my cheek until his hand was at the back of my neck.

I had never been kissed before, and this moment terrified me, though I did not resist. As he gently led me close, I swallowed, catching a quivering breath. Just as his lips touched mine, he whispered, "Are you okay?" I nodded and smiled, reaching my trembling hands up around his neck until I had fully embraced him in my first kiss.

Oh, I remember it well enough. I remember. I wanted more. Parting his lips from mine, he whispered things to me that made my senses reel and spin as he worked his way across my cheek ever so slowly, as if savoring every touch of my skin. He made me feel so special, needed, wanted. As his mouth gently slid to my neck, chills descended my spine. Tilting my head, I began to pull, holding him more fervently as we arose from our chairs. With all my heart and soul, I pulled him into me as I felt his other arm reach around my back and grip me tight.

It was at that moment, I felt his teeth pierce deep into the soft of my neck. The pain was minimal compared to the passion I was indulging myself in. I knew something was wrong even as I began to lose strength.

I looked up and saw the ceiling begin to spin.

I tried to say something, but could not but breath in short gasps, so deep was his bite. I felt a gaping

wound in my neck, and tried to push him away. Yet such a passion had overcome me that, instead of rejecting him, I was receiving him, as if I wanted more.

Again, I heard him whisper to me as he laid me down gently in my bed and covered me up, as would any tender parent.

"A new life I give you, and take not yours. You are innocent, pure, clean within a world of filth. You are a peculiar among all who have had the privilege of falling before me. Thus, I spare you eternal darkness and death. Thank you for sharing your life with me. In return, I share my existence with you, and open up a new world for you to explore." He smoothed back my sweat-drenched hair and looked upon me with astonishing kindness. I smiled up at him and raised my hand to touch his face. He took my hand and kissed it gently.

"Be not troubled, nor dismayed, for all answers will come to you in time. And in time you will master this gift I have bestowed upon you." At his words, I recall a piercing sadness overtaking me, and I wept, weakly gripping his cloak.

"Don't go," I begged. Looking to the ceiling, he closed his eyes for a while. Then, slowly shaking his head, he looked down upon me and caressed my forehead with a gentle hand.

"Milady, should I stay longer than this night, you would break my heart. For soon enough, I am sure to fall for one such as you. Never before have I been so privileged as to be in the company of such. But know this: You would break my heart; you would despise and hate me. And so I must bid you farewell."

. . . that is all I remember of him, so long ago. And even as I stand here recalling this single memory of my past, I deem it monumental. He had kept his promise. I was given a new life and world to explore, but I did not have to leave this land to experience it.

As I look upon my once home, now decayed and heavily touched by the relentless hand of time, I recall my other memories of besieging this town and land. They answered for my pain and suffering as I grew used to the changes in my body and soul. The survivors fled from the path of my destruction. Even the common animals seemed to feel my presence, for they too retreated into distant parts; places I have not yet ventured into.

It has been one-hundred twenty and five years to the day since I stepped into this blessed realm. I come here every year, always alone, hoping beyond hope that he will be here . . . waiting for me.

My anger has long since turned away, and all I wish is to once again look into his piercing eyes. I wish to walk and talk and hunt with him forever. But he has never shown himself; not once. I am afraid he never will . . . and I miss him.