

Predatoress



Emma Gábor

PredatoreSS

Hungarian Bride

by

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Predatoress

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Swept into the Vortex

His pale skin dazzled rather than frightened me. I thought my visitor was part of the absurd logic of my dreaming mind as I lay asleep in the bed I have had since childhood. His angular, handsome face approached mine and his canines began to lengthen. I felt I was submerged in a fascinating nightmare and stared at him, paralyzed. A helpless numbness took over, even to my fingertips. I thought I must still be asleep. I could not move or summon up the energy to escape. It was a like a recent nightmare in which I was trying to scream but no sound came out of my open throat.

I managed a hoarse sob, which he immediately silenced with his hand. Please tell me this is a dream! The sharp pain and attendant sting as he wordlessly plunged his smooth, sharp fangs into the left side of my neck startled me into understanding that I was not imagining this. He lay on top of me to keep me still. I felt my warmth and vitality drain in seconds. It was replaced by a prickly, chilly nausea. I was enveloped in an invisible web. I was limp, unable to move, unable to struggle. He drank in intense silence. His dark hair caressed my right cheek like shiny raven's feathers and I could hear gentle lapping sounds.

This first bite must have contained an anesthetic as with some snakes that paralyze their prey before eating them. Or like the venomous spiders that

paralyze victims and cover them in silk to immobilize them. Like the tarantula that liquefies the animal's insides leaving their exoskeleton intact. I felt my outer body was still there but something was missing inside.

At last he pulled away from my neck and looked me full in the face, unsmiling but at peace. His dark eyes were endlessly deep. I saw momentary compassion. Then he quickly backed away and departed through the window into the moonlit night.

The blood that spilled on my nightgown after his withdrawal was warm and wet. What was happening to me? Who was he? Something was horribly wrong! I felt sicker than I had ever been in my life. Maybe I should wake my parents and have them take me to Szent Erzsébet's emergency room.

But as I was leaving my room, I felt as if I were swept into a vortex at whose center was a vacuum of tremendous strength. A whirlpool of irresistible force was drawing me in. My mind was falling down an endless flight of stairs. I felt disconnected from reality. Colonies of small bugs seemed to be crawling up my spine and through my veins and arteries, pricking and squirming. A powerful vibration strummed through my nerves as if I were a harp whose strings were played by invisible hands. It was agonizing and extremely pleasurable at the same time. I was filled with yearning. This force was driving me to do something—but what?

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I went to the mirror in the hallway to check if I was all right. I saw nothing except my bloody cotton nightgown and darkness where my face, neck, and hands used to be. Terrified and trembling, I thought I must still be dreaming. Where was I? This has got to be an episode of the night terrors and I will wake up! Where was the Emma who had always been me? I could feel myself, and saw my hands, feet and body when I looked down—I just could not see a reflection of myself in the mirror. A new form of anxiety coursed through my body, an agitation I had never felt in my short life. I needed something to make it stop. Please, anything to make it stop!

I had to get out of the house! A relentless desire was driving me, pulling me, compelling me to do what? I could not resist this urge to go out into the dark, quiet streets of my sleeping town. I had not really known hunger in my well-cared-for life but I knew this was beyond the mere craving of the empty belly. My sense of smell sharpened as I caught a whiff of my own blood on my collar. Delicious and compelling! I wanted to smell the blood of others. I wanted to taste it. I had to taste it. More than just taste it. I had to drink it fully and satisfyingly. This was hunger for the very fluid of life, which had been drained from me and which I now knew I had to replenish. I finally understood. But even if I had not understood, this craving was so magnetic I was powerless to resist it.

I crept quietly down the stairs and out of the house into the cool blackness of the night, illuminated

only by haloed streetlamps. In my haste I neglected to put on a coat but it did not matter at this point, for the shivering, shuddering iciness inside me was more frigid than the foggy atmospheric dampness. It felt like I was being carried along the streets by a powerful undertow. Disoriented, I seemed to float above the cobblestones without any understanding of my destination. I knew I had to be cautious because a girl drifting about in a white, blood-spattered nightgown in the deserted streets would attract attention. The prickling and tingling throughout my body was almost audible in its intensity. Something or someone must help me! Must give me relief or I must find it!

That is how it all began.

Dark Clouds over Transdanubia

Dear Reader, it will be easy for you to judge me, condemn me, and say that I have been evil. When you read my story, you might think at times that I had no heart. That I was a soulless liar, a manipulator. That I was a machine driven by selfish desires and pleasures regardless of the cost to others. You might say to yourself, “Ah, one more uncaring human animal, mindlessly destroying people for her own survival. Worse than an animal that only kills to eat and utterly consumes the carcass! In fact, most carnivorous animals are benign compared to her, for she was the mistress of living death.”

But, do not be so quick to pass your judgments on me, until you understand the truth of the matter. I never meant anyone any harm. Quite the contrary, I strove to hurt as few people as possible. Especially my beloved Zoltán. Zoltán, my husband, my love; the greatest source of happiness I have ever known as an adult. My dear, this story is to convince you that I only adored you, lived to see the light of the morning sun shining in your eyes, the cool Transdanubian moon glowing in your face at night, to kiss you once again with the passion whose source is as powerful as the immutable laws of physics.

I sound insane as I talk to you, Dear Reader, and then address Zoltán in the same paragraph. But

I am decidedly not insane. No, I am not an Edgar Allan Poe creation, tortured by the relentlessness of my thoughts, haunted by obsessions. My particular situation went beyond conscience and its infliction of guilt on an ever-active mind. Please understand. I was driven by forces over which I had no control. My behavior had been programmed into my DNA, into my blood. It was my destiny. There seemed to be no way of ending this progression of fate. Even suicide would not achieve the desired effect.

For I was immortal. Yes. Now you know. Do you think being immortal is a wonderful thing? Isn't that what most people wish for themselves and their loved ones? No one wants to face the inevitable nothingness that proceeds after the body decays in a crypt or is consumed by fire in cremation. The death of the body and the possible nothingness that follows is a horrid thought to most humans, thus we have created all kinds of afterlife scenarios in our childish religious systems. Heaven, Nirvana, Seventh Heaven, Limbo, Purgatory, Hell, Hades, the Inferno! I know better! Only one form of living immortality exists—the perpetuation of my species—the Transylvanian lifeline of eternity—kept alive by the blood of mortals.

Yet I was in love with a mortal, my groom Zoltán. I don't think you will blame me for not being totally straightforward with him about my condition, at first. Or maybe you will. But aren't we all entitled to a bit of true joy on this earth? Is it so horrible to want love and to feel the thrill of giving love, of

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being in love? How would he have reacted to me if he knew from the outset that I stayed alive by drinking human blood and would have continued to stay alive as long as human life existed on earth and on other planets? Was it my fault that I was a vampyr? I did nothing in my own power or volition to earn that designation.

No. It happened when I was asleep in my own bed, where I had spent so many uneventful nights, sleeping well so I could tackle my studies in the morning. I did nothing to provoke it. My lovingly protective parents desired that my social circle be restricted, so it was not because I fraternized with a wild crowd. I was only (and was to remain eternally) eighteen years old. I was less sophisticated than some of my peers and looked younger. But that had changed because of my experiences during my nightly excursions after that life-changing night. My appearance had taken on a smoldering quality at times and a deathly pale aspect at others. I lost my innocent demeanor. If you looked into my eyes, you would have seen depths of endless blackness that fastened and fascinated with a magnetic pull. This was not the case in my pre-vampyr days. Then my eyes had a soft gleam and trustfulness that came from a simple life devoid of profound experiences. It was a life centered on the happiness in my small family and my studies.

Please believe that I was deeply unconscious, the night my transformation occurred! I was peacefully dreaming under my goosedown quilt in my native

Hungarian town in Transdanubia. Its name is Sopron. Sopron is not too well-known, except for its music festivals and the old town center. I always felt safe in our family house near the lush pine forest of Lővérek, where my father and I took frequent walks. My town was crime-free, with the exception of the occasional pickpocket. But that too changed when my life was overturned that night. I don't think there is human alive who will condemn an innocent sleeping girl, yet my guilt persists.

My blood was extracted and feasted upon by a bloodthirsty, literally blood-hungry, being of human and yet inhuman qualities. Where was I at fault when the well-groomed, immaculate youth entered my bedroom, approached my quiescent form, and oh so gently inserted his fangs into my carotid artery? I was still semi-conscious when my lifeblood drained into his body and gave him obvious relief. But I still feel the guilt. I explain my story to you, Dear Reader, in hopes that you can exonerate me. I must explain my innocence, so you will understand. And perhaps you will see that I have redeemed myself.

At the time, the only vampyrs I had ever heard of were the creatures of myths and fairy tales, told to me by my school friends. Or by my older cousin, Eva, who spun sugarcoated versions of tales about Hungarian fiends, such as Elizabeth Báthory. She stayed with me on the nights my parents went to the opera in Vienna. At the time, even she was ignorant of a fact that most of the world knows: Vampyrs

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have no blood of their own. Elizabeth Báthory, the Blood Countess of Hungary, bathed in human blood, and even drank it, but her body always contained her own blood. She was not a true vampyr. They definitely must imbibe the blood of living humans because they have no blood of their own. Elizabeth killed and feasted on the blood of hundreds of servants and noblewomen but did not depend on this blood for her very survival. She drank blood as a youth serum and because she enjoyed inflicting pain, whereas the experienced vampyr has the nobility of character and depth of skill to inflict the least amount of pain possible.

You already know, I thought I was dreaming as the intruder held my head still, and drank gratefully. When I came to semi-consciousness, his white shirt, thin black leather jacket, and pale skin dazzled rather than frightened me. But then, a few minutes after he left, I was compelled by an unknown restlessness to sneak out of my room and into the streets. This was not like me. I had a relationship of trust with my parents and didn't do things behind their backs. Besides, it wasn't my habit to wander out alone at any time of the night. My mother, father, or one of my older cousins accompanied me when I rarely went out after dark, usually to some school function.

In the dark, quiet streets in the early morning, I was now possessed of a new boldness, driven by I knew not what. I just knew I needed to fulfill the overwhelming urge. I understood the practicality of

sneaking around, under these conditions. I hid in the recesses of buildings if the police were in the vicinity. If they saw my pale skin and white night-dress reflecting the lights of the street lamps, they would escort me home, wake my parents, and cause a stir that I could ill afford.

I passed Sopron's old Fire Watchtower. A homeless family was sleeping near it, huddled together in its shadow. I could smell the blood of their sleeping daughter. I gauged that she was about my size and instinctively understood that her delicate body housed just the right amount of bright red fluid for my needs. My parents had taught me that wasting anything was a sin. To drink to the last drop was the sign of a well-brought-up child. I had always wanted to be good and make my parents proud.

Now this good-girl Emma quietly tiptoed to the side of the sleeping girl. Her dark hair was matted against her head, held by a greasy kerchief. She was sleeping face up, lips slightly parted, as she breathed evenly. I could smell the unwashed bodies of her and her parents in the cool night air, yet I was not put off. Like an infant who instinctively roots for its mother's breast, I automatically zeroed in on the throbbing artery on the girl's neck. How was I to take my evening blood meal and not disturb her parents? They were snoring in exhausted sleep, on their sides. As delicately as possible, I crouched down next to the girl and inserted my newly grown incisors into the soft, thin skin on her neck. I softly slurped the liquid. It had a salty, metallic taste. Her

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blood was not as thin as I had expected and it was trying to clot. I knew I had much to learn if I were to accomplish my task as efficiently as possible. Speed and accuracy were important in such a situation and I did not want to use force.

I felt instant relief as the girl's body slackened. At last complete release from the unbearable anxiety and tension! The painful, stressful misery I had been acutely suffering just a short moment ago was gone. My hunger was gone. My distress was over. I was free from that throbbing, relentless need. The prickling numbness had also disappeared and I was flooded with peace. Now the air took on a velvety sweetness. The streetlamps, surrounded by soft halos of light looked supernaturally cheerful. My wellbeing and survival, for now, was secure. I lifted my arms to the starry universe and rejoiced in the calmness and serenity flowing through me.

Miraculously, her parents stayed asleep! I think this was due to my skill at my family's favorite game of Spellicans. We played it sometimes after dinner. The object of the game was to demonstrate delicacy of touch in picking up thin wooden sticks thrown in a random manner, without budging the surrounding sticks. Also, I felt with my tongue that my eyeteeth were of a particular sharpness and fineness. This allowed for neat, as opposed to gory, penetration. My training in good table manners stood me in good stead as I cleanly took my meal, with no blood spatter on my face or clothes. I stood back to admire the neatness of my incisions, congratulating myself

on the precision that would make a skilled surgeon proud.

I was pleased with myself that I could slake my hunger and thirst so efficiently. I could feel new energy continue to course through my body. It only vaguely occurred to me, in my blood besotted mind that I was destroying this girl in the same way that my life, as a mortal, had been destroyed. At that point I hardly realized that I had set something into motion, a fate like my own, destined to seek sustenance from the blood of the living.

As the tales reported correctly, vampyrs create more vampyrs to join their unhappy circle. Contemplating the loneliness of my future, cut off from the warmth of my own humanity, I fantasized forming an alliance for mutual assistance with this girl. But I couldn't see how something like that could happen overnight. There was no social connection between us. Yet I was so lonely now. I had never felt this kind of loneliness. Isolated, satisfied but not happy, I was satiated but sad. Was I condemned to friendlessness now that I had this dark secret? I had to conceive other plans for the companionship I needed now, more than ever.

Compulsion

By now you are probably wondering why I am spelling “vampire” with a “y” and without the “e.” I have discovered in my research that etymologists have disputed the exact origin of the word “vampire.” Most sources, including the *Oxford English Dictionary*, derive it from the Hungarian *vampyr*, which in turn, is derived from the Turkish *über*, witch. I was not a witch in any sense of the word, not that I deride the Wiccan sisterhood. It’s just that I did not possess powers of either black or white magic. Neither was I a hideous ghoul, who plundered graves and fed on corpses. I needed living blood, not the stagnant substance in dead bodies. But, make no mistake about it: I needed it. In short, I was a being, much like the majority of the human race, driven by compulsions over which I had no control.

The obsessive-compulsive human is driven to repeat the same task over and over again, be it hand washing or locking and unlocking the door. Yet she is judged as being psychologically impaired and in need of therapy. The alcoholic is propelled to drink and flood his brain and blood with alcohol. The drug addict seeks to assuage his never-ending need for a fix by inhaling, swallowing, or injecting substances into his body. The addict’s days and nights are spent in endless pursuit of the substance of choice. I have heard that in the West, social

programs and support groups abound to assist these mortals. My sympathy goes out to these slaves who are trapped and controlled by forces outside themselves. But where are the twelve step programs for vampyrs? No one looked upon us with compassion, even though we were less responsible for our actions than the aforementioned addicts. In truth, addicts could continue to exist without their self-abuse of choice as long as they eat food to support their cells and drink enough fluid to keep hydrated. Their health actually improves when they discontinue their compulsions.

But I needed to assure my very continuity with the blood of humans. My health would not have improved if I stopped. Do you understand? Unlike the alcoholic or addict, I did not introduce a foreign substance into my blood. I needed blood itself, regardless of the foreign substances it contained. Now can you see my point? I continue to harp on it because it is important for me to secure your agreement that I am not to be judged harshly or condemned in the court of public morality.

Your good opinion matters a great deal to me--especially after you learn of some of my nightly adventures. For you will think I was unnecessarily cruel if you do not understand how carefully I tried to keep the whole process as painless as possible. You will think I am evil for destroying others to continue my survival. I was not evil for evil's sake! I was just doing what everyone else is doing on earth—surviving!

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Every night I made my forays into the Sopron community. Oh, I was so cautious! I decided that I would select only sleeping adolescent girls. It was only later that I gained confidence in myself as a predatoress. By that time I also fed on the blood of young men. But I never preyed on babies or children. It was impractical anyway, for I would need several babies, or at least two children to provide the quantity that one well-developed young adult could produce. Also, it would be needlessly cruel and wasteful to vampyrize a baby who did not have the wherewithal to seek its own blood replenishment. A baby vampyr crawling out into the cobblestone streets of Sopron at 1:00 AM would be a sorry sight. Under the circumstances, I wanted to be as compassionate as possible.

My need for companionship persisted. Then the perfect solution struck me. Why not enlist my best friend Kati Debreceni? She would become my next meal, after my virginal experience with the sleeping homeless girl. Kati and I had been friends since kindergarten. Her shiny, straight brown hair hung in bangs over light brown eyes. She was a much healthier specimen than the homeless girl. Her family was part of the emerging upper middle class.

She needed me to help her prepare for a biology re-exam the next day. This was a good pretext for me to ask my parents if I could stay overnight at her family's well-appointed townhouse. Though I was studying advanced courses, Kati found school difficult and often relied on me to study with her

for exams. This time we might have to study later than usual. I had never spent the night away from home. After some discussion, my parents felt the occasion was fine. I also wanted to get them used to my spending other nights away from home in the future.

We reviewed all possible answers to any possible questions that would be on the test the next morning. Then we got ready for sleep. I hid my mounting discomfort. We were braiding each other's hair, and began talking about Zoltán Szabó. Most of the girls I knew had yearnings for him. He was more than merely handsome. He had a look of penetrating seriousness, a graceful demeanor, and quiet charisma. He was several years older than we were and had an air of mystery, which was lacking in the few adolescent boys we knew.

As we sat cross-legged on her bed, Kati's eyes sparkled as she told me of the secret notes she had been sending to Zoltán via courier. She scented them with the Queen of Hungary Water, and included poems such as:

“How long and how in secret it has been
That I have watched you through my down-turned
eyes!
My lips have yearned to kiss your manly face;
My body longs to feel thy potent thighs!”

“Kati!” I laughed. “I didn't know you had such physical passion surging through you. And what

nerve to send poems such as this! Does he even know who sent them? This is mighty bold of you! Think of how you would feel if you were found out!” I began to look at her with a new kind of interest, as if the heat in her blood attracted me. “That part about the potent thighs is a bit much,” I said as I tried to control my laughter.

“Oh, no one would suspect me. You know how shy I have always been around the opposite sex,” said Kati as she blushed. “Besides, I saw him looking at you several times at the Festival of Ancient Music. I know because I couldn’t take my eyes off of him and was vexed that he seemed only to be attracted by you.”

Her blushes brought the blood to the surface of her golden skin in a most appetizing manner. I could feel the tremors of vampyric force rise and soon they would take over fully. One part of me was horrified that I was making plans to imbibe the sanguine fluid that brought such blazing color to my best friend’s cheeks. I felt the same longing I felt as a child outside the Sopron Cukrászda, one of our delightful pastry shops. I could feel the saliva pouring into my mouth as I used to gaze at the sugary delicacies in ornate display.

Now my dearest Kati Debreceni took on the aspect of a plump and juicy mákos beigli, our famous poppy seed moon cake. Ah, the moon. How I loved it now. More than the sun. Much more. And moon cake! What a fortunate appellation. I was happy,

though conflicted, for I knew that I would be satisfied amply tonight. Only an hour more and we would be snuggling together under her eiderdown, her hand trustfully in mine as she drifted off to sleep. How lucky I was to have such a good friend. We shared so many happy childhood memories. To want to drain her of her plasma, blood cells, and platelets seemed harsh! Yet she would be a perfect companion for nightly excursions, so I wouldn't have to be so alone in my horrific pursuits.

Kati was yawning, displaying the healthy pink lining of her mouth and gleaming rounded teeth as she lay next to me on the bed. She confided once more how insanely in love with Zoltán she was, placed her hand in mine, and instantly fell into a deep-breathing sleep. Her mother, Mrs. Debreceni, came into the room to bid us good night, bringing a plate of kifli with warm milk.

“Oh, I see our Kati is already asleep. How good it is to have you spend the night. Last night something dreadful happened which I'm sure you've read about it in today's *Kisalföld*. It looks like vampyrs are making their way around Sopron. The police found what seemed like a homeless girl trying to capture and suck the blood from a teenage prostitute around the area of the Old Fire Tower early yesterday morning. Let's hope we don't have what happened about ninety years ago. It was a veritable vampyr epidemic in Sopron! Our town became famous throughout Hungary because of what happened in those days. Sopron was called

‘Odenburg’ then. I am glad for the name change, as I don’t want to be associated with those frightful goings on.”

“What do you mean?” I asked. It began to dawn on me that last night’s activities had far-reaching consequences for our town. Already my first victim was set into motion. I had to be careful. It was important that no one had seen me last night as they had seen the homeless girl. But what about tonight? I was going to turn my best friend into one of The Undead. I was going to eat the pastry and warm milk her mother so kindly brought to us. Her mother trusted me as a pal for her child and this is how I was to repay her! Be grateful that you do not have these memories on your conscience.

We chatted a bit more as I sipped gently at the warm milk and took small bites of the fragrant kifli. My appetite for human foods, even for pastries that I enjoyed so much in the recent past, was declining. Not to draw suspicion or comment, I ate but it was a painful chore. My only desire was for blood, like a Masai warrior thirsting for the warm sweet liquid flowing from his cow’s veins. These human foods, such as bread, meat, vegetables seemed as unsatisfying to me as porridge to a tiger.

Mrs. Debreceni told me of the famed Odenburgian, Count László, who wreaked havoc with the population of the town and the surrounding countryside during her mother’s youth. “But now we are called ‘Sopron’ and have left that all behind

us, I had hoped. My dear Emma, you have no idea of the horrors we all felt, knowing that there had been a creature among us who feasted on human blood. Why am I even bringing it up just before bedtime? It was all so horrid. I was only a little girl when I heard the stories. But they created a lasting impression on my imagination. I was terrified by the whispered stories, and suspicious shadows all around me. The adults wanted to spare my innocent ears when they sat around on gloomy nights telling the stories, but I heard plenty! Almost every night I cowered under the covers, hoping I would be safe.

“My dreams were almost as bad as the reality could have been. At times, I wanted to get it over with, to be finished with the constant terror. Yes, as a child, I contemplated suicide, because of what I had seen one day when I went into the marketplace with my grandmother.

“We were walking by Orsolya tér, just passing Mária fountain, early one spring morning. Ever since that day, I have never been able to pass that place without the memories flooding back to me of what I saw. Around the figure of what looked to be a sleeping teenaged girl, stood a crowd of various townsfolk. It seemed strange that the girl would be asleep by herself out in the open as she was. Where was her family? She did not look homeless, but rather well taken-care of, in the manner of the upper middle classes. As a policeman shook her to ascertain her state of life or death, she turned and

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plunged her teeth into his wrist and began to drink thirstily!

“My grandmother tried to hide my eyes by covering my face with her shawl. But I could see it all through a gap. The policeman was trying in vain to detach himself from the powerful suction the girl generated as she fastened her lips around his wrist. I had heard stories of vampyrs always seeking the necks. My school friend Zsuzsa told me that vampyrs fastened on necks, where the blood flow was more abundant because the arteries were large. I was amazed that this powerful police officer could not extricate himself from the persistent attachment of this dainty, almost thin, girl onto his appendage. Moreover, the rest of the crowd did not come to his aid, but rather, dispersed in fear. Who knew what the policeman would do when the girl had her fill of him?

“My grandmother hurried me away, my face still covered, as I tripped over the cobblestones and curbs. I asked, Grandmother, ‘don’t you think we should do something to help the policeman?’ ‘No, my dear, we need to leave as quickly as possible. Don’t tell your mother or father about this or they will not let you go to the market with me again.’ I promised, but never forgot that day! And now this—again, with a teenage girl!

“I never wanted my Kati to go through that kind of terror as a child and have protected her from hearing such tales. It is all in the past now, yet the

emotions still haunt me. Let me stop before I frighten you and disturb your sleep, Dear Emma. Sleep well, my sweet child. I will see you in the morning.” With that, she leaned over, kissed my cheek, kissed Kati’s cheek, and moved towards the door.

At last she was gone! I waited an hour, hoping that the household would be in slumber, but my hunger for the rubicund fluid of life was escalating. As an added precaution, I walked quietly down the dark corridors. All was silent except for Kati’s father’s light snore through thick wooden doors of her parents’ room. I returned to the sleeping form of my best friend. I lightly placed my lips on the throbbing artery in her smooth neck. “Dearest companion since childhood, I have always loved you. I love you even more now, in a different way. I need you now for my very existence. I want to make you part of my Sisterhood of Blood, so that neither of us will ever be alone. Together, we can wander the nights in search of our prey, sharing our discoveries and conquests. I have never begrudged you anything and don’t intend to now. I will now bestow upon you the agelessness and timelessness of your new species.”

I then gently and quietly inserted my lengthening fangs into her neck. I marveled at my own finesse. This was no clumsy blood bath. I performed neatly and precisely. You might say there was a quality of professionalism that may have been unmatched in vampyrical history, given that this was only my

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second bloodletting. I drained her blood before she had a chance to awaken or to understand what had happened to her. When she finally rose from the bed, she was already a new creature, driven by new desires. She held me close, kissed me silently, opened the door and vanished into the night. For now, she too had to slake the driving thirst that would not allow her to rest until it was satisfied. I held off from accompanying her. That would be for tomorrow night. We now had all of eternity together.

Companions of the Night

After that night of conversion to her new identity, Kati and I were indeed companions of the night. Other teenage girls of our acquaintance shared innocent pastimes such as going to the Sopron Pláza to see the latest movies, shopping in the Old Town, walking around the Lővérek Hills, sipping mélanges, eating palacsintas (Hungarian crêpes) at sidewalk cafes, and studying. We spent most of our time together after the town had gone to sleep. We noticed that the bright daytime sun was too sharp for our tender eyes. The soothing darkness of the evening was much more comforting to us. For that calming lack of light also signified that our feedings were immanent. Our restless craving would be put to rest once more as we imbibed the lifeblood we so desperately needed to still our pain.

It was painful, this new life of ours. Or should I say, this life beyond death. Most vampyrs would describe our hunger as a chilling, burning, sharp cramp all over one's body, on the surface as well as deep within each organ, to the marrow of our bones. It is not like human hunger, localized to the hollow stomach's uncomfortable protests. Along with it comes acute mental agony until we are assured that our next meal is at hand.

The logistics of locating and then seizing our prey were complicated. Neither Kati nor I had any

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experience with breaking and entering, obviously. How obedient and quiet we were, as girls, within the strictness of our families and social system! Knowing something about this subject, or even thinking about it, was beyond our imagination. Yet breaking and entering is precisely what we needed to do to obtain our nightly feeding in many cases.

At first we devised a plan to dress as boys. We logically concluded that it would be much better to disguise ourselves altogether. But later we agreed that looking just like ourselves would disarm any policeman or authority figure who would happen upon us in our after-midnight excursions. We are harmless-looking. Perhaps the officer would be concerned that two young ladies are out so late, he would hasten us on our way home—but if we were boys, he might suspect we were up to mischief, especially if captured on strange premises or, worse, inside someone's home.

Yet our first night out together as a team, we did not break and enter. We decided to feast upon the sisters, at whose home we were always welcome, instead. They were close to our ages and we had known each other since we were in Széchenyi High School. Golden-haired Gizi was a juicy-fleshed 17-year-old. She was the slower moving and the quieter of the two. She had womanly grace and did not need to try too hard at anything. Her beauty sufficed under most circumstances outside of school. Black-haired Eszti was the coltish, fine-boned, 16 year-old sister, whose sense of humor

tended towards sarcasm and boisterous fun. She was angular, while Gizi was rounded. Her nose came to an elfin point, while Gizi's was rounded at the tip. This gave Eszti a mischievous look sometime, while Gizi's looks resembled a peach, ripe for consuming, in her rounded succulence. The girls were a good choice for us, as their parents were visiting Lake Balaton and they were alone for the week.

We knew that we could not invite ourselves over to spend the evening, for then they might have told their parents or others. Kati and I did not want anyone to suspect us as the cause of their future transformation into insatiable Wanderers of the Night. So, we decided to drop in unannounced after supper. We would bring a box of *krumplicukor*, the old-fashioned Hungarian potato candy of which Gizi was particularly fond. Eszti despised that native treat, but we knew we could intrigue her with talk of Zoltán, in whom she shared our intense interest. She had declared upon occasion that she would never love any one more than Zoltán and would rather die an old maid than have any other man. We laughed at the finality of this statement, coming from a 16-year-old. How did she know what she would feel even a year from now, no less for the rest of her life?

As we approached the sisters' house from the street, we admired the traditional straight gable and pitched roof that the family had preserved from days gone by. I loved our little town and so did Kati. Now our love for the town and the people in it

had taken on a new emphasis. In another minute though, Kati and I began a testy, irritable discussion about our plans. “Emma, have we decided who is going to take whom?”

I said, “I thought I would take Gizi and you would take Eszti because her feelings for Zoltán are so much like yours.” The derision on Kati’s face was so unlike the Kati I had known, I almost forgot to blame myself for being the cause of her situation. That is the only thing that stopped me from taking her scorn personally.

“What kind of reasoning is that, Emma? Gizi is plump and juicy. Her blood will be rich and easy to access. Eszti is too wiry. I will have to work like hell to sup on her blood and, after all my effort, the blood will still not be as substantial. Do you think it’s right that you are appropriating the choicest morsel for yourself? This new vampyric nature of yours is turning you selfish. Look what you have done to me. The least you could do to compensate would be to let me have first go at Gizi.”

I realized she was correct. I, who had cherished and nurtured the qualities of unselfishness and generosity instilled in me by my parents, was becoming greedy as my hunger intensified. Of course I wanted the easier of the two sisters all to myself. But that kind of thinking would be destructive to my future alliance with Kati. We could be much more effective as a team than alone,

sharing our spoils like a wolf pack. On the other hand, the concept of sharing felt inimical to my new ethic, in the tradition of the solitary predator.

“You are right, Kati, this recent bloodlust is overriding all my altruistic tendencies,” I said. Yet I continued in my selfish rationalizations, trying to sound logical in my next attempt at putting a good spin on it: “Eszti is like cserkész sausages that you enjoy so much. Granted, cserkész is thin and dry. But you have always said you loved its chewy resilience. It’s a great energy-boosting nibble. Five thousand Hungarian Boy Scouts can’t be wrong in making it their snack of choice on forest treks!

“Kati, you know I have always preferred gyulai sausages, moist and juicy, like Gizi. There is nothing more to it than that. It’s just a preference sort of thing.”

“Emma, I can see through your self-serving reasoning and it does not work with me. Let’s agree to split the girls evenly, with me starting on Gizi and you starting with Eszti. Then, midstream, we will switch and complete our meals.”

“No,” I said. “I am one day senior to you in our new life as vampyrs and I am your initiator. The unwritten law of seniority applies. I don’t want to finish with Gizi after I have been sucking on Eszti’s meager flow. How do I know anything will be left? I will be working away to extract a few mouthfuls, while listening to you freely drinking from the

flowing fountain! I don't even trust that you will switch over when the time comes.”

Our conversation vexed me so, I almost called the whole encounter off. How silly of me to think that I could share my nightly excursions or that I would be better off with a partner. Maybe after this night, I would always be alone, free to choose my food sources without the reproach of, or consideration for, Kati or anyone else.

I stopped and grabbed Kati by her upper arm, surprising myself as I hissed, “I will take Gizi! You will take Eszti. She has plenty of blood for your second night out. Don't be so avaricious! You will have many nights ahead of you for all of eternity. Now it is very important for us to maintain a light-hearted approach to the whole situation so as not to make the girls suspicious. Remember, this is not your last night on earth or on any other planet, so stop acting like it is. Last time I checked, the population of the Sopron-Győr-Moson area alone was over 425,000. Surely you will have a great assortment from which to choose every night of the week. So stop acting like this is your last meal on earth!”

Kati looked at me with great resentment but then softened. “I was a fool to argue with you. As the old Hungarian proverb says, ‘A prudent man does not make the goat his gardener.’ It was stupid of me to think that you would help me by leading me to a blood harvest when your goatish greed drives you to

consume the lion's share. I hate the old Hungarian proverbs my grandmother always belabored, but another one applies here: 'An ox remains an ox, even if driven to Vienna.' That means you are a greedy, vicious, non-human whose beastly lust supersedes the fact that you look like a respectful, kindly young lady."

Really, this was too much! I wanted to get in the last retort. "While we are on the subject of Hungarian proverbs, Kati my dear, how about the one my grandfather taught me: 'A crow does not delouse the ox to clean him, but to feed himself.' That is what is known as enlightened self-interest. I thought that bringing you along would be an asset to me in my quest to feed myself. In return, I could be helpful to you in your initiation into the life of the Undead. Instead, you are turning into more and more of a problem on this expedition. I mean, I love you as a person but as a vampyr you need to go along with the program and trust that I know what I am doing."

Kati sighed as she gave into my unassailable reasoning, "Oh, all right. Let's stop with the oxen proverbs already! This is post-Communist Hungary. There haven't been any oxen around here in 75 years! Let's do what we can for ourselves tonight and tomorrow we can consider setting out on our own." Thus, our innocent friendship had been transmuted overnight into an adversarial relationship. At that point I realized I might have been wrong about being companions for eternity.

Innocence Lost

We knocked at the thick wooden door of the Kovács family's comfortable middle class townhouse. After a brief, heart-pounding moment, Gizi appeared and opened it with Eszti by her side. "Why Emma and Kati! How cool of you to visit us! What brings you out to see us tonight? What do you have there? Oh, krumplicukor! Come in, come in!" The exquisite bone structure of her face was obscured only a little by the thin layer of adipose tissue that overlay it. She and Eszti both were quite the beauties, each in her own way. Gizi, however, had a glow that came from within, while Eszti made a darker impression because of her mental reservations. Cheerfulness and sarcasm rarely mix in the same nature.

I saw then that Gizi's neck might present a problem because of its thickness. I couldn't gauge how deeply buried was her carotid artery. Eszti would be a piece of cake, so to speak, compared to Gizi, even if she was thinner and offered a less bounteous harvest. Only a very thin layer of skin covered the prominent arteries and tendons in her neck. Maybe I was a fool for arguing with Kati over Gizi. Eszti might be an easier meal after all. Besides, I had a feeling that Eszti would taste more like bittersweet chocolate as opposed to Gizi, who probably would be more like milk chocolate, if you were to use chocolate as a comparison. I have always been a fan

of dark chocolate. Yet the difference between a juicy, spicy kielbasa-like gyulai and the chewy cserkész was a more apt comparison for my purposes.

Eszti remarked as Gizi tore open the package of krumplicukor. “Only we Hungarians would think candy made from potatoes is a good thing. Who else would think such a bland, tooth-breaking concoction worthy of enthusiasm? I’m surprised you didn’t bring some Zwack Unicum to go with it! What a great combination: The tasteless with the bitter!” She was referring to a drink we Hungarians swear by as a stomach strengthener, an acquired taste.

Gizi rebuked her sister. “Eszti, stop being rude. Emma and Kati are our guests and they brought me something I like, regardless of what you think of it. You don’t have to eat any of it. I assure you, I will eat it all. And stop putting Hungarians down! We have a great cuisine, honored all over the globe, and rightly so. Just because you are obsessed with America, doesn’t give you the right to turn up your nose at our traditional goodies. America is the capital of junk food, so I don’t want to hear any more about it!”

She turned to us and laughed, “Eszti talks day and night about America. If it’s not America, it’s Zoltán! Just before you arrived, she was fixing a drink called ‘The Mad Hungarian.’ Can you believe this? Someone in America dreamed up this name

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for a drink that consists of two shots of coconut rum and root beer, whatever that is! Most Hungarians have never been near a coconut. They wouldn't know what you are talking about if you mentioned coconut rum, no less root beer. Is it rum made of coconuts and beer made of roots? We were trying to approximate both ingredients when you arrived. She was mixing Hubertus with mashed marzipan and plum pálinka. Want to try it?"

We sat at their kitchen table while Eszti poured tiny, decorative ceramic cups of her Mad Hungarian. Kati had been silent until she sipped the strange brew. I could tell she was distracted by her thoughts of how we were to overcome the sisters. I saw that it would be easy. If they kept drinking this heady stuff, they would fall into a deep sleep. It was up to us to stay in control. This would not be difficult, as the drink was vile, although it did have an alcoholic kick, something I was not used to. Kati stood up, lifted her cup, and toasted, "To Hungarian men!"

"Oh really?" asked Eszti, "What brought that on from out of nowhere? Don't you mean, to one Hungarian man in particular—Zoltán Szabó? If so, I'll drink to that!"

I gave Kati a meaningful look when I saw her raising her fourth little ceramic cup to her mouth. She needed presence of mind to complete her night's responsibilities. I interrupted, "Kati, I thought you told me plum pálinka triggers your allergies." I took the cup away from her with a

laugh but also gave her a serious look. It occurred to me that all this alcohol in everyone's veins could have an impact on our blood meal later on, perhaps diluting the nutritional impact. Gizi and Eszti gave me a quizzical look. They had never seen me act bossy.

"I have an idea. Let's talk about Zoltán," said Eszti. She was getting silly now. She was giggling and her deep brown eyes were dancing. The candlelight shone in them. "He is going with our brother András to Club Colosso this Saturday night to hear Omega-három band. I'm begging our parents to let us go. They will be back from the lake by then—but they will be expecting us to stay with our little brother, Anton. I wish I lived in the USA—where I could go out any night of the week and not have to stay home and watch my little brother. I see in the cinema how the girls live over there. There's such freedom! Did you ever see that movie *Buffy the Vampire Killer*? If only I could have that kind of life!"

Gizi was smiling at her sister. The brightness of her glowing cheeks hinted at the blood coursing beneath the taut skin. My God! Is this what I have come to? I see my good friends as no more than bags of blood. No more than receptacles of the fluid that gives me relief. I cannot glory in their aliveness and only wish for unconsciousness to overcome them so that I may have my way. Their conversation, which used to be enjoyable, is now tinged with tedium as I count the frightful hours

until they are in my power. I was disgusted with myself yet could not stop this force that had taken hold of me.

Gizi had the kind of beauty that made few demands, other than its inevitable admiration. One couldn't help but look at such planes and surfaces with a feeling of pleasure and wonder. She carried herself smoothly, erectly, at home in her womanly form. I was glad that Kati and I had settled the debate and Gizi was to be mine tonight. I had read about primitive tribesmen eating their enemies in the hopes of receiving some of their energy. In this case, I hoped I could siphon off some of Gizi's radiance along with her blood. I was already beginning to feel weak and out of sorts and longed for her with a passion that was strange to me.

“Well, what do you think of Zoltán, Kati?” asked Gizi, completely unaware of the turmoil going through my mind.

“I'm crazy over him,” said Kati. Eszti gave a whoop and laughed.

“I could write a whole song to him,” said Eszti.
“And, actually, I did.”

She stood up and started playing air guitar to the tune of *Werewolf of London*:

“Ah-ooooo Zoltán Szabó!
Ah-ooooo Zoltán Szabó!”

We all got up to dance and made sounds like mock werewolves. Eszti then did something uncanny— she began acting like a vampyr, pursuing Kati as if she was going to bite her neck. How ironic that in a few hours, the role-play would be reversed, with real consequences for both; an innocent pantomime, prefiguring the indelible future.

Friendship Redefined

After much singing, dancing, and drinking Gizi, Eszti, Kati and I all fell into an exhausted heap on the brown corduroy sofa in the living room. I signaled for Kati to wait until we were sure the sisters were quite unconscious. Both were breathing the long, relaxed breaths of sleepers in the third stages of sleep.

I wanted to teach Kati the etiquette of clean vampyrical feeding. I could see from her impatience that she was not going to pay attention to the techniques unless I was very strict with her. I did not want a gruesome bloodbath. If Kati goes out on her own and makes a mess of it, that is one thing. But I don't want to be associated with, or be witness to, amateurish behavior. Especially where our friends were concerned. Kati had an impetuous quality, which was charming in our human life but had no place in the realm of the vampyrs. Precision was important to the stealth our new vocation required.

I gestured to her to keep quiet and waved my hand to make her wait and watch me. I softly bared my extended fangs. I quietly and gently inserted them in Gizi's throat. Ah, what pleasure! Finally, the numbing drive for blood was being fulfilled. In seven long pulls, I drained most of Gizi's lifeblood from her still-warm body. I relented a little. "Here

Kati,” I said, as the warmth and ease from the relieving fluid coursed through my own veins. “You can finish her off. Then I will start Eszti for you, since she will be tougher. ”

Kati agreed. Her normal good humor was being replaced by the ill-at-ease fogginess of the pre-feeding cycle. I am referring to the physical and emotional state in which vampyrs exist before we avail ourselves of our next bloodfest. Everyone has experienced that groggy state of torpor after arising from a mid-afternoon nap: That half-alive dullness of mind and senses. Yet you are acutely aware of loud noises and other disturbances. It is a combination of crankiness and malaise. This is what we feel every night when our feeding time nears, except there is a component of anxiety that puts an edge on it. We are like the lionesses pacing their cages in the zoo, smelling the raw meat that approaches in the zookeeper’s pail. But there is no energy, just restlessness in our bodies.

Unlike the zoo’s lioness, we are not so lucky as to have our meals brought to us. We must go out every night, slaves to our unbidden desires, to obtain our sustenance. Furthermore, the captive lioness innocently gobbles down the muscle tissue brought to her with no further consequences to the dead animal that sacrificed its life so she could continue her caged existence. But what we do is transmute our food source into one of our Population of the Night, turning our meals into our very own competition for our next night’s food supply. Even

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a lioness in the state of nature, though driven by the same hungers, cannot lay claim to that phenomenon.

I was acutely, and somewhere deep in my human heart, sadly aware at this point that we were turning Gizi and Eszti into vampyrs too. I realized that they would need to depart from their comfortable home that very night to replenish the supply that Kati and I had diminished. Having been good in math at school, I also realized that if this type of activity kept up every night, the number of vampyrs in Sopron would increase exponentially until the town would be populated by nothing but our blood-sucking ilk in five years. I had already seen that I would have to branch out my feeding patterns to include more than just teenage girls. It also occurred to me that we would have to make our excursions into other areas of Transdanubia, such as Győr. Maybe we could cross over into Vienna, where the butter and cream-fed flesh of its citizens might provide a tasty treat.

The flavor differences of people were becoming more apparent to me as I began to extract Eszti's blood from her thin neck, even though she was only my fourth victim. Heretofore I had described Gizi as a gyulai and Eszti as the chewy cserkész. In reality, Gizi's blood tasted more like filet mignon and Eszti's tasted like calf's liver. Since calves' liver has never been a favorite of mine, and Kati has always preferred it, I motioned her over to the open vessel I had just punctured in Eszti's neck and said,

“Be my guest.” I had already had my fill and was not being altruistic about it. Altruism and vampyrism, unfortunately, are mutually exclusive qualities. Gizi was a nutritious meal and I didn’t need any more. Eszti’s blood was so full of alcohol, I was concerned about my own presence of mind if I supped on any more of her. Let Kati have the rest.

Hungry and thirsty, Kati sucked loudly at first. I pinched her arm to draw her attention to my pantomime of correct feeding practices. Luckily, Eszti was unconscious from the loss of blood she had already sustained and the alcohol she had consumed. But Kati was not creating a perfect suction. Though she quietly completed her task, her mouth was sloppily covered with clotted blood. Crimson rivulets were running down her chin. “Kati, you are going to have to be neater than that if you want to stay out of trouble. I am not going to be around to help you every night. If you walk through the streets looking like that late at night, someone will come up and drive a stake through your heart.”

While I was reprimanding Kati, a vaporous-looking Gizi had arisen. Her skin, which had always been rosy, was now blue-white. She smiled painfully as she brushed past us without a word, opened the front door, and stepped into the night. She was a clever girl. She would be able to find what she needed. I loved both of these sisters and, selfishly, was glad that they were going to be my companions in our new life together. I was looking forward to going to the Club Colosso on Saturday night with

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them. We were not club goers and it would be a new experience, if we could only get our parents to consent.

As Kati took the last few drops of Eszti's blood, Eszti jumped up and ran to the door, still open from her sister's egress. She called out, "Gizi, take me with you!" We could hear her voice echoing off the buildings, as she repeated it, running through the street.

Kati remarked, "She's going to have to be more discreet than that if she is going to meet with success in this field."

"Good, Kati," I said. "Now you understand what I mean about vampyr etiquette. It doesn't come naturally, but must be acquired and learned, sometimes painfully. Being sloppy, noisy, rude, crude, or possessing any quality that brings negative attention to ourselves is strictly out of the question now that we have assumed our new calling. Those qualities might be excusable in your regular teenage girls and are even considered chic by certain people. But we cannot afford to call the slightest bit of attention to ourselves, blending in seamlessly as much as we can. Thus we will attain people's trust and gain our advantage. We also do not want to awaken the sleeping victim and scare him or her off."

I realized it sounded arrogant that I took it upon myself to know so much about the proper conduct

for human leeches such as myself, after such a short history as one. However, during my 96 hours or so as a vampyr, I had done a lot of thinking and self-observation. I thought more introspectively now than I ever did in my carefree pre-vampyrical days. Then I had only my studies, my friends, my music, and my parents occupying my thoughts. My life had been safely uncomplicated. How I wished for those dear old nothing-special days now! For what I had done in the past three days blotted out all the goodness of my undramatic childhood and cast it in a new light of unrecoverable innocence.

My Human Origins

Let me take some time away from the mayhem that followed to tell you about my beloved parents. During the next few nights, all four of us went out on the town to pursue our blood sport as I continued to hide my activities and to lie to the dearest people in the world to me. My mother and father would have been heartbroken if they knew what had become of their only child. They reared me with the utmost attention to compassion, affection, respect, and unselfishness.

What they had gone through in the pre-Communist days, and later under Communism, predisposed them to non-violence. They had seen too much suffering to ever inflict it on anyone themselves. My new predilection for sapping the lifeblood from the living, however painlessly, went against everything they ever taught me. I grew up with not so much as one spanking or slap, not that my behavior would have occasioned physical punishment of any sort. I cared too much about my parents to cause them grief and so I obeyed them out of sheer love.

Like Kati's parents and the Kovács family, my parents were middle class. While my father was an intellectual, with an independent mind under Communism, he was clever enough to tailor his gifts for the benefit of the Party to avoid

persecution. He designed a special espionage detection database system, which the government used at the border between Hungary and Vienna. This is where spies were known to filter into the country from the West. At the time it was strictly manual, but through the years he computerized it. Thus he gained much recognition for himself as valuable to the State. The State awarded him the post of Commander of the Custom Troops, though unofficially he worked on his computer solutions most of the time in his office.

He kept his philosophical notions to himself and therefore was able to keep a low profile as a thinker and scholar. He often repeated the famous Hungarian proverb, "Tell the truth and your head will be broken." He was a closet Capitalist during the Communist era, placing trust in free market forces to regulate commerce for the good of all. He believed that markets are efficient and should function without interference. He was quietly insistent that the role of the state is only to regulate and protect.

I loved walking through Lővérek Forest with my father, discussing these and other issues, from the Big Bang theory to genetic engineering. He wanted me to develop my mind and to learn how to think. Often he'd say to me, "It is not enough to be a beauty, which you are, Emma. You must work to make use of your excellent intelligence. The most important thing in the world is to leave this planet a better place than you found it, even in small ways. It

might be all right for other girls, like Kati, to fritter their lives away with the popular Eurotrash culture, amusements and entertainments, but you have a greater destiny. I would like you to fulfill the scientific yearning in you that was thwarted in my youth by the constraints of the Party.

“Emma, your teachers have always been very encouraging when I have discussed your scientific future with them through the years. They believe you will excel at the Environmental Engineering program at the University of West Hungary and make your mark in the world of forest genomics and bioinformatics. You know, it’s very rare for a student as young as you are to have access to a laboratory. You are very lucky that Professor Mátyás took you under his wing and has allowed you to work out your experiments in his lab.”

This was true. My scientific ability came easily to me and at a relatively young age. In the laboratory or on paper, I worked with skill and finesse at my chosen field of Molecular Genetics as it relates to forestry. I was fortunate that Sopron’s University had worldwide recognition for its forestry program. My interest in, and capacity to understand, such concepts as forest genomics and adaptive genetic diversity distinguished me amongst my schoolmates in my early teens. My penchant for discussing DNA-related principles gave me a reputation for being “a brain” in circles beyond my secondary school. Even my father was impressed by my advanced placement tutorial on micropropagation,

which is clonal propagation by in vitro technology via organogenesis and somatic embryogenesis. Forest genomics and new molecular genetic approaches to measuring and conserving adaptive genetic diversity in forest trees were almost all-consuming passions with me. Professor Mátyás saw my tutorial and gifted me with the use of his lab equipment and materials for furthering my research.

In short, if you haven't already discovered for yourself, I am what is called a "brainiac." I don't want to bore you further with demonstrations of my understanding of how forest genetic conservation can benefit from new achievements in genomics and our ability to analyze the whole genome. But I do want to impress upon you that my father had great hopes for me as I was to begin my first semester at the University in a few weeks. He also had a belief in my innate goodness as a person, that is, in my desire to do the right thing. Ethics as it relates to genetic engineering is a profound subject. He often quoted a dear colleague from his work place—Mrs. Kaszás, "Live as if God and your conscience were watching."

Under Communism we were brought up not to believe in God, so for my father to mention God in the early days of my life, was a special secret between us. The Party did not appreciate its members speaking in reverence of The Opiate of the People. But this is what made the intellectual intimacy between Dad and me even deeper. It was confidential between us, until the overthrow of

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Communism in 1989. During our walks, he had shared so many of his thoughts and visions with me, it was a mixed blessing. I was under pressure to be what both he and my mother could not achieve. Yet I loved those pensive strolls and think of them as amongst the best times of my life.

Dad also was proud of Hungary and spoke often of how many geniuses this small piece of turf produced. Many of them achieved fame only after they had left Hungary. The desire was born in Hungary but came to fruition in other countries, mostly America, for political and material reasons. My father also envisioned that for me, though he couldn't bear to let me go as far as America. He couldn't stand to think of parting with me, yet wouldn't think of moving to the USA. He felt he was too old to move to a new culture, speak another language, and become accustomed to new ways of doing things.

“It's too late for me. But for you Emma! You have so much potential. I would like nothing less than for you to win the Nobel Prize. Quite a few Hungarian men have won it, but not one woman yet. You will be the first!”

This statement usually preceded an enumeration of the many distinguished and world-famous products of Hungarian soil, chanted in a droning voice:

“Edward Teller, father of the H bomb, the composers Béla Bartók and Franz Liszt, Paul Erdős,

legendary mathematician and discoverer of the Erdős Number, Peter Carl Goldmark, inventor of color television and the electronic video recorder, Andy Grove, president of Intel, Moricz Kohn Kaposi, discoverer of Kaposi's Sarcoma. . .”

I began to laugh to break the monotony. “Dad, I know the list by heart now! And Tony Curtis, and the Gábor sisters, no relation to us, and Eugene Fodor of Fodor's Travel Guides, and Harry Houdini. . .” I grabbed him and gave him a tight hug and loud kiss on the cheek.

“Stop it!” he laughed. “Now you are making fun of me! But I cannot reiterate enough how important it is for you not to waste your life and your ability—even if I have to bore you to death to do it. My Emmushka, can't you see how people allow their lives to drain away on trivia?” My father continued with a catch in his voice, “Emmushka, my dear, I don't even want you to get married and follow the usual routine of bearing and caring for children if it stands in the way of your talents' expression. I don't need to be a grandfather that badly.”

“Dad!” I shouted with feigned horror, “How can you call me Emmushka after all these years of my protesting against this wretched diminutive? If you don't stop teasing me like this, I will promptly become a kitchen-bound brood mare whose only relief from the daily chores is listening to *The Bozoki Family* soap opera on the radio!”

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In spite of the happiness of our banter, I saw that my father's wishes for me not to live the normal life had been fulfilled in ways he could never have fathomed. He looked so earnest and innocent walking alongside me through the deep green forest on this day. How lucky for him not to know the agonies I had been suffering as I watched my own transformations with horror. Yes, I was far from living the normal life, but in ways he could not even have imagined. And far from leaving the world a better place than I found it. And far from living as if God and my conscience were watching.

My mother also took an active interest in my intellectual development. Under Communism she worked in one humdrum factory after another and never got the chance to develop her skills as a painter. Just getting materials for her oils on canvas was a major undertaking, when such materials were in short supply in Hungary at the time. Like most people in this country during that period, she lived in a drab, constrained reality. It was jokingly called "Goulash Communism," after the revolution in 1956. She told me, "It was a farce. Everybody knew it was a joke. The message was, and you could see it on their faces, 'You pretend to pay us and we pretend to work.'"

"The lack of variety of products available to Hungarians under Communism kept me from getting the supplies I needed. Remember when I worked in that bottle factory? All the wine in the whole country came in that bottle. And it was the

same kind of white wine everybody drank. And when I worked in the glass factory, we made the same glass everyone drank the white wine from. And the bowl factory—everyone in Hungary had that same kind of bowl. Well, that kind of work took the life out of me and now I'm too tired to break out into my own style of painting, regardless of your stories about the American Grandma Moses.”

After Communism fell, my mother felt she was too old to make an impact in spite of encouragement and nagging from me. “Mama, art has no age—look at the American painter Grandma Moses—she was 78 when she began her career as a painter and continued until she was 100!”

“Yes, Emma, but she also lived in America, where people don't know things like that can't be done, so they do them. Here in Hungary we have a greater sense of limitation when it comes to age. We have a greater sense of limitation, period. My life is over. I can only hope to live through you and your potential as a great scientist now.”

“Stop it, Mama! I can't take the pressure you are putting me under. Can I help it if you couldn't live the life you wanted? Why place all your hopes in me? What if I can't live up to them? Placing me up on the pedestal of your optimistic expectations makes it very difficult for me to come to you with my real problems. I don't want to disappoint you, so I say nothing!”

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My mother abhorred violence of all kinds and retold stories of what happened to her mother, my soon-to-be-married grandmother, when the Russians invaded Hungary.

“The first ominous night descended on your grandmother and her family around 8 o'clock. The entire Soviet division was resting up in town for three days and two nights. They had a free hand in having what they wanted and there was no recourse to any authority to prevent them. They followed the old war maxim of Ghengis Khan: ‘Get me that town by morning and all the gold, women, and wine of the city is yours.’

“And so it was. As soon as it got dark, Grandma, hiding up in the attic in a crawl space, could hear the desperate, shrieking laments of women, audible from the streets and among the homes. In groups, the Russian soldiers occupied deserted houses and started cooking the food they robbed from the neighborhood. Then they invaded the shelters of the neighboring houses, rounded up the hiding women and forced them to go and ‘help’ them. After supper those who resisted their advances were shot on the spot and nobody could do anything about it. Luckily, they missed your grandmother.

“The next day the Death March began. It was the march of prisoners taken and forced to march towards Romania to the assembly depot of those unfortunate people to be taken to Russia for slave labor. Anytime a Red Commander took a city, he

reported the number of prisoners he had taken. They were marched in an endless line on foot towards their assembly post in Romania. Some of the prisoners died on the roadside, some succeeded in escaping.

“Guards counted heads at the beginning of the march and had to deliver the same amount at their destination point. Anyone who looked on was liable to be forced into the march to take up the slack created by the number of dead or missing men. Even very elderly men wound up in the death-march just because they were onlookers as the march went by their homes, or they were rounded up from their homes. The guards had the number on paper and this number had to be accounted for at the delivery station.

“On the third day the nightmare seemed to be over. Soviet Military Police appeared on the streets and to everyone’s great satisfaction and general amazement they were not looking for Hungarians, but for AWOL Russian soldiers. In one neighborhood home they found six or seven Red Army men, drunk, sprawled over beds and tables, and sleeping on the floor. The MP shouted something in Russian. There was no reaction. Then one of the MPs fired his gun and shot one of the AWOL men on the spot. The remaining men sobered up immediately and ran to the assembly point. To quote Karl Marx: ‘Man is valuable only insofar as he furthers the interests of the

revolutionary working class. Otherwise his life may be snuffed out like a cigarette.’

“Thus the victorious Red Army gathered in our market place and marched on to Vienna; leaving behind them devastation, hunger, and misery. Grandma crawled out of her shelter and looked around with horror. Her father and mother were gone but her baby brother, Uncle Tamás, was still alive, hiding behind a box in the basement, dehydrated and starving. Human misery was everywhere. Most homes were mere shells, windows and furniture smashed, personal belongings looted, pantries empty, and the currency worthless.

“Adding to her despair was the complete isolation from the outside world; railroads paralyzed, cars and trucks confiscated, even the horses had been appropriated, and the printing presses seized. Grandma was to be married in two weeks to your Grandfather who was in Győr at the time. She didn’t know if he was alive or dead, or whether he would be able to make it into Sopron for the wedding.

“But the wedding day arrived, sorrowfully, with most of the wedding party reduced. Your Grandmother managed to go on with it, in spite of grieving for her parents and not knowing if she would ever see them again. She had even managed to salvage her painstakingly embroidered wedding

gown from the rubble and restore it to its former freshness and beauty.

“There was a Russian military hospital about 20 miles from her place, housed in one of the Esterházy’s lavishly furnished castles. On the hospital staff were several Russian nurses. One of these nurses was walking down the streets on your grandmother’s wedding day, accompanied by an interpreter. ‘Interpreter,’ she asked, ‘Where are they going, and who is that young girl dressed in white with all those embroidered flowers? I have never seen such a beautiful dress!’

“‘This is a wedding march, my lady, they are going to church to be married.’ answered the interpreter.

“‘Tell her I want that dress, and I want it right now’ ordered the nurse. Your grandmother refused to disrobe right in the middle of the street or to give her the wedding dress she had spent every night for six months embroidering. The nurse then forced her at gunpoint to do so. The nurse took the bridal veil and gown to the castle, put it on, and paraded around the castle, admiring her reflection in the many mirrors of the Versailles-like chambers. After this, she sat down and wrote three letters; one to her mother, one to Stalin, and one to the Party. The following day, she was found dead in your grandmother’s wedding gown, her blood forming a huge red flower in the center of her chest, staining the white and multicolored threads of the dress. She

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died by her own hand of a gunshot wound to the heart.”

I had heard this and other stories several times and understood why my mother deplored violence of any kind. If she only knew how little I was living up to her wishes and how I was really acting out all that she found repugnant. At that point, I wasn't creating anything, only destroying as my endless craving for blood, blood, and more blood drew me onward!

Beyond Craving

I was looking forward to going to the club with the girls but we still had one evening before that plan could materialize. The morning after Eszti and Gizi crossed over to the other side to the world of the Undead, they phoned me to arrange a get-together. I called Kati and we decided we would all meet at her house in the mid evening and make our excursion after the town was asleep.

Mrs. Debreceni busied herself with snacks and coffee—as if we needed coffee to keep us awake. And the gesztenyepüré, normally one of my favorite treats, made from ribbons of pureed chestnuts and clouds of whipped cream, seemed cloying to my blood-obsessed palate. I pretended to eat it, while sequestering it in my napkin when Mrs. Debreceni wasn't looking. I could see that Eszti, Gizi, and Kati were having trouble with the normally easy-to-eat meggyleves, our cold cherry soup. Normally, the sweet-sour fruit cleanses and refreshes the mouth. But we were far outside the norm and the only appeal they had was their dark redness, which reminded us all of iron-rich, slightly coagulated blood.

I could also see that the voluptuous Gizi was going into a trance of desire. She had a collection of Kati's *Elle* magazines on her lap and she was carefully cutting out the necks of all the models.

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She was making a collage consisting of nothing more than necks. Pasted together, they looked like a patchwork of fleshy stems, which could be mistaken for arms or legs were it not for their veinous pattern and the knotty Adam's apples. Eszti was gazing at the pastiche with longing. They both had a sweaty pallor that gave them an unhealthy sheen.

“Are you girls on drugs?” asked Mrs. Debreceni with an ironic laugh. “You’re acting like you are in a trance. Usually Gizi attacks my food with gusto and tonight all four of you are acting strange.” She got down into our faces and examined our eyes with perplexity.

At last she said, “I’m going to bed. Make yourselves comfortable but don’t stay too late, you all look like you need sleep. Kati, I want you to go to bed early tonight. You have an unearthly paleness about you, which I don’t think looks healthy. You’d tell me if you were on drugs, wouldn’t you? Who knows what’s been filtering through the border from Vienna? I don’t think you’d be stupid enough to ruin your lives with such poison, would you?”

Little did she know that our cravings were beyond the mere desire to put chemicals into our blood-streams. If she really knew the truth, Kati’s mother might even have preferred that we had polluted our brains with the alkaloids of the poppy plant or the cannabinoids of the hemp plant. At least we could have gotten into some sort of detox program if this

were the case. But what could anyone have done to help us at that point? The hollow-eyed junkie living like an opiate propelled specter was a fortunate being compared to us. She might sell her body or steal to get drugs but her crime was ultimately against herself. Was she taking the very life from people and turning them into insatiable vampyrs? No. In a sense, she was morally superior to us, even in her degradation.

We all watched as Mrs. Debreceni left the room. Our faces reddened in anticipation, as they used to before the Hortobágy Equestrian days, when we would leave school early and spend the day in awe of the beautiful Lippenzaner stallions as they pranced through their routines. I stood up. “In one hour it will be midnight. We will make our way down to the Belváros. There we will find stragglers walking home from the nightspots, happy with wine and satiated with their evening’s repasts. We can trap them the way a wolf pack isolates and hunts down its prey. Too bad we must dine on blood mixed with alcohol. On the other hand, that will make our prey easier to subdue.

“Or, we could follow a group of students who have had a bit too much. We will isolate the weakest and go from there depending on the sizes of the individual students.” I listened to my own authoritative voice. I never realized that I had leadership abilities, having been of a rather studious personality type, as I have mentioned. But the mantle of leadership fell on my shoulders due to my

seniority and skill level alone, in this case. Not that I was proud of it, but I was the one who set this whole ball rolling. I couldn't let Kati make the plans as yet, she was too inexperienced and inept in her bloodletting abilities to have the credibility. Gizi and Eszti were obvious novices too, this being their second night out in their new form.

I am not a power hog and have never been interested in having groups of people, or even individuals, obey my commands. My seizing the reins was simply a matter of efficiency. There was nothing more to it than that. I could see that the impatience was mounting in my friends and they might possibly lose control in a frenzy to feed their needs. They could be like a pack of hungry wolves run amok, rather than a disciplined group trained to hunt effectively. I could see that in the future we might all go our separate ways, but right now we were experimenting to see if more could be gained through communal, or team, vampyrism. However, I didn't have too much riding on communal success, as I had seen how Communism had failed in Hungary and the rest of Central and Eastern Europe.

Sampling the Town

After we made sure that the Debreceni household was asleep, Kati, Eszti, Gizi and I made our way through the narrow streets of the old town. The streets were built long before automobiles became prevalent and some cars were parked on the sidewalks for lack of room. Some German, Austrian, and American tourists, all men, were making their way past us from the Blue Tropical Night Club on Lövér Körút. The Germans were loud, singing, laughing. The Austrians were softly singing their national anthem, “Land der Berge, Land am Strome. Land der Äcker, Land der Dome,” as they swayed arm in arm. The Americans were staggering a little, arms around each other’s shoulders, but more restrained than the other groups of tourists.

Eszti remarked enthusiastically, “Ooh! Look at those luscious looking American filets filled with succulent blood. Let’s dine on them tonight! They look convenient, we are weak and hungry now, why not go for them? Please, Emma! You know how much I love America and this would be a special way of experiencing a country I admire so much. I never get my way. Gizi always gets everything she wants because she is so beautiful, but no one goes out of her way for me. Please, just this once give in to me and let’s at least start with the Americans!”

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I asked the other two what they thought about the idea of feasting on Americans. I pointed out that the Americans we have been seeing are robust, muscular and hardly the type to be subdued. Some are fat and do not look easy to penetrate. The only way this could work would be if we waited for a particularly drunken group, out of which we could cull one or two. Or we could go on and search for Hungarians, who were not as beefy as the Germans and the Americans.

“No,” Eszti murmured. “We can get Hungarians any day of the week. I think we should partake of the exotic and have a little tasting adventure. Like sampling from a large buffet table, only in this case the offerings are all human, and in particular, they are US Prime Government Inspected!”

At that point, onto the street came a group of what appeared to be American college students. Two of the boys were lagging behind the herd, shuffling, staggering, and laughing. “This is going to be easy,” said Kati. “They are so pickled, we will only have to knock them over and they will be out cold. There’s hardly any challenge to it at all. They’re wirier and smaller than the others in their group.”

“We don’t want challenge,” I said. “This is not a game. We are not here to amuse ourselves with sportsmanship. We are here to sustain ourselves in the most practical manner possible. Look at the blonde one. He is hanging onto the brown-haired one and will fall of his own accord any second now.

Let's form a circle around them and guide them into the alleyway. Eszti and Gizi can take the blonde and Kati and I will share the brown-haired boy. If they are not enough, we will have to have seconds on some other unfortunate ones this night."

We held hands and rushed over to the American stragglers. We formed a circle as we used to in our childhood games. A look of surprise and delight crept across their faces as they saw us approaching and closing in on them. Four, friendly, attractive Hungarian girls fastening their lustful eyes on these drunken boys; staring at them with craving they had never before seen. We easily herded them into the alleyway, pushed them over, and quickly subdued them. I suspected that they thought we wanted to have our way with them in a foursome of casual sex and abandon. They did not resist.

Eszti and Gizi looked like lion cubs at a Kenyan waterhole, each taking a side of the blond boy's neck. Kati and I gently drained the blood from the brown-haired boy. Kati's technique was improving and there was no blood spatter and waste. As the American boys expired, they had a look of happy surprise frozen on their faces, as if being drained of one's blood was good fortune.

"God bless America! That boy was truly delicious," murmured Eszti, with a brilliant smile. Her angular face looked pretty, suffused as it was with the blush of satisfaction. "I think it would be a great idea to

try a whole menu of different nationalities tonight. Though I would love to try one of those again.”

This led to a discussion about the possible flavors of the different ethnic groups. I licked some residual blood from the blond boy’s neck. “This tastes a bit lighter and dryer than our brown-haired boy. Kind of like the difference between a deep red wine, Egri Bikavér, Bull’s Blood, let’s say, and a dry white wine, such as Soproni Kékfrankos. Or between the white and dark meat of a chicken.”

The ever-sensual Gizi mused, “I wonder what Italians taste like! Do you think that garlic, basil, and oregano flavor their blood? Would the French taste like bouquet garní? Would Norwegians taste like dill? And do chilies make Mexicans’ blood hot? We will probably never know since we don’t see many Mexican tourists in Sopron. Our Hungarians taste like a hint of paprika, this I know. But it is not hot. It has a sweetish, aromatic quality I can’t describe exactly.”

Kati was getting into the spirit of the evening now that her driving thirst and hunger had been quelled. “Look at that lonely-looking Indian guy leaving the club. He’s a rare bird around these parts! Let’s try him to see if he tastes different, due to the spices he has ingested.”

“Really, Kati, aren’t you full? I asked. “It’s wasteful to victimize someone just for the purpose of seeing what they taste like. Vampyrs are like the American

Indians or the Inuits. We do not kill beyond what we can use.” I found that I was constantly feeling the need to teach Kati vampyr etiquette, while it came naturally to Eszti and Gizi.

“He looks emaciated,” she replied. “He could be kind of a digestif, just for the fun of it. All four of us could probably drain him without overstuffing ourselves.”

Eszti and Gizi nodded their heads with interest.

“All right, then, if we are all agreed, let’s move in for the kill, girls!” I whispered.

The thin brown man was not drunk, but he was walking pensively, with his shoulders hunched and his eyes towards the ground. He looked so bony, he reminded me of the kerti sármány, our Hungarian ortolan: All crunchy bones and sparse flesh. He looked up as we approached and his sad eyes brightened. “Hello,” he said in English, with a smile that filled his face with joy and large, brilliant teeth. “What luck! I am all alone here and would love to make friends with some Hungarian girls. Will you have a drink with me?”

“Sure,” said Gizi. “We will have a drink of you too.” She said it in such a friendly manner, it only made her glowing, satisfied demeanor more attractive.

He looked at her as if he didn't understand the last part but it didn't matter. Perhaps it was her heavily accented English. As a non-native English speaker he knew the perils of incorrect prepositions. "My name is Krishna. I am from Bombay, making my way around the world before I settle into marriage and the life of a householder."

"Of course we'll be your friends, Krishna," I said with a soothing voice. "But first we want to show you our favorite kissing place where we take all the visitors we particularly like. It is our Hungarian custom to surround a man of choice and kiss him, all at once in an out-of-the-way spot. We are famous world over for this custom. You don't mean you haven't heard of this? Girls, let's show him what I am talking about!"

We moved him into the same alley where the drained bodies of the Americans were lying, as if they were sleeping off their boozy night. The alcohol levels in their bodies must have delayed their flight into the night. In the darkness it was difficult to see the neat holes in their necks. I realized we had only so much time before they would arise to begin their own feeding rampage so we needed to work quickly. We surrounded Krishna, who was chuckling with happiness, and began closing in. "No, nobody told me about this special Hungarian custom. And I have been reading about Hungary on the Internet too. I will definitely tell my friends about this when I get home."

We squeezed him between us like four boa constrictors working in unison until he lost consciousness. Then each of us took delicate sips from the incisions that I made in his neck.

“Mmmm,” purred Gizi. “I like his flavor. I think I taste cumin and cinnamon.” She held his blood in a trough-like hollow in her tongue in the manner of a wine taster.

“I taste cardamom,” said Kati, smacking her lips to more closely determine the flavors.

“Though he’s thin, at least he’s not drunk, so his blood is not diluted with alcohol, which is rare for us these days,” I said. “I like his spiciness. I think I taste a hint of saffron. I’d go for another Indian any day, even if I had to get two to satisfy the quantity of blood I need. But Indian tourists aren’t that common here in Sopron, or in Hungary in general. We just got lucky tonight. I think we need to re-evaluate. There’s nothing wrong with good old Hungarian blood. And tomorrow night, when we go to Club Colosso, that may be all that will be available to us.”

“I still like Americans the best,” declared Eszti. “Maybe there will be a few American tourists at the Colosso tomorrow night. I want to try at least one more before restricting myself to our native fare.”

Bloodmeal at the Colosso

Before my vampyrhood, I was rarely out at night. I had no occasion or desire to go to the clubs and restricted myself to visits with my female friends, or doing my genome research in the lab, or studying. Now I was out there, fiercer than any Goth club kid and far more ruthless. I found it touching when all four of us entered the door of the club, to the pounding of the music, that some club-goers were dressed as mock vampyrs, with white makeup, black eyeliner, and black lips, multiple piercings, and capes. “You innocent children!” I thought. “If you only knew what the reality was, the fantasy would lose its appeal! You think playing the undead is a fascinating sport. If you had to live through the truth of it instead of the masked-ball imitation, you would realize this is not fun.

“It is no fun to be at the mercy of a compulsion over which you are powerless! Tonight I will be forced to act out my drives once again. You will go home to your warm beds to sleep and reawaken refreshed. I will go home with part of my mind ashamed of the havoc I have wreaked. I will lie to my parents, lie to my friends, and live a completely double life. I will not awaken refreshed. I will awaken to know that the craving will boil up within me once again. Once again I will have the occasion to create a memory that will cause me nothing but helpless remorse in

my reflective moments during the daylight. Then I will go out and do it again and again!

“I don’t want to disrespect your interest in the Gothic world, the antithesis of all that is cheerily banal, chatty, and forcedly sunny. The blonde, wholesome world of materialistic optimism does have its cloying characteristics and I understand why you react against it. But please try to understand the reality that your applied blood-makeup and ravaged demeanor represents. It represents personal torture. If you care at all about inflicting human suffering, you would re-evaluate your style. It’s not cool to be a perpetual bloodsucking machine!

“Better to go to a club dressed as an axe murderer. In actuality, the axe murderer inflicts a kinder cut than I. For he kills his victim outright, releasing him or her to the resting place of eternal peace from which so many have returned to tell of unmitigated bliss. But I send a demonic force into the world by recreating the vampyric scourge, endlessly and exponentially. My victims are never given the rest of eternal union with the Divine Source. They are instead forced to wander in an endless exile of craving and satiation, destruction and painful immortality.”

These were some of the thoughts I was thinking as we entered the throbbing room, full of pulsating bodies dressed in all manner of attire. Some of the clubgoers were almost completely naked, spurring

an interest in all four of us beyond the merely sexual. It was like a giant restaurant to us, whose menu contained a variety of human offerings. Gizi's eyes were glittering. It was 11:30 and approaching feeding time. I watched as she stared at the gyrating body of a muscular male. He looked like a bodybuilder and would be difficult to subdue. She might need our help. His neck looked too muscular and not tender enough.

“No, Gizi,” I said. “I can see what you're thinking. You're practically drooling. Let's pick an easier target. Just because he is beautiful on the outside doesn't mean his blood is any better than the homeliest person's on the dance floor. For example, look at that soft, weak-looking specimen over there. He's pale and formless. His face almost disappears into his neck, it is so amorphous. Yet, he'd be a much easier target for our purposes. All human blood is simply made up of red cells, white cells, platelets, and plasma. That's it! Granted, different people have different flavors, but the basic nutrients are the same. Why bore your fangs through a sinewy neck and subdue a tough muscleman when a pliant, giving neck offers the same benefits? For our purposes, the human exterior, skin and muscles are mere casements, or containers for the fluids we crave.”

“I've always liked the more challenging men,” shouted Gizi, projecting her voice above the pounding bass from the nearby speakers. “I might try him anyway. Also, why do I have to share him

with anyone? I want him all to myself.” She pulled down her silver scarf to reveal her generous breasts for which Hungarian women are world famous. Her waist was small, in spite of her heretofore rich diet, creating a silhouette reminiscent of 19th century voluptuousness. Now that her meals consisted mostly of blood, her waist was even more defined than before. Her white satin sheath hugged her body and appeared fluorescent purple under the black lights. She would have no trouble at all tonight snagging any prey she chose.

I commented to myself that she was courageous to wear so much white and silver, considering the possibility of spillage and staining. I had chosen a discreet black dress, low cut to allow for quick cleanup, like a vulture, whose face and neck is completely devoid of feathers. Nature was wise in the vulture’s effective design. The vulture can stick his neck into the viscous bowels of his prey without saturating his feathers with blood and thus take off at a moment’s notice with dry feathers, should any threat arise.

Kati and Eszti were dressed a bit more practically. Both wore black leather mini skirts, as if they had planned to look alike. I was surprised their parents let them go out like that, but they were wearing sweaters and coats to cover up before they left the house. Kati’s black baby T-shirt had “Out for Blood,” in English, scrawled across its front in bright red. It was torn in strategic places and made her look much tougher than she was in reality.

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Eszti's extremely tight red T-shirt had "New Blood" written in tiny pink letters, also in English, across her chest that forced one to get in close to read them. This was good thinking. Like the carnivorous sundew, she could lure her prey in close for a more precise incision.

"Really, Gizi," shouted Kati, watching the writhing hips of the muscleman. "Why don't you want to share him? It's like hogging a whole box of chocolates all yourself. You know you won't be able to finish him and to leave him half drained would be a total waste. I thought we agreed about not wasting last night. But, do what you want. There are so many here to choose from! I like that tattooed guy over there."

"He looks like an American to me," remarked Eszti. "He has that happy, rounded look. It's hard for me to describe, but he has that super confident look of the American who has never lived through any deprivation, grew up drinking lots of milk and eating beef, thinks simple thoughts about his next Rolex or his next SUV, and has the undying belief in a future of unlimited consumerism. I think he's cute. Kati, let me have him, OK? Or, we could share, because he is rather big. I love the snake tattooed on his neck!"

At that moment, the air seemed to be supercharged with electricity, unaccounted for by the swirling lights and relentless music. Zoltán Szabó had entered the room. Kati looked paralyzed as the

strobe lights froze her open-mouthed stare. Eszti too, stood in focused silence. They moved close together and held onto each other, their cheeks against one another, as if they were staring into the mouth of a flaring volcano.

Zoltán was with Gizi and Eszti's brother András, a bookish lad, whom I have always liked. The sisters had asked Kati and me not to feed on András and to leave him to his placid, scholarly existence. This was no problem for me at all. He was never an attractive guy, small, undernourished looking, with a hawk-like nose and a tiny down-turned mouth set in a bony jaw—but he was rightly known for his intellect. He and I had had many debates on genetic engineering and ethics, usually resulting in an impasse. He proposed that genetic engineering was the salvation of the future, bringing the possible elimination of all the diseases that plague mankind. I saw it as a chance for the power-hungry global corporate establishment to gain control over the lives of countless earth-dwellers and force them into dependency.

He should only know the current state of my ethics! What ethics? To have ethics means you are motivated by concepts of right or wrong. Ethics is a system of moral principles that govern conduct. Even intellectual abstraction could not rationalize my new ethics, which were simply: Use people to satisfy one's desires, regardless of the victims' pain and suffering.

“My God!” shouted Kati just as Omega-három stepped onto the stage. “Have you ever seen anything more gorgeous?” We looked at the pale, etched faces of the musicians, who appeared bloodless and gloomy. “No! I mean Zoltán, you fools! I have never seen anything like him and probably never will. Let’s steer clear of him when it comes to our usual activities. Both he and András will be off limits. What do you say, girls? We can dance with them, but that’s all. No breaking and entering—breaking the skin and entering with our fangs.” Her ingenuous laugh was disturbing, considering the subject of her pun.

Gizi, who was still transfixed by the glistening muscles of her prospective bloodmeal, muttered her assent, though she was obviously distracted. Zoltán did not hold the same sway over her as he did over her younger sister and Kati. Nor was I such an obvious fan, though I agreed with Kati and Eszti, only because I saw that there were so many bodies from which to choose. I didn’t want to make my friends angry with me by forcing the issue.

Technically, to vampyrs, no one is off limits. We do not abstain just because the human we have selected for consumption has great potential for goodness or is particularly sympathetic, altruistic, talented, or beneficial to humanity. Just as blood is blood, so the source of the blood makes no difference to the true vampyr, whether it is pumped through a heart full of malice or full of loving-kindness.

It would be impractical if we had a scale of values from which we made our decisions about whom to prey upon. Thus we have evolved to consume all humans on an equal-opportunity basis. Beethoven would be on a par with the lowliest street cleaner from a vampyr's point of view. Though not particularly proud of it, vampyrs are truly democratic.

“Girls, I will agree this once on not imbibing András's or Zoltán's blood, just as I won't prey on your parents. And I expect you to agree to not victimizing mine. But I want you to realize that, in general, we cannot make such fine distinctions. Not only may we not, we simply cannot. Do you think we have control over our desires under our current life conditions? We do not have free will to pick and choose on the basis of character. Don't you realize this is part of the hell we must live through—facing the damage we create through our uncontrollable fiendishness? That is our destiny, not cautiously selecting from amongst earth's creatures to feast only on the criminal and earth's detractors. If this were the case, vampyrs would be elevated to the status of heroes and would join the forces of good to eliminate all the evil denizens of this planet. Instead, we are forces of evil, dedicated to destruction and suffering. Do not be in denial about this.”

I was surprised that Kati, Eszti, and Gizi could hear me. The music was increasing in volume and I was almost hoarse with shouting. But they did hear me.

Kati said, with a smirk, “Thanks a lot, Emma, for getting us all involved in this lifestyle we never would have chosen on our own. I didn’t want to be a ‘force of evil,’ as you say. Now it looks like I’m stuck with being one for eternity!” Gizi and Eszti also shot me hurt looks.

“I apologize,” I said, realizing how insincere I sounded, shouting over the band’s cover of ELO’s “Evil Woman.” As I listened to the lyrics, I did start to feel sad about the predicament I had gotten my friends into. Here I was, giving directions. Bossing them around, imperiously and relentlessly coaching them on being the best vampyrs they could be. Yes, I felt bad about it. But I could not stop it. As we danced in silence, we listened to Jeff Lynne’s words, so appropriate to my condition: “Hey woman, you got the blues, cos you ain’t got no one else to use You took my body and played to win E-evil woman, e-evil woman, e-evil woman, evil woman.”

I was feeling miserable about it all. Kati, Gizi, and Eszti lost their glow too. Then we saw Zoltán approach us. He walked with a straight gait and I could see for the first time why my friends were fascinated by him. He had a presence. An inner stillness radiated from him. I remember thinking, “This is a man who knows his mission in life and seems wise without even opening his mouth.” The undulating bodies of the surrounding dancing men seemed like paper dolls flapping in the wind compared to the palpable solidity of this man.

I looked into his green, Slavic eyes with their slanting eyebrows. I felt a hum in the air as when two harmonic notes meet and create a buzzing vibration. His slanting, straight nose was slightly asymmetrical. His full lips covered a mouth full of large, strong teeth. But it was his neck I was interested in. I was drawn to it out of proportion to the demands of the moment. I wanted him. I wanted him for myself.

At first I thought I wanted him to be my nightly meal and that this was the source of the lust that was stirring within so hotly, I began to sweat. But I could also feel something stronger. Indeed, I could have any of these nighttime revelers for my dinner if I were just “out for blood,” as Kati’s T-shirt suggested. No, there was something that made me feel sympathy towards this man and I didn’t want to hurt him. Moreover, I didn’t want any of The Undead to prey on him. Yes, I know we all pledged that we would not suck the blood from him, András, or any of our parents. But in a moment of hungry weakness, I know our evil natures could prevail and we might welcome the opportunity to plunge our fangs into the blue-veined neck of Zoltán Szabó, to lap our fill through grinning lips, only to say afterwards that we couldn’t help ourselves.

Zoltán and András said their hellos to the group and chose to remain silent amidst the progressive crescendos of the band as they sang, “Ha ha woman what you gonna do, You destroyed all the virtues that the lord gave you, Its so good that you’re

feeling pain. . . .” Zoltán and I stood together for a moment. I could feel his aura of warmth and light. Then, softly, he touched my shoulder and I could feel the heat of his hand penetrating the thin silk of my sleeve. He started dancing with me, taking both my hands and moving them in time with his hips. Gizi moved off, slowly rotating her hips as she walked towards her chosen morsel of male flesh. He was moving towards her as well, thrusting his hips forward, simulating copulation. They were staring at each other magnetically, like cats staring at birds before pouncing. In reality, she was the cat and he was the bird and it would never be the other way around.

Zoltán and I were moving with the irregular beat of a riff based on “Sunday, Bloody Sunday.” I could see Eszti and Kati gazing at us with longing. They were the ones who adored him and I was the indifferent one. How did I get to be the one to dance with him, while they waited on the sidelines? I was feeling uncomfortable about the whole situation. Feeding time was drawing near too. Zoltán’s neck looked entirely too inviting. All I could do was fixate on it instead of looking into his eyes or at his face. It was a sensitive-looking neck, whose blue veins and Adam’s apple formed the only textures in its otherwise smooth surface. It looked like it would be easy to assault, not like that wall of muscles Gizi so foolishly insisted upon.

I moved my eyes away. “I’ve got to go now, Zoltán. Please come and visit me tomorrow, around three in

the afternoon. It will be quiet then and we can talk. I'm interested in your studies and want to discuss some matters about immunogenomics. There's no point in trying to discuss anything here."

I would attempt to be awake by 3:00 PM, as I was finding it more and more difficult to stay awake during the daytime after my all-night activities. I wanted to see him again and talk to him. This unholy preoccupation with nothing except blood and vampyrism was wearing me down. I needed some conversation in my life that wasn't about techniques of siphoning blood or the merits of dark haired people's blood over blondes'. My erratic hours were interfering with the chats I used to have with my father and when we did talk, I was distracted by the pulse-pounding shame of my deception. My mother, too, was looking at me with concern because of my diminished appetite at the dinner table. It would put their minds at rest if they saw I had a male caller and was fitting into a healthy pattern of behavior. Perhaps they would impute my newly strange behavior to being in love.

I then rushed from Zoltán's side. I ran to Eszti and Kati, who were looking almost transparently pale. "We've got to get started with replenishing our fluid now! Are you going to take the tattooed 'American,' if that is what he really is? I'll help Gizi with Charles Atlas over there. He looks like a veritable fountain of hemoglobinal delight. I just want to warn you that if yours is an American, his blood may be full of cholesterol."

“Oh, stop it,” laughed Kati. “Didn’t you give us a lecture on the topic of ‘blood is blood?’ What’s up?”

“I was oversimplifying,” I said. “All blood is made up of the same basic components. But you can have foreign objects floating around in it like cholesterol and viruses. For example, a well-fed polar bear's blood has 10 times more omega-3 fatty acid than a fasting bear that has no access to seals. Seals are a rich source of omega-3 fatty acids, which reduce cholesterol in the blood stream. Blood taken from polar bears during the seal-free season showed levels of cholesterol nearly 25 percent higher than blood taken while the bears had plenty of seal blubber to eat.”

“Wow, this is great,” drawled Eszti. “Our first night out at a club, with the possibility of snagging an American, and all you can talk about is seal blubber and polar bears.”

“All I meant was that this American might have been living off of what they call ‘fast foods’ for most of his life, rendering his blood high in cholesterol. We dined on Americans last night and the accumulated cholesterol could be harmful to your health. But what do you care? You’re immortal anyway! Besides Hungarians, with all the pork and lard we eat, are just as bad from a cholesterol point of view. I daresay the Austrians,

with their schmaltz and whipped cream, are not much better in terms of artery-clogging fat.”

“Great,” laughed Kati, “Now we’re talking about pigs and lard, chicken fat, and cow byproducts! Emma, we’re not in studying for a biology exam right now. We’re supposed to be out having a good time, dancing, flirting, picking out our next meal, not thinking about artery-clogging fat.”

“All right then, girls,” I laughed, “I’ll try to control my comments about health and nutrition, as they do seem paradoxical in our case. Let’s plan our attack. We must be as discreet as possible. Here’s what I suggest,” I shouted above the music. The crowd was now dancing in unison with hands above heads like riders on the roller coaster at Tivoli. My friends could barely hear me. “Kati and Eszti, you surround the American and dance him off to that dark niche in the right-side room to the back. I’ve noticed that is where the couples go for whatever privacy can be had in such a place. I have been watching that spot since we arrived. Few people will see us. And if they do, it will look like two enamored ladies and an adventurous American with skin as colorful as our native embroidery. That is why Americans come to Europe. To experience something outside of their ordinary lives and no one will think anything of it except how cool it is.”

“This will be out of the ordinary, all right,” rejoined Eszti. “But I do love my Americans and can’t seem to get enough of them at this point! My mouth is

Predatoress

watering like it never has before, even for our mother's cseresznyés rétes, whose bright cherries have their own bloodlike appeal at this point in my feeding cycle."

She was referring to her favorite cherry strudel for which Mrs. Kovács was well known. It was a sad commentary that all she could see now was the comparison of ripe cherries to rich blood. She was becoming more and more like me, drawing as many comparisons of everything deep red to the object of our craving. Red, in whatever form it took, always reminded us of blood. Again I was struck with something akin to guilt. What had I done to these girls? I felt I must facilitate this evening's success to make up for the mischief I have created in their lives.

"Act like both of you can resist him no longer and must smother him with kisses out of sexual desperation, as they do in the Italian films. Tell him you want to give him 'hickies' as souvenirs of his stay in Sopron. Americans love 'hickies,' or love bites, I hear. Then, insert your incisors into him on both sides of his neck. People will think he is howling in bliss, if anyone can hear him at all. Begin drinking his blood immediately so there won't be a sloppy mess on your face, clothes, or floor."

I surprised myself with my knowledge of sexual behavior, including love bites, considering I had no experience and have never received or given an

erotic kiss in my life. I had seen some of Fellini's films and thought I could extrapolate from them.

Eszti and Kati seemed to be happy with the plan and both made off for the colorful Yankee, hand in hand, with renewed zest, whirling their hips to the beat of the music. He looked up with amusement as he watched the girls approach. Things were under control there. Now it was time for me to assist Gizi in bringing down her quarry. Hers was no wounded wildebeest playing out his last days on the savannas of Africa. He was much farther up on the food chain and in full-blooded health. We would have to count on the element of surprise to have our way with him. I could also see that Gizi did not want to share the wealth and had designs on keeping him all to herself. Though I loved her, I would have to teach her a lesson in manners too. Kati is not the only one who needed correction. Gizi had been able to get away with far too much through simply being gorgeous.

Because the girls were new at it, they were still fascinated by the exteriors of their prey. I knew that would soon fall away. Experienced vampyrs don't care about such frivolities. They are interested in what is inside, not the gift-wrapping. In this sense they are like the holiest of saints, caring nothing for the cover and only caring for the essence beneath the surface. Like Mother Theresa, who saw only the Christ within the leper and pariah, I sought only the holy fluid of life itself under the outer form. You might ask, how does she dare compare herself to

Mother Theresa, who lived to save lives, while she lived to destroy them? As you can see, I am still trying to justify my way of life and present myself in a favorable light to you, Dear Reader.

“Gizi,” I said to her as I grasped her arm and looked into her eyes, “Snap out of your trance! It’s time to put a game plan into effect.”

“Emmushka, Emmushka, Emmushka,” said Gizi, in her husky, lazy voice, “You are far too bossy. We’re out here tonight to have fun and enjoy ourselves. This is not a military drill, with your game plans and such! I’ll admit I am game to taste that luscious morsel of man meat, but to turn every feeding session into a boot camp, with you as sergeant calling out orders, is not how I want to go about it.”

“I just don’t want any of us to botch the job and call unwanted attention to ourselves. Do you really think you can take that pulsating mass of muscles down all by yourself?” I asked, searching her eyes for consciousness. She seemed so dreamy tonight and distracted. I wondered why I ever thought it was a good idea for all of us to go out together.

More and more I was becoming convinced that we should all operate solo. Why did I think I had to manage my friends’ hunting trips? Was I feeling the growing sense of responsibility that I had indeed turned them into the ravenous and indiscreet creatures they are now? Technically, vampyrs

don't feel guilt. Yet my remaining human side felt responsible. Hovering over them wasn't going to help, though. It was too late. Now they had the same basic vampyric nature as mine, whose necessity would find its own avenues and strategies. I should stop micromanaging their forays. I would relax, and just take care of my own concerns, in the future. But since we were all here tonight as a group, I would oversee the operations for one last time because it appeared they could go awry at any moment.

"I'll admit I have been overbearing, Gizi, but just this once, let's join forces and together take care of that juicy hunk of hemoglobin, in whose plasma satisfying red and white cells that we crave, are suspended. After that, I won't interfere in your excursions any more," I said. How long have I been talking to myself about going it alone? I don't understand why I continued to insist that blood sucking was a social occasion. It was not. Vampyrs were not meant for the warmth of friendship and sharing. It is logical, for vampyrs to be cold, secretive, and independent.

Gizi looked into my face with an excited glint in the depth of her eyes and complimented me on my descriptive abilities. I like your alliteration: "hunk of hemoglobin." How about this one, "succulent sack of sanguinity?" In spite of her attempts at humor, I could see that her face was growing ashen from incipient bloodlessness. The time was coming for us to deploy.

She said, “I can barely hold myself back. Look at that pulse in his neck. I could just swallow him whole, he’s so luscious. Let’s take him to the back room and join Kati and Eszti.”

At first I didn’t think this was a good idea. I didn’t want Zoltán and András to see any of us writhing all over these guys in such a public spot, not that they were liable to frequent the back room. Also, it might look suspicious to have four women passionately kissing and nibbling on two guys at the same time. On the other hand, the crowd was becoming more intoxicated and might think this added to the ambience of Another Crazy Hungarian Night. Also, people were too involved in their own pleasure seeking to be judgmental about others, or even to notice, in some cases. “All right, Gizi. You do the talking, as he already seems to be intrigued by you. I will just be quiet and look for the right entrée for inserting our fangs. You’ll take the first bite. I will quickly follow suit before he knows what’s happening, and that will be that. Then we will all leave before it looks too obvious that the bodies are out cold.”

Gizi walked languorously towards our mark. This was going to be easier than I thought. He turned away from the cat-like woman with whom he was dancing and began moving to the music with Gizi. He was allowing her to move in close and graze his neck with her lips. She had wrapped her scarf around her waist, accentuating its curved indented smoothness, and then around his, so they were tied

together. This was a good move to ensure that he could not escape too easily. I wouldn't have thought of that and mentally congratulated her. I could see that she was perfectly capable of managing him herself, regardless of his size and strength. Her breasts bobbed like white balloons as she shook her shoulders to the rhythm of the music. "This is my friend Emma," she said, pulling me in close with her arm over my shoulders. "We share everything. When I find someone as remarkable as you, I don't want to keep him to myself. Somehow the pleasure is deeper knowing that she is experiencing it too. Is it all right if she dances with us?"

"Ich kam innen aus Wien und kenne nicht Ungarn, also verstehe ich nicht ein Wort, das Sie sagen," said the platelet-packed dream.

"Oh, he's Viennese," exclaimed Gizi, knowing he couldn't understand. "We already dined on them last night, so this beauty's flavor shouldn't be different. I was hoping I'd be able to speak to him in Hungarian, but he said he doesn't understand a word I said. Maybe it's not necessary to speak at all. It might be even better. Just come in close and start kissing him on the left side of his face, while I take the right."

I moved in and placed a kiss on the left corner of his mouth. He smelled delicious, like the pickling spices for sauerbraten mingled with rich dark beer. He smiled down at me and I could see the light shining through his thick brown eyelashes. His blue

eyes radiated with happiness at his good fortune. What luck to encounter two beauties, forced to remain silent due to the language differences, capable of communicating only through their bodies.

Gizi looked into his eyes hypnotically, linked her arm in his, and led him gently away. I entwined my arm with his as well, as we led him to the more secluded room towards the back of the club. In the corner, we could see the black leather mini skirts of Eszti and Kati moving rhythmically over the half-seated, half reclined body of the tattooed American. I could see that the American was already unconscious. He had a detailed drawing of a coiling cobra on his neck.

Kati had neatly inserted her fangs into its eyes. “Well done,” I thought. “This was the sloppy Kati whom I thought would never learn vampire etiquette, and look at her precision now! No one would even guess that the red parts of the cobra’s pupils are really the holes she drilled and not the handiwork of the tattoo artist.”

Eszti too, looked quite competent, and not in need of any guidance from me. She had the American by the other side of his throat and was steadily sucking the blood out of a stylized spider illustration, without making a sound. The American was moaning, but already weakened and incapable of throwing the girls off, due to amount of blood loss. He sounded like a man that could be imagined to be

in the throes of intense sexual passion, as he cried out. His legs were stretched out before him, twitching a bit as his lifeblood flowed into the two women's open throats.

I wanted to make sure that we would all leave at the same time and signaled to Gizi that we had to make short work of her quarry because the other girls were almost finished. "Stop it now, Emma," said Gizi, with uncharacteristic rudeness. "I am not going to rush through this gourmet treasure, just because those two kids had a head start, have had their fill, and are now ready to call it quits."

"Really Gizi," I asked, "if we don't hurry up, how are Kati and Eszti going to justify the drained body of their victim? It will look awkward if anyone passes and looks in. They might even call emergency services. No, we must leave together. Enjoying a leisurely meal is not appropriate right now. You can do that on your own. We must attack and drain with speed so we can move on together."

As we were talking we were touching our Golden Boy playfully, holding his attention with our eyes and hands. Knowing that he could not understand a word we said, even if he could hear us, gave us a great sense of freedom.

Gizi said, "Our parents taught us not to play with our food, but I'm sure they weren't thinking of this." She smiled up at him and said, "Egyem meg a szivedet". Loosely translated, it means "I'd like to

eat your heart" which is said with great affection, usually to a small child who has done something so nice or good that it has emotionally touched an adult's heart. In this case we were both imagining the strong muscle that pumps the blood through his veins, arteries, and capillaries. How bright with healthy blood it must be. How large, clean, and healthy! Gizi slurred as she kept herself from drooling, "They say one's heart is as large as one's fist and his hands are sizeable." However, we were not interested in the actual meat of the heart itself, only the fluid that passes through it.

I put my head to his chest and heard the slow pump. He was in great condition. I estimated his heart was beating about 60 beats per minute. What were the consequences of a slow heart beat for our purposes? Would it mean that our feeding would take more time?

"Stoppen Sie, stoppen Sie! Was tun Sie?" yelled our prey with a laugh as if we were tickling him mercilessly. Gizi had already inserted her incisors into his neck and was sucking blood but must not have hurt too much. It seemed he was translating the sensation into an amusing itch instead of pain. I jumped on him in an effort to pin him down and all three of us went tumbling onto a nearby sofa. I quickly introduced my fangs to the other side of his neck. He was laughing hard by now, which facilitated the blood flow. With each guffaw the blood came spurting into our mouths and our stomachs were filling fast as we gulped it down.

His eyes fluttered and flipped up to reveal their whites as he passed out with a huge expulsion of breath. The projectile force of his blood eventually slowed down. We had to exert ourselves to extract the last drops.

I saw some admiring glances from passing males, probably wishing they were the recipients of such ardent attentions. It was late and they were going home alone. “How can some guys be so lucky? Look at that tattooed dude over there too, some guys have all the good fortune,” I heard one of them say.

Residual Corpses

All four of us walked quickly out of the club, energized by our well-chosen victuals. We didn't see Zoltán or András and did not search for them to say good-bye. Perhaps they had already gone home. I was happy to see that none of us had blood smeared on our lips or faces and our clothes were spotless, except for Eszti's T-shirt, which had some spatters on it that looked deliberate and part of the style.

The next day, however, all the local newspapers reported on the strange fate of two lifeless bodies, an American and an Austrian:

“REUTERS, Sopron, Hungary: A spokesman for the staff at the emergency room at Szent Erzsébet Hospital in Sopron, reported two males, Ralph Collins of West Milford, NJ, USA and Hans Wellhasch, Vienna, AU, had been dead on arrival at 2:30 AM Sunday morning. Coroner János Lugosi pronounced death due to extreme loss of blood. He noted that each male had two sets of incisions in their necks, reminiscent of the superstitious tales of vampires that prevailed throughout these parts in the last century. Manner of death was ruled to be homicide.

“Various other such corpses have materialized around the town of Sopron, creating a disturbance among the citizens and a challenge to the police. Further challenges arose when the bodies went missing from the morgue. If anyone has information about the whereabouts of these two bodies, please contact the Sopron Police Department. At this time it is believed that the bodies were stolen by the perpetrators to elude detection. However, no witnesses saw any unauthorized personnel at the morgue, which requires special security clearance for admittance.

“Club-goers at the Colosso are being questioned for any information they might provide to resolve this case.”

My mother and father approached me at the breakfast table with this news.

“Emma,” my father said, “We don’t want you going out to those clubs for a while. Weren’t you, Kati, and the girls at the very club they are discussing in this article? Look at this.”

He pushed the Sopron paper, *Nyugati Kapu*, across the table towards me. I could see the photo of the body bags of the two DOA corpses. They seemed so shrunken compared to the size of the living men.

“Papa,” said I, “It’s a coincidence. Just because we happened to be at Club Colosso and something happened there doesn’t mean we can never go out again. We’re young and want to have some fun. We can take care of ourselves and each other.”

My mother, with lines of concern etched in her face, said, “You can take care of yourselves better than two strong men, an American and an Austrian? Let’s be realistic Emmushka! What can you do to defend yourself? The world is a perilous place and you don’t realize it!”

My father added, “Emma, your mother and I are concerned. We don’t understand this sudden club business. We think you’ve been hanging around with that Kati too much and I’ve told you that it’s a waste of time. What are her plans for life? Does she have any other goals than finding the next amusement? What about those girls? What are they doing with their lives? Do they take their studies seriously? I doubt it! I am not happy that you are taking time away from your scholarly pursuits and spending time in such dangerous places. These girls are not a good influence on you I can see.”

“Yes, Emmushka,” said my mother sorrowfully. “And I don’t like the way you have been looking since you have been staying out so late. You are obviously run down. Look at yourself in the mirror. Look at your pallor! Don’t forget, you have opportunities your father and I never had. Soon you

will be starting at the university. Don't throw your life away by going with the wrong crowd."

They came over to hug me and to move towards our large, oval mirror near the living room door. It was a family ritual to stand in front of it together and reflect on ourselves as a happy family, picking out my facial features that resembled my parents', dreaming about the future, remembering the past. But, as you know, vampyrs cannot see themselves, or be seen in a mirror. So I had to avoid being near any reflective surfaces when around my parents, from then on.

It was also ironic that my parents were accusing my innocent friends of corrupting me, when you know I was the disastrous cause of their moral downfall. Here were my dear parents and I was lying to them once again. "I'll be more careful," I said. "Don't worry so much about me. I love my studies and I want to make you proud. Don't begrudge me a little light-hearted fun. Have I done anything to disgrace you? No! I think you should have more faith in me than you have. I am not a baby any more."

"You'll always be our baby," my mother said, sadly and full of heart. She cradled my head, pressed it to her shoulder, and gave me a hug and kiss. My father patted my arm. I had never spoken to them so defensively before. I could see they were puzzled by this and by my sudden interest in "light-hearted fun."

If they had only known what I was and what I have done, they might have thrown me into the street that minute. The many lies I have told, since my condition took hold. They had never tolerated lying and I never really wanted to lie to them. They were my best friends in the world and had been nothing but good to me. But no, they would not have thrown me into the street. They would feel infinite pity for me, and crashing disappointment about their hopes for my future. I smiled at them and changed the subject. “Today Zoltán Szabó will be paying me a visit at 3:00. I want to discuss my genetic engineering project with him.”

“Now that is a young man with a future,” said my father, approvingly. “Emma darling, is this why you have been acting a little strangely? Your mother and I have conjectured that you might be experiencing first love.”

My mother smiled wistfully. “Emma it might be time for your father and I to explain some things. Sometimes what we feel is love, is merely our biological drive to reproduce ourselves.”

I felt myself blush, giving a lavender tinge to my bluish pallor. Actually, I did not need an explanation of the mating dance. I had learned all about it in biology class and in my own readings. It felt uncomfortable because we did not discuss physical matters in the household. We observed the culturally sanctioned reticence about discussing

such matters between the generations. It felt strange and awkward.

I laughed and said with uncharacteristic irritation, “I just want to have some conversation with Zoltán. Let’s not make more out of it than that. I don’t need to hear a lecture on the reproductive cycle. I have already studied about it in school and independently. This is silly. I don’t want to hear about how the sperm meets the egg and all that mechanical activity! Our meeting is for a simple talk! That’s all! We’ll discuss immunogenomics, which I have explained to you Mother, is the genomic and bioinformatics approach to immunology! OK?”

My father’s eyes were twinkling and filling with tears of happiness. “I think our little kitten is in love. Why else would she be acting so peculiar? Well, well. Such a simple question and look at her coloring. It’s all right, Emmushka. Being in love is a good thing. Look at your mother and me. We love each other more, after all these years of being together. And sex between loving adults is not a bad thing either. We just don’t want you to spoil your future by getting pregnant before you establish your career.”

“Really, Papa, this is getting too far out of hand. I only want to ask Zoltán a few questions about molecular genetics. It does not logically follow that I will then get pregnant and ruin my future career. I’m sure he’d have a big laugh if he heard this conversation we’re having!”

Predatoress

My parents looked so lovingly innocent, I could barely hold back my tears. They had done nothing to deserve this kind of predatory fiend as a daughter. For that matter, I had done nothing to deserve my fate as a predatoress either.

Naively, they were worried that I would be overwhelmed by sexual passion, resulting in a curtailed life and limited potential for achievement as the babies came along in unpredictable numbers. What they should have been worried about was that one night I might not be able to suppress my desire to sup on their blood too. They were so convenient. It took much discipline on my part not to use them as a source of my sustenance: The very bodies that gave me life! To keep myself from stealing what they had freely given my whole life—food for survival, took not only my sworn agreement with my friends that relatives were off limits, but great restraint during moments of acute craving. My moral nature was standing by helplessly as I asked myself, “How much lower could I descend than incestuous vampyrism?”

Rather than worrying about my sexual desires for Zoltán, my parents needed to worry about my desire to feast on his blood as well, even though he was officially off limits too. Vampyrs use sexuality but do not feel it. More pressing needs supplant any sexual desire I might feel (though at that point I did not know what sexual desire felt like either). It is understandable. As a vampyr, I didn’t reproduce in

the mammalian fashion anyway, but by creating more vampyrs through our 550-year-old method, bypassing the reproductive tract all together. The usual 9-month gestation period was not as efficient as the almost instantaneous transmutation of human to “newborn” vampyr at specific stages of growth and maturity.

Thus, my beloved parents were in the wrong forest cutting down the wrong trees, as they worried about Zoltán and me. I was nauseated that I had to make fools out of the two people I loved most by enhancing my false innocence. My sense of doom was growing as I could see myself endlessly trapped in an eternity not of my own choosing. I was unhappily unable to control the impulses of my new identity, yet struggled to master their loveless devastation.

The Arsenal of the Government

The ringing telephone concluded my troubling contemplation of my parents. It was Kati.

“Emma, this is serious. The police have been over to my house already, asking me questions. Someone who knew me from school said they thought they saw me with the American last night at Club Colosso. I’m scared. They are questioning as many people as they can about what happened last night. How did we think we could get away with this?”

“How did we think we could get away with any of it? Now, calm down and let me think. Did they know I was there too?” I asked in a whisper.

I could hear a slight tremor in Kati’s voice: “I’m not sure, but they showed me a list of people they were going to interview. András was on it. Of course, being completely honest, he will tell about all four of us being there. What does he have to hide and what does he think we have to hide?”

At that point I heard loud pounding on our door. My father went to answer it.

He came over to me with a disturbed and dark look on his face. “Emma, the police want to talk to you about what went on at the club last night. You see, Emma, this is what comes from wasting your time

with such foolish stuff as the Eurotrash hangouts where they take drugs and other garbage. Stop this nonsense now! Your mother can't take this much longer. I want you to promise me, no more clubs!" He left me to get coffee for our uniformed visitors.

"Kati, I've got to go. The police are here now. Let's make sure we all keep our stories straight. Yes, we were there. No, we did not know anything about Ralph's or Hans' corpses or their disappearance from the morgue later on. Call Gizi and Eszti and tell them to stick with this story. The police can't prove anything. The corpses are missing. They did not collect any DNA samples of our saliva on the wounds in their necks, or at least they didn't mention it in the paper. Besides, our DNA is not on file and even if they sample our DNA, it doesn't prove we were the cause of their disappearance. I don't think they had time to autopsy them before they flew off into the night. So if there is any evidence against us, such as eyewitness testimony, it is strictly circumstantial. They cannot prove that we were the cause of death, even if we were seen sprawled on top of the men. It is difficult to prove homicide without the bodies. Also, they cannot implicate us in the disappearance of the corpses from the morgue. Those guys left of their own accord, as newly emerged vampyrs. Kati, I've got to go. Please call the girls now."

I could think of better ways of spending Sunday morning than talking about morgues and facing the police. Most of all I wanted to sleep so badly, my

body felt like it was filled with a mixture of hardening cement and superglue, rigid, propelled forward by the sheer power of my will.

I rushed into the kitchen, where my father was adding milk to one of the policeman's coffee. Two portly officers were standing near the table where we just breakfasted. This was not the kind of company we were used to in our household. I felt even more sick to my stomach as I prepared for the next series of lies.

"Emma," said my father, darkly, "This is Sergeant Tarján and Detective Kohut. Please tell them everything you know about the horrendous situation at that nightclub place. I explained to Sergeant Tarjan that you are not in the habit of frequenting such places and it was your first time there; that you are a good girl and your school record is spotless. I told them that Police Captain Básti, my friend from my university days, thinks of you as one of his own. He's known you since you were four years old. He taught you how to play ugróiskola on the pavement outside of our compound." The expression of sadness on my father's face made me feel tight in the throat.

He looked at the police officers and said, "Sergeant Tarján and Detective Kohut, I want you to know that Emma's mother and I are not happy that she chose to spend last night frittering away her time on activities that will be of no benefit to her. We are not happy with her frivolous companionship and are

very upset that she placed herself in a situation that could have been dangerous or fatal.”

“Papa, please,” I said, with embarrassment, “I went to the nightclub for a few hours with my girlfriends. That’s all that happened. The place was so crowded and smoky it was hard to see what was happening. We danced a few dances and then we left.” I began to cry, which only constricted my throat further.

“Miss Gábor,” said Detective Kohut in a compassionate tone, “I know this is difficult for you, but try to remember if you saw any unusual activity that night. The victims had small holes in their necks. Did anyone try to get too close to you or force themselves on you in any way?”

Ignoring my queasiness, I replied, “No, I read about those holes in the neck and no, I didn’t see anything too strange. The place was crowded and smoky. Wait a minute. There was a man who tried to dance too closely with me. He was wearing that Goth makeup that has been so popular with certain kids who rebel against their parents. He tried to pull me towards him without even an introduction. He was dressed in a black suit with a black shirt and tie. His preternaturally white skin shone in contrast. His black lipstick and nails looked ugly and frightening.

“I’m not used to people dancing roughly with me, or dancing with me at all. I walked away. He disappeared into the crowd and I never saw him again. I think I agree with my parents after all. I

don't want to go to the clubs any more. I can see the potential for trouble. And this has turned into a nightmare. A few hours of supposed fun aren't worth it."

"Thank you, Miss Gábor," said Detective Kohut, genially. I studied the detectives as they looked at each other. Their faces revealed no emotion or cognition except perplexity.

"We have no further questions," said Sergeant Tarján. They shook my father's hands, bowed to me, and left. I didn't feel good about how that interview went. I should have kept my mouth shut. That was a stupid story about the Goth-vampire in the black suit. It seemed suspicious, as if I were trying to put them off my scent. How idiotic of me! Besides, how would one Goth kid account for four sets of holes in the victims' necks? I hope the other girls don't run off at the mouth as I had just done. The police could inquire of other people who were at the club that night if they saw this Goth Boy. Of course they would say they hadn't. Even my friends would say they hadn't seen him. I had just made it up on the spot. How were they to know?

This was ridiculous. I told Kati to keep quiet and I'm the one blabbering without thinking ahead. My exhaustion was dampening my logic. My vampyric circadian rhythms were out of whack. Vampyrs are not meant to be up and about during the day. I was forcing myself to stay awake so I could fit into our family routine without arousing

suspicion. But these long nights and forced days were taking their toll. The discomfort was intense and every muscle and bone ached.

I ran past my mother, who looked at me with uncomprehending alarm. I entered my room, pulled the heavy dark green curtains, set the alarm for 2:30 PM, and threw myself onto the floor, where I descended the steps to merciful black sleep for a few hours before Zoltán's arrival.

Zoltán and the Rife

The alarm clock's jagged ring jarred through the viscous fog in my brain. I struggled towards consciousness. Vampyrs, as I have mentioned, are meant to sleep all day and only come out at night. The sharp morning sun is painful to the vampyr's eyes and even to our bodies. Usually vampyrs feel most comfortable sleeping in coffins buried in the cool ground, but I wouldn't dare insist on doing something obviously bizarre like that. It would horrify my already mystified family and they would think I had completely lost my mind. I chose to sleep on the floor, which was closer to the earth than my fluffy bed. This I knew was eccentric but excusable, owing to the deep exhaustion my parents knew I was going through. They had been watching over me as I slept. Both were looking at me with misgivings in their eyes.

And who could blame them? I had gone, in a matter of a few days, from being a studious, stay-at-home, obedient girl to someone who stayed out all night. Their misgiving would turn to horror and grief if they knew I had to restrain myself from dining on them and that I wanted to sleep in a coffin buried in dirt! That kind of behavior would be labeled as insane. They might think the best thing for me would be a short stay at Erzsébet Kórház's Mental Wing.

Hungarian mental institutions are not to my liking, even though they'd be an ideally captive source of food for any vampyr. Vampyr cannot be imprisoned but I still wanted to stay with my parents and preserve any bit of love and humanity that was possible. I made a mental note that I would sleep in my bed even though a coffin, preferably buried, would be the most restful.

Legend has it that vampyrs must sleep buried in their native soil. Through the centuries it changed a bit. Now, as long as vampyrs are near their native soil, they will sleep in peace. If they travel to a foreign land, they must bring their native soil with them, or they will have no possibility of rest.

But let me stop rambling on about coffins, soil, and sleep. Zoltán had arrived and I needed to get myself freshened up. My breath had a decaying meat odor to it and I needed to use half the bottle of mint extract to neutralize it. This is one of the problems of vampyrhood; the blood byproducts flavored the breath most unfavorably to the human sense of smell. I also applied color to my cheeks, which were paper white at this time.

I entered the living room where my mother and Zoltán were sitting on the large leather ottoman in the middle of the room. My mother had placed a tray of tea and her somloi galuska in front of them on the low coffee table. She had cut my one-time favorite light, airy cake into small squares and topped them with whipped cream. My mother had

gone through some trouble to please our guest. I could see she liked him. She had her hand on his arm and was speaking to him in a confidential tone.

“Emma is such a good girl. Her father and I have high hopes for her achievement in molecular genetics. You probably know that she wants to apply this to forestry and the biodiversity of trees. You’re in molecular genetics too, aren’t you? I think Emma said you are in immunogenomics. That is a field for which her dad and I have great respect. Maybe you can influence her to settle down and fulfill the promise of her excellent mind. Recently she has started gallivanting around town with her girlfriends, wasting her intelligence on low-level amusements. Last night she was at that Club Colosso where that entire ruckus happened.”

“I was there too,” said Zoltán. He rose as I uneasily entered the cozy room. “We didn’t see anything out of the ordinary, but then András and I left after only an hour. The girls were perfectly safe when we saw them. Not to worry, Mrs. Gábor, they’re big girls now. And they have the protection of being in a group. Emma in particular has extraordinary intelligence and would not let anything or anyone get the best of her.” He said this as he looked at me and then back to my mother.

He reached for my icy hand and held it firmly for a few seconds. I sat next to him, feeling an attraction as strong as a neodymium magnet.

His smile had the effect of warming the air around us. I felt movement in my chest, like my ribcage was a harp and he was plucking my strings. The vibrations were overtaking me. He was beyond handsome, with his sensitively-crafted bone structure and piercing eyes. Why hadn't I noticed it before? Kati and Eszti had been carrying on about him for the past year and I thought they were silly. But I felt it again. The same effect as when we were at the club. It was beyond his mere physical beauty. The delicious Viennese Hans had been handsome too, but I didn't feel this same electric effect.

"I'll leave you," said my mother, taking Zoltán's hands in both of hers and looking back and forth between us with more than warranted delight. "Come back often!" Then she quietly said to me, "Emma, please eat a little bit of this cake to fill out that dress a bit. You are getting too thin!" She laughed apologetically as she looked into Zoltán's face and left the room.

Normally I would have been embarrassed and irritated by this last comment. This kind of attention to my physique would have been awkward for me in front of any guest. Because it was Zoltán, my discomfort multiplied. My mother's comment was far too personal for the purpose of this visit. But soon other sensations supplanted my self-consciousness. I was basking in an amazing sensation of excited peace as I drank in Zoltán's presence. A bubble of silence surrounded us that included only Zoltán and me in a still, timeless

universe. We looked deeply into each other's eyes and said nothing.

I broke the charm of this incredible sensation by asserting my intellect: "I asked you here to discuss some aspects of gene therapy. I know you know a lot about the potential for using genes themselves to treat disease or enhance particular traits. Isn't it true that gene therapy holds potential for curing such genetic and acquired diseases as cancers and AIDS by using normal genes to supplement or replace defective genes? Or to bolster a normal function such as immunity?" I asked, laughing slightly as I remained looking into his eyes. I felt I needed a bungee cord to hold me from falling into their depths.

"Interesting," he replied. "I like your straightforwardness. Most women would have started with a bit of small talk before they plunged into the subject of genetic engineering, if they would ever approach the subject at all. But genomes are a passion of mine."

"Genomes and blood pathogens are a passion of mine too," I said, realizing that he could never guess at how literal I was being. "I want to understand certain DNA structures for a theory I have that might solve some of the world's major health problems. This may seem off course, because as you know, my main interest is reforestation. However certain events have recently come to pass

that have spurred my interest new theories on DNA healing.”

“I too am interested in new theories—my pet theory involves the Rife microscope and specific frequencies of light, to eliminate disease causing agents and cure such epidemics as AIDS” said Zoltán. “I never realized we had so much in common. What do you need to know?”

I was looking at his neck. Its smooth skin stretched over his Adam’s apple. His carotid artery was tinged with blue, hinting at the nutritious blood flowing beneath the surface. Fine creases indicated long hours of bending over books in the library and over the microscope in the lab. I had not noticed these creases in the multicolored lights of Club Colosso.

He continued, “I don’t know if you have ever heard of the Rife microscope. Rife’s microscope has overcome the biggest drawback of the scanning electron microscope. As you know, the scanning electron microscope changes the protoplasm of the organisms it examines, due to the virtual hailstorm of electrons it produces. The Rife scope reveals specimens in their natural living state. Through control of illumination, Dr. Royal Rife discovered that certain microorganisms were stimulated by given frequencies of light. Certain microorganisms could also be devitalized by beaming radiations of specific frequencies upon them.

“With this device, he noted that when the proper Mortal Oscillatory Rate was reached, many lethal organisms, such as those of tuberculosis, typhoid, and leprosy appeared to disintegrate, or blow up, in the field of his microscope.”

I wondered what Zoltán’s blood tasted like as it colored his face in his enthusiasm. Then I immediately reproached myself. “Stop it now, Emma,” I said in my mind, barely able to pay attention to the important things Zoltán was saying. “You are going to have to completely block out any desire to suckle his blood! This man may be the gateway out of your condition one day.”

He continued, “Emma, it’s so fantastic! Through his microscope, Rife showed that a virus was responsible for cancer and that cancer is an immune deficiency disease like AIDS. His microscope works on the principle that the body is 99.7% electric. The only parts of your body that are not electrical are the bones in your teeth, your fingernails and your toenails. That explains why nails continue to grow after you die. They don’t need electrical stimulation to grow. The rest of your body just falls apart.

“What I want to discover is what is known as the Mortal Oscillatory Rate of certain diseases so I can destroy them through vibratory light resonance, the way a soprano’s voice can shatter glass.

“You, know Emma, I feel so much at home with you, talking about such things. I don’t feel that you are just biding your time until we hit upon a more savory subject. For example, I feel I can talk about blood and blood diseases in all their permutations with you. I’d like to find a cure for leukemia in my lifetime, or for another blood disease, pernicious anemia.”

“Never feel that you are grossing me out when you talk about blood,” I said with enthusiasm. “Blood is everything to me. As it says in Deuteronomy 12:23 – ‘for the blood is the life.’” I did not cite the entire quotation, which is, “Only be sure that thou eat not the blood: for the blood is the life; and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh.” We didn’t read the Bible much in our post-Communist household. But the fact that we were now allowed to read it made me curious one day and my fingers instantly found this quotation that reverberated through my head: “Eat not the blood.”

I did not say another quotation from Leviticus 17:12-14 out loud, but went into reverie thinking about it, almost tuning out Zoltán’s concluding remarks– “Therefore I said unto the children of Israel, ‘No soul of you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger that sojourneth among you eat blood. And whatsoever man there be of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, which hunteth and catcheth any beast or fowl that may be eaten; he shall even pour out the blood thereof, and cover it with dust. For it is the life of all

flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof: therefore I said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh: for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof: whosoever eateth it shall be cut off.””

Shall be cut off, as I am now. Yes, cut off from the feelings of a normal human being. I got back on track and continued, “I am interested in another aspect of blood. You might call it ‘blood memory’ or ‘cellular memory.’ It is the phenomenon in which a person receives an organ transplant from a stranger and takes on the habits, drives, or talents of that person. For example, they may develop a talent for classical piano that belonged to the donor, or all of a sudden crave alcohol, tobacco, or human blood, substances that they didn’t want pre-transplant. In one amazing story I read, an eight-year-old girl who received the heart of a murdered 10-year-old, began having nightmares in which she relived the crime. Her dreams helped the police solve the murder.”

I went on, “Some scientists believe the mind is not just in the brain, but also exists throughout the body, circulating through the blood, like the immune system. This could explain the numerous recorded strange transplant experiences. They have determined that the mind and body communicate with each other through peptides in the brain as well as in the stomach, muscles, and all of our major organs. It’s a peptide/receptor network. For instance, a memory associated with food may be linked to the pancreas or liver, and such

associations can be transplanted from one person to another.

“I just read about a scientist named Prinz who reported from his studies that the digestive tract is made up of a knot of about 100 billion brain nerve cells, more than found in the spinal cord. The stomach network may be the source of unconscious, or possibly even subconscious, decisions that compel people to do things they otherwise might not.”

“Emma,” said Zoltán, his eyes alive with enthusiasm, “I never realized how deeply you cared about these things. I too am fascinated by phenomena that defy ordinary explanation.”

He took my hand in his again. Warmth spread through me like a penetrating ray of light from the Rife microscope he just mentioned, matching my vibration perfectly and dissolving the discomfort my whole body felt from sleep deprivation. Maybe this is what people talked about when they fell in love. My desire to kiss his lips was outweighing my desire to vacuum out his blood and deposit it in my system. Silence and another kind of desire overcame the insistence of my other urges. It was the same feeling that surprised me at Club Colosso last night. It also was spreading from my belly to my head, through what seemed to be the peptide receptor network.

He focused his whole attention on my eyes. “Emma,” he said, “What did you mean just then when you were talking about blood memory? I could understand the alcohol and tobacco part of it, for I have read of such things too. But you also included human blood in that list. What do you mean by that?”

“Oh, I have a vivid imagination,” I said. “Mrs. Debrecei had been telling me a story of vampyrs in Sopron when she was a child. I just found it strange that the two men who went missing from the morgue were reported to have bite marks on their necks.”

Zoltán stopped me. “The newspaper only reported that they had holes in their necks, not bite marks. You do have a vivid imagination, Emma!” He laughed and held my hands tighter.

I realized I better shut up or I could sound like I knew more than the coroner or more than the police disclosed. I have heard that this is the way criminals have tripped themselves up in the past, by revealing carefully concealed details that only the police could know.

I began again, “This is the reason I asked you here today. Here is my question. Let’s just say that vampyrs, and this is strictly hypothetical, once again roamed the streets of Sopron at night. Would it be possible to isolate the cause of such deviance from healthy human behavior, determine its true

source, whether viral, bacterial, fungal, genetic mutation, or blood memory, and treat it accordingly?”

Zoltán looked serious. He took a deep breath and said, “Normally I would laugh at the idea of vampyrs, but I read the recent article in *Kisalföld* about the homeless girl caught sucking the blood from a teenage prostitute around the area of the Old Fire Tower. So, let’s presuppose that vampirism is a scientifically provable phenomenon. In order to determine the composition of the vampyr’s blood, we would have to obtain a sample of that blood. How easy is it to get vampyrs to give up some of their blood for testing purposes, or for any purpose, for that matter? Perhaps we had better focus on other diseases that are easier to study.”

“But you wouldn’t be averse to studying the blood if I could get you a sample?” I asked. I was searching his face for any ironic or derogatory expression. On the contrary, his eyes shone with interest.

“No, I’m not against it at all, but I just don’t have the proper equipment here in Hungary. My lab is badly lacking in even the basics. I don’t even have a transmission electron microscope. There’s only one scanning electron microscope and that one has a waiting list of scientists who want to use it. So forget about something as obscure as a Rife’s microscope! Let’s say you were able to obtain a sample of vampyr’s blood, just for the sake of an

example. I would be glad to look at it under the scanning electron microscope to see if I could isolate the components when my turn on the waiting list came up, but as far as curing the condition, we would have to go to America, where Rife machine replicas exist in abundance, from what I hear. The original Rife microscope has never been found. They say it was destroyed.”

“Well,” I said, “I don’t see the point of going all the way to America to solve a hypothetical question, so let’s drop it, for the time being. However, I would love it if I could ever get a sampling of vampire blood, to examine it with you at your lab. Maybe we could do it at a time when the powerful microscope is not in use, such as late at night.”

“Then you will need patience, because there is a six-month waiting list to get at that microscope, even at night. Also, I don’t see how you will be able to get a verifiable sample of vampyr blood. Say you went onto the black market for it. How would you know that the sample wasn’t just pig’s blood or regular human blood?”

“Zoltán,” I said, slightly insulted, “I would hope I would be able to distinguish human from pig’s blood and would test for it before I’d wasted your time with any microscope. I know that pig’s blood contains the sugar galactose. The human immune system sees galactose as foreign. This is why pig organs that have been transplanted into humans when a human organ was not available are so

rapidly destroyed.” Then, to show Zoltán that I was quite aware of the differences between mammalian blood types, I added, “Interestingly, humans lack galactose but we still have the gene for making it; yet the gene is not expressed in humans.”

My mother came into the room. She could see that we were sitting hand in hand. She was partly smiling, partly wincing. “Emma, how can you be speaking of such unsavory subjects as pig’s blood on such a beautiful day? I’m sure Zoltán didn’t come here for this kind of discussion.”

“On the contrary, Mrs. Gábor,” said Zoltán with a clear-eyed smile, “This is the very topic that interests me the most and I am enjoying my visit immensely. I cannot tell you when I have enjoyed myself more. Unfortunately, I must be going now. But before I do, I want to invite Emma to a charity ball for the Pedagogic Society. I have two tickets and would be honored if Emma would be my date. It will be held at the Castle of Fraknó. You know, the magnificent old Esterházy family fortress. I know this is short notice but it will be next Friday night. I can come for Emma at 9:00.”

“Of course it would be fine for Emma to be your guest and I give my permission right now. That sort of event is much more worthwhile than the venues Emma and her friends have been frequenting lately.”

Predatoress

“Thank you, Mrs. Gábor,” Zoltán said, as he took her hand and placed his lips upon it in a courtly manner. He shook my hand and left with the words, “See you on Friday at 9:00!”

When the door closed I said, “Mother, please don’t keep harping on the two nights of my entire life when I went out to the clubs. This is not my pattern and you are making me look bad in front of Zoltán.”

“And talking about pig blood doesn’t make you look bad? I guess not, for I see Zoltán is quite fascinated with you. I daresay you could talk about pig entrails and he would be just as interested in you.”

The Spice of Variety

A week passed before Zoltán and I were to be together again at the charity ball. It was a week of exhaustion for me, as it was becoming increasingly difficult for me to stay up all day as well as go out at night for my feedings. I started taking the easy way out by trolling our unofficial red light district for easy prey. These prostitutes lived high-risk lifestyles anyway, I told myself. So what if someone like me came along and wanted to drink their blood? The world would not miss them or mourn them. These women might even prefer the immortality I conferred upon them to being at the mercy of any arrogant, drunken tourist who thinks he owns them for an hour and the price of a few forints! They would become victimizers instead of potential victims as their Johns innocently took them into their cars for a moment of sexual release.

I had also grown tired of the feeding foursomes with my friends Gizi, Eszti, and Kati. I was becoming increasingly morbid in my desire to be alone at night and away from their lighthearted chatter. It was so much more practical too, instead of worrying about their maladroit feeding faux pas. Also, I found it discomfiting to have so easily won Zoltán's favor, when Kati and Eszti were entirely and hopelessly smitten with him for so long.

I told them that I was going to the ball at the Castle of Fraknó with him next Friday night. They both gasped, then as they tried to pretend it didn't matter to them. I could see that Kati was straining to hold back tears. Eszti, who usually at the very mention of Zoltán would break into song and dance, stayed peculiarly silent. Gizi was the only one who showed no emotion as she wished me to have a good time. I was not happy to hurt my friends in this way but felt I could do nothing else. Not going with Zoltán would not solve anything. It might make things worse for him in a way. I knew that as long as he was with me he was safe from vampyric attacks that might slip through our collective vows to stay away from him and our family members.

Gizi offered to lend me one of her gowns and I accepted, though her figure was fuller than mine. It was too late for me to find a gown of my own and gown shopping had never occurred to me. "Its light blue silk will make your paleness less pronounced," she remarked, looking concerned. I knew I needed every cosmetic trick I could conjure to offset the deathly gleam of my skin. Gizi also needed to tend to her pronounced pallor as well. Eszti and Kati were looking even paler than usual because of the news about Zoltán's invitation.

I realized that Gizi, Eszti, and Kati still met to hunt for prey every night in Sopron. I had been contemplating a break from this Sorority of Blood and going it alone. Now that Zoltán had asked me to be with him, perhaps this would be the break I

thought I wanted. Yet I loved these girls too. And it was much more fun going out with them than on my lonely excursions. I wanted to bring Kati and Eszti back to their naturally ebullient spirits as I pronounced the next words.

“Girls, don’t you think it would be a good idea to change our territory a bit and go into Vienna once in a while for our feedings? At the rate we are going, Sopron will be overflowing with vampyrs in no time. We could have a great time together in Budapest, Lake Balaton, and Vienna. This will keep our feeding territory fresh and spread the undead out in a more even fashion. Thus we will deflect any suspicion as our nightly activities become increasingly apparent to our families.”

“Well, how are we going to explain our excursions to these places to our families, when we have never gone there together before without them? Don’t forget, they’ve lost a bit of trust in us since the incidents at Club Colosso,” said Kati nervously.

Eszti said, “I don’t see why we can’t be more independent! In America girls go out all the time together and nobody thinks anything of it. Our parents are overly protective here, where Attila and his Huns once made history.”

“Ah yes, the brave, bloodthirsty Huns, whose mantle was taken over by the Magyars in the 9th century,” said Kati. “Where are all of them now?”

“They’re working in factories, in shops, as dentists for the Viennese trade, as scholars, and teachers. In short, they are civilized into domesticity and are no longer the wild horsemen of the open country.” I said. “But look here, girls, you know that we are more bloodthirsty by far than any of Attila’s horde. I daresay the Huns would run and hide at the sight of our nourishment gathering activities.”

Gizi laughed gently. Her naturally dreamy look was even more soft-focused than usual. She said, “I think I can persuade our parents to let us go to Budapest and those other feeding holes you mentioned. We just have to pace ourselves and not go to all the places in rapid succession. Emma, you will have more persuading to do than any of us. I could see your parents were more distressed over the nightclub forays than any of our parents were.”

“I find it ironic that Emma’s parents think she is so damned innocent and she’s the one who started us all on this career of mayhem,” said Kati. “It’s crazy that her parents think we are the bad influences on their angel!”

Gizi smiled sweetly to deflect the anger she could see was brewing. “Let’s go over to our house for a few hours until feeding time. I want Emma to try on my gown for this Friday night.”

“I don’t think I want to watch while you dress our rival for Zoltán in one of your delectable concoctions,” said Eszti. “Kati and I would have

to fake our enthusiasm while you make Emma irresistible. We'll feel like the pigs that smilingly unearth truffles, yet are frustratingly kept from consuming the delightful treasures, lest they be slapped."

"What do you know about truffles, Eszti?" asked Kati. "We don't really have them here in Sopron, nor can any of us afford them."

"I've read about them," said Eszti. "OK, forget the truffles. Let's put it this way. Watching Emma get dressed up for Zoltán is like watching a stake being driven slowly into my heart."

"For God's sake, Eszti," I said. "This kind of drama is unwarranted. It's only one ball and, essentially, we are interested in continuing our discussion on hematology and molecular genetics. I assure you, except if you want to drink his blood, which we have all pledged not to do, I will not stand in your way of attracting him."

Eszti looked into my eyes and said, "I could never compete with your beauty or your intelligence." This remark stung me more than if she said I was ugly and didn't deserve Zoltán. I had not intended to steal Zoltán away from anyone. He was not anyone's to steal. Especially someone in my condition, experiencing the discomfort of my new identity.

Deep Red Velvet

Dear Reader, I have not described my physical self in much detail up to this point because I thought it was irrelevant to the story. After all, what difference does it make whether I am a glowing beauty or a drab brown hen? My power does not lie with my beauty, but in my intellect and my intense, supernatural strength as a vampyr. Do vampyrs care if they are physically pleasing or not? Only insofar as being comely attracts more willing prey.

In this regard, nature was generous in its endowments towards me. It is almost gratuitous in my current condition, for attractive or not, I will have my feedings. And I can assure you, that when my mouth is engorged with clotted blood, and the excess is spurting from my nostrils, I am not your average conception of beauty. Yet, in my satiated state, and definitely before my transformation, many friends and strangers had told me how symmetrical and vibrant my features are.

I suppose you could say I have characteristic Hungarian features: Thick black wavy hair against contrastingly white, smooth skin. My cheekbones and slightly slanted brown eyes bespeak of the Mongols that swarmed over this land long before the world wars that turned Hungary into what it is today. My pronounced cheekbones and straight nose sculpt my face, much like the actress, Erika

Marozsán's, except for the darkness of my eye color compared to her violet.

My body, too, I have been told, is the full expression of all that is excellent in the Hungarian gene pool—or at least until childbearing takes place or inactive middle age sets in. I had mentioned Gizi's round, full breasts that mounted in contrast to her incurved waist. I, too, have firm breasts, but they are not as large as Gizi's nor are they shaped the same. Hers are globes, like rounded melons from Persia that infrequently appear in our marketplaces. Mine are conical, coming to a more distinctly triangulated point. This is where we will have to alter her gown, I presumed. Also, since my almost exclusive diet of human blood, I have lost quite a bit of weight in my waist, probably occasioning further adjustment to the gown. I am taller than Gizi, which could also present problems with the fitting.

The first gown Gizi showed me was an obvious "No." It was a diaphanous light blue, with layers of shimmering translucence floating around the shoulders and hips. She had favored light blue, thinking it would diminish the pallor of my skin. On second thought, we agreed the color was impractical for possible blood spatter or trickles.

The second gown was perfect for my situation. It was deep ruby velvet, simple in its lines, glowing richly in the soft light of the declining day. Its low bosom and body-grazing flow of fabric created

visual drama and needed little alteration. Even its length could pass as intentionally mid-ankle. Since vampyrs can't see themselves in the mirror, I relied on Gizi's reaction. "Emma, you look good enough to eat and drink in this gown." We both laughed, knowing who was going to be doing the eating and drinking.

"Don't tease about such matters, Gizi," I said. "I just hope I will be able to overcome the temptation to feast on Zoltán. I will have to devise some kind of neuro-imagistic programming. Every time I desire to devour Zoltán's neck, I will picture. . . what? A stake going through my heart? A cross? Wolfbane (which I have heard is very painful to vampyrs, though have no experience with it)? I need to be able to dance with him and talk with him, so I can't picture something too repulsive or I won't be able to go near him at all. This psychological self-manipulation must only take place when I am overcome with a desire to puncture his neck with my fangs. I will work on this and hope to perfect it by Friday."

"I'm sure you will," said Gizi. "You manage to do everything you want, Miss Emma. Don't you? Such perfection may in itself be a flaw."

"I hardly think being a life-draining parasite is perfection," I replied.

Deep Red Rose

What Gizi said about me, that I usually get everything I want, is not true. If it were, I would easily be able to get out of this endless blood thirst that horrifies me in my rational moments. Like everyone else, I feel I must work at things that are worthwhile. The only thing that comes easily to me right now is overpowering my victims in the moment of insatiable hunger. Part of my interest in Zoltán comes from the hope that he may be able to lead me to the solution to my situation. To help me isolate the pernicious substance in my body that continues to drive me and to obliterate it without causing too much damage to the healthy entity that I was, such a short time ago.

My anticipatory impatience made the arrival of Friday night seem so slow. I was happy that Zoltán appeared on time, exactly at 9:00. I appreciated his punctuality. My mother and father were both in the living room waiting to greet him at the door. I had prepared them about not asking too many questions and not implying that our night out meant any more than a pleasant evening between friends. I didn't go out on dates and this was the first time a man came to take me to a dance. They had been shyly looking at me in the sophisticated blood-red velvet gown. My skin shone so white, it was almost bluish against the lush fabric.

“Emma, you didn’t eat any supper. Your father and I are both exceedingly worried over your pallor these days. It may be that you are anemic. We want you to see Dr. Barabás next week.”

This is the last thing I wanted to do. Dr. Barabás had a huge collection of vampyrice and fancied himself a modern Van Helsing. He would see the faint scars on my neck, be prompted to test my blood for beyond the usual components, and find that something was not right. He would then begin to study me in a focused way that I could ill afford. For through his studies, he was sure to know about Wolfbane, staking the heart followed by decapitation, and other ways to destroy vampyrs. I was not out for my own destruction. I wanted to be cured not destroyed.

“Mother and Dad, please stop hovering over me and worrying so much about what I eat and how I look. Let me make some of my own decisions now. I’m eighteen years old and have already proven my sense of responsibility to you many times. With my laboratory training, I can make a study of my own blood to see if I am anemic. Then I can do research and take corrective measures. In fact, tonight, anemia and other blood conditions are going to be topics of conversation between Zoltán and me.”

My mother threw her hands up disapprovingly. My father looked on me with pride. “My Emmushka! What a serious girl! Here she is going to a glamorous party in this extraordinary gown and

all she can think of is the human circulatory system! This is what I love about this child. She is not frivolous! I do think you are taking it a bit far though, to think that you can come up with your own diagnosis and perhaps cure.”

My mother said, with concern in her voice, “This talk about blood is not appropriate for an evening out with such a dashing young man as Zoltán. Don’t you think a few more charmingly feminine topics are in order? A bit of small talk about popular subjects is surely more suitable than an exhaustive discussion of the substances that comprise blood or blood pathogens!” said my mother with dismay. “I can understand it if you are wearing a lab coat, but you are going to a sumptuous castle, looking outstanding in this gown.”

As I said, the knock came punctually at 9:00. My parents started towards the door together. “Please Mother and Dad, let me answer the door. I’m not 12 years old!” I ushered them both to our sofa and walked to the door to let Zoltán in.

He stood at the threshold with two roses in his hand: a white and a deep red, much like the red of my gown. I took them from him and pressed them to my nostrils, inhaling their freshness. He looked me fully in the face and then moved his eyes slowly down my body.

“You are a stunning woman, Emma. Brilliant and remarkable!” He reached to pull me into his arms. I

turned away, against my warmest desires, so as not to alarm my parents.

“Zoltán, you have already met my mother, but I have yet to introduce you to my father.” I could feel my body heat rising, making my skin damp. I wanted to press my breasts against the smooth front of his white dress shirt. His full lips felt magnetic and I wanted to taste them, not as a food source, but to feel the inner connectedness between our bodies through them. This was the first time I had ever felt such magnetism that wasn’t based on my feeding cycle.

“Ah, so this is the famous Zoltán Szabó I have been hearing so much about!” my father said, taking Zoltán’s hand and making a slight bow. I was hoping that Dad wouldn’t make embarrassing comments, such as “Emma talks about you so very often,” or praise me too highly as if he were a salesman and I was the finest Tokay. Instead he said, “Take good care of our Emmushka. She is not used to going out on dates.”

“Thanks, Dad, that is more information than Zoltán needs to know,” I said, going towards the armoire to get my cloak. Gizi had loaned me a long black velvet cape lined in purple satin. Zoltán came over to the armoire and helped me put it over my shoulders. I felt his warm touch and his breath on the back of my neck as he adjusted the folds of cloth over my shoulders.

I wanted to get out before my parents solicited more compliments from Zoltán, but was unsuccessful. My mother rushed over to Zoltán and looked him in the face. “Look at this beautiful girl. Her complexion is like this white rose. I am sure you will not find a comelier one at the Castle of Fraknó! But Zoltán, I would like for you to make sure Emma eats something tonight. She did not eat her supper this evening.”

“Mother,” I said, embarrassed, “I think I am older than five and can see to my food needs by myself, thank you!”

Zoltán laughed and told her that he would certainly make sure that I partook of the many delicacies that were going to be on display for the guests’ consumption.

“Let’s stop talking about what I have eaten and what I am going to eat, shall we?” I asked, with barely hidden annoyance. If they only knew how insatiable I actually was, they would keep concerns about my appetite in check.

“Forgive us,” said my father. “Emma is precocious and knowledgeable and we give her credit for this, but she is our only child. She is the lifeblood and future hope of our family. So we are a bit overprotective.”

“There’s nothing to forgive,” said Zoltán. “It is natural to want to protect and nurture such a jewel.

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Before you know it she will be a distinguished scientist and may even tell you what to do for your wellbeing.”

That was the beginning of my struggle. Right there it started. The struggle between curing my condition and perpetuating it. Zoltán could not discern my unrest as we left the affectionate circle of my family and home and went into the night together, hand in hand.

Predation at the Castle of Fraknó

We took a taxi, something very special for most people in Hungary, to the evocatively atmospheric Castle of Fraknó, built by the Esterházy family. It does not have any of the dark, frightening aspects of the fabled Dracula's Castle. It looks more like a palace from a fancifully illustrated fairytale. In the soft electric lights, I could barely make out the details of its large and imposing structure in the deepening night. But the towers and turrets bespoke majesty and power.

Zoltán was giving me a history lesson as we walked to the main entrance. Being of a didactic nature myself, I felt comfortable with his teacherly manner. "The Esterházys, as if you didn't already know, were the richest and most powerful family in Hungary, dominating Hungarian political and social life from the 17th to 20th centuries. The Esterházy family was descended from Attila the Hun and rose to prominence in the 16th century during the Turkish wars. Their absolute loyalty to the Hapsburgs secured them a unique position in Austro-Hungarian affairs and stood them in good stead for centuries."

I enjoyed his attention to this kind of historical detail and watched his face, focusing on his

intelligent eyes. “Ah yes, Attila the Hun,” I replied. “My friends and I had recently been discussing how different the Hungarian character is now, from its predecessor Hun fathers’.”

He laughed and said, “Yes, Emma, we have become a nation that wants its comforts and security. Our magnificent Esterházys went beyond mere comfort. Royal visitors brought them spectacular gifts as tokens of respect. You will see gifts of gold cups from Emperors of the Holy Roman Empire, statues, presentation plates, jewelry, and spectacular objects for ostentatious display are everywhere.”

He might as well have been reciting love poetry or singing to me. It did not matter! The actual content of what he was saying was not important. It was his presence. If he had used tender words of seduction, they could not have pierced me more completely as I stood, transfixed on the stairs leading to the castle. I took in his eyes with mine and I said, as I pictured myself jumping on him, straddling him and covering him with kisses. “I do know that the composer Haydn served the Esterházys uninterruptedly for thirty years. Imagine having a brilliant composer on hand for three decades!”

A long pause followed during which we said nothing, holding each other’s hands and looking into each other’s eyes. Then Zoltán slowly began, enunciating each word as he kissed my face and lips slowly, “At that time (kiss), the Esterházy estates included twenty-nine lordships (kiss), with twenty-

one castles (kiss), sixty market towns (kiss), and 414 villages in Hungary (kiss), besides lordships in Lower Austria (kiss) (kiss), and a county in Bavaria (kiss). This will give you some idea of the power and importance of the house to which your Haydn was attached (kiss). The family was divided into three main branches (kiss), but it is with the Frakno or Forchtenstein line (kiss) that we are more immediately concerned with (kiss).

We paused at the entrance and he turned me fully towards him, both hands on my shoulders. “Emma, I feel I can discuss such a wide range of subjects with you: history, science, philosophy, nothing escapes your curiosity of mind. My friends know that I am uncomfortable with small talk and you haven’t attempted it even once, preferring to stay silent rather than chat away. I don’t mind our silences. They feel relaxed and natural. I appreciate your not trying to fill our silences with trivial talk. There is no awkwardness between us and I feel that my lonely soul has come to rest when we are together. Our kisses, our silence, and our talk are all part of the same pleasure. I believe I am falling in love with you!”

He brought his lips to mine, soft and full, for a long kiss, unlike the playful kisses of just a moment ago. My mind swirled in a downward vortex of physical pleasure I had never known in my life. How can so much emotion come from the mere touch of the lips? It was the intimacy of being so close to him, touching the back of his silky head, feeling the

shape of his skull. I wanted to feel the rest of him too and I needed him to feel me. All of a sudden it seemed we were wearing far too many clothes. I was not used to having such thoughts. This was all new to me. And I wasn't thinking about his neck or the blood beneath his skin, either. I desired all of him in a way that I could not describe. "So this is what 'falling in love' means," I said to him.

"Yes," he said. "It literally feels like falling. Like we are falling into each other. I always thought it was just a figure of speech. I really haven't had the pleasure of the experience until now."

"I'm surprised," I said, "With all the women who have crushes on you, Zoltán. Everyone I know thinks you're quite a man."

"I'm quite your man, Emma. You know, I have been busy studying, teaching, and researching. It was a fluke that I was at that Club Colosso the other evening. I don't have, nor do I want, much of a social life, really. You know I spend most of my time on finding the molecular genetics solution to the autoimmune issues that have so recently become major diseases in our modern times. Lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, vasculitis, AIDS, multiple sclerosis, Crohn's disease, type 1 diabetes mellitus, scleroderma, myasthenia gravis, Guillain-Barré, ulcerative colitis, primary biliary cirrhosis, hemolytic anemia, pernicious anemia, thrombocytopenia, anti-phospholipid syndrome, Behcet's disease, Grave's Disease, Hashimoto's

thyroiditis, polymyositis, dermatomyositis, ankylosing spondylitis, Sjogren's syndrome, psoriasis, and vitiligo, to name a few.”

I loved every word he spoke. Every disease he mentioned drove my desire to find the cure for it. I wanted to use my scientific ability and passion to join with him in bringing to light the underlying conditions that would cause the body to attack itself. Zoltán wanted to take this understanding towards eradicating the diseases and curing the patients who are actually victims of themselves. Of course Zoltán could not detect the irony that I was as passionate about healing as I was about destroying, at that point. I wanted to save people from their misery, yes, but I needed to save myself, or misery would be in my wake for eternity.

Zoltán continued, “It is mysterious that most of these diseases were not prevalent in the preceding centuries. And some of these maladies, like Behcet’s disease, exist only in certain countries, like the Middle East, Japan, and Turkey. It does not occur in the United States or Europe. What is causing our own systems to attack our own selves in these times and not in the past?”

I speculated, “The immune system is acting out, on a molecular level, what humans do to one another in violent displays of destruction, murder, torture. We attack our own kind and it is productive of nothing.” Of course I was being a hypocrite. In a few hours I would be perpetrating an attack on one of my fellow

creatures for my sustenance once again. “I also think it is due to industrial and agricultural pollutants in the environment and food, which trigger our immune systems into malfunctioning and attacking healthy tissue.”

“You may be right about that, but I’d like to see the science behind such assertions,” Zoltán said as he touched the tip of my nose with his lips.

I felt a sense of unreality as we finally walked through the castle entrance and gave our coats to the attendants. They were elegantly dressed in 17th century livery. The brilliance of the décor matched the inner radiance I felt, in spite of, no, because of, the preceding conversation about autoimmune diseases. Zoltán spoke softly as we gazed around us. “Many of these objects were damaged in World War II and were painstakingly restored to their former beauty.” He held my hand as we looked around at the gold and porcelain resplendence. We were both trembling slightly from the force field between us. It was irresistibly drawing me back to his lips. I lightly brushed them with mine and then gently placed my tongue just inside the opening of his mouth.

“Emma, if you keep this up, we will turn around and go back to my place. I don’t know if I can restrain myself much longer from kissing you all over.”

I clung to him and pressed my face against his chest. His heart was beating firmly. He brought my hand up, placed his other hand on my shoulder, and began to dance me into the room where an orchestra in tuxedos was playing a Strauss waltz.

Neither of us had taken formal dancing lessons to keep pace with the precision of the music, but it didn't matter. We were doing a combination of improvised waltz and polka. I felt more lighthearted than I ever remembered in my studious, obedient, and serious life. And I was euphoric for the first time since the night of my unhappy transformation. I also was excited about continuing our discussion about blood sugars, proteins, and autoimmune diseases when the evening came to an end and we could prolong our embraces. Yet my happiness was soon blunted by the knowledge that as midnight approached, my feeding urges would force me to break away from Zoltán and commit the unspeakable acts of which he could have no idea. At the same time, I was acutely aware that I needed to separate my physical lust for Zoltán from my blood lust for him as the hour approached, or I would not be able to break away.

He led me to the elaborately arranged food tables. Of course I was not interested in the artful hors d'oeuvres, paté' de fois gras, which in Hungary is called *hideg libamáj zsirjában, almával töltött fácán* (pheasant stuffed with apples), *ropogós malacsült* (roast leg of suckling pig), and *szarvastokány erdei gombával* (venison with wild mushrooms) to name

a few of what might have been a hundred different dishes and side dishes. I chose a bit of the rare venison, knowing that its sweet gaminess was closest to the taste of human blood and therefore I could tolerate it better than the other victuals. Therefore I could appear to be eating something.

Nor did I want the champagne that was glittering elegantly in thin-stemmed cut crystal. I remembered the corny line from the Bela Lugosi film *Dracula*, reiterated in *Dracula's Daughter*, "No thank you. I do not drink . . . wine!" Zoltán did not want to drink either, saying, "Emma, I am too intoxicated with you and our conversation to dull the sensation with alcohol."

We danced, laughed, held each other, and did very little talking as if we were communicating on another level. And so time passed in an amazing haze of happiness unlike anything I imagined experiencing in my narrow existence. But I could also feel the approach of midnight. I did not even need to look at the clock. My body was sending me the familiar signals. I knew I would have to split off from Zoltán so I could slake my thirst with someone else's blood, and for God's sake, not his. I didn't dare look at his neck. When I did, by mistake, glance at it, I began my neuro-imagistic self-programming, seeing his Adam's apple as a clump of Wolfbane, bobbing in a sea of crosses.

This caused me to look away from him as we danced, which was distressing because it forced

me to descend from the heady delight of our vibratory state into the distracting, ravaging dissatisfaction that had characterized so much of my life recently. I began glancing around the room for prey. This searching was taking me away from Zoltán. It felt like a betrayal. We had been so connected with each other. Our locked eyes created a pathway of compatible wavelengths to and from the depths of our beings and I couldn't allow myself to fully enjoy the moment because now I was rehearsing all kinds of subterfuges to allow me to leave his side, take care of my needs, and then return to him with as little fuss as possible.

I saw a juicy-looking young man with high cheekbones and distinctively upward slanting eyebrows. But how could I overpower him, and where could I do it unnoticed? He looked athletic and might put up more of a fight than was practical. Also, because he was a captivating creature and the object of many admiring glances, he was too noticeable. Furthermore, I didn't want to create any suspicion in Zoltán that I was interested in another male simply due to his striking appearance. Zeroing in to suck on his neck might look like I was drunk, out of control, and kissing him. I only wanted to kiss Zoltán and did not want even the slightest doubt of anything else to surface.

I searched the room furtively and saw a gentleman with thick, bright white hair. His equally thick white moustache and sideburns framed a pink face that hinted at the nutritious blood beneath the surface.

His portly frame was confined to a wheelchair. This man would be easy to overcome but the question is, once an invalid is turned into a vampyr, does it follow that he will take his infirmities into his new life style? If this were the case, his handicap would bring new torture to his life as he tried to move a wheelchair with him into the black of night. Could I be that cruel to inflict further pain upon a life already afflicted? I decided against him. I would have to maneuver the wheelchair into a dark, unvisited part of the castle, where I could feast on him in secret. No, that would not work. The whole operation was too cumbersome. Surely someone would notice my wheeling him away. His bright hair shone incandescently, drawing much attention to his ample person. Add to that the notion that he could cry out or otherwise signal his distress, and I realized he was too dramatic and not a good choice.

I hit upon another plan. It was natural that I needed to be excused to go to the Ladies' Room.

Ladies' Room Feast

The Ladies' Room at the Castle of Fraknó was as splendid as the rest of the structure. I was happy to see high doors on the stalls. Exploiting this situation would be easy. Silly of me to think of overcoming someone in full sight, when this would be easier than I thought.

I waited by the luxuriously carved basins, carefully avoiding the mirrors, watching for my prey to enter. It did not take long. A plump, honey-blonde young lady, about my age, came in and walked to the stall farthest from the entrance. Good. Thank you for not choosing the first two stalls. I recognized this girl. She was Mrs. Tóth's oldest daughter. Not a particular friend of mine, but her mother was close with my mother.

She was wearing a gown of canary yellow silk, baring her shoulders and neck in its strapless sheen. How convenient too, as there were no necklines or necklaces to fiddle with, only a long, floating scarf in the same bright yellow. I could use that to tie her up while I dined. I quietly walked into the stall next to hers. I could see the space under the partition was large enough for me to squeeze underneath. I saw from my position, the billowing silk of her long skirt covering the floor. I heard the stream of her long-held urine hitting the sides of the toilet bowl in a continuous hiss. The time was right. I quickly

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ducked under the partition and emerged to her stunned shriek.

She was still urinating when I took her scarf, bound her mouth and eyes with it and immediately plunged my fangs into her neck. She was a well-fed heifer, as sweet as the buttercups in the country fields of summer. She lost consciousness within seconds and I consummated my feast in fewer than ten minutes. I left her there. By the time she came to and left to go on her own feeding spree, the ball would be over and nothing would remain of my handiwork, except that there would be one more vampyr wandering the streets of Transdanubia. I really must heed my own ideas about diversifying my venues. I didn't want this young yellow bird to be mentioned in the papers or taken to the morgue. She would incubate in the bathroom for a few hours and then go off into the night on her own, provided none of her companions with whom she attended the ball came looking for her in the meantime.

The Delight of Being Understood

I hurried back to Zoltán. I had only been gone a bit longer than fifteen minutes. I missed him already. I wanted to look into his eyes again and regain that feeling. Now that my hunger was appeased, I could concentrate on him totally.

He embraced me, holding me close for at least a minute. I hoped my breath didn't smell of fresh blood. I had been careful to remove all traces from my mouth and face. None had spattered on my crimson gown but it would not have shown anyway.

“Emma, are you fond of poetry?” He began the first line of one of my favorites, *Because You Love Me*, written by the dashing Ady Endre in 1906. “Your eyes are mirrors of blessed marvels, for they have seen me.” It's a tongue-in-cheek favorite of mine, actually, because of its misapprehension of love. My friends and I liked to laugh over the ‘I love you because you love me’ theme. Also because of the, ‘you are woman because you love me,’ ideas, spoken by someone who obviously did not experience unconditional love.

I continued, as he laughed with surprise that I knew this poem, “You are the mistress, the cunning woman of the caress.”

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He interjected, “A thousand times blessed are you as woman, for you have seen me and looked at me.”

I took over, “Because you love me I also love you.”

He completed it, “Because you love me you are the woman, you are the fair.”

I laughed. “Zoltán, do you realize how egocentric that sounds? I love you because you love me? I love you because you have seen who I am? It’s all about him! Your eyes are mirrors that reflect mine! I am a blessed marvel and you reflect that! Because you love me, you are the woman, you are beautiful. Notice how many times he says she is ‘woman’ because she loves him. She wouldn’t be a woman if she didn’t have these feelings for him?”

He laughed, “Yes, but he is talking about the delight in being understood by someone. That is what I was saying to you on the steps before we entered the castle. I know you understand me and can follow my thoughts on several levels—scientifically, intellectually, ethically, esthetically, and spiritually. Do you realize how important it is to feel that someone understands you? It may be one of the foremost emotional satisfactions in life.”

“Zoltán, this is what I understand: that I’m falling in love with you, your eyes, your mind, and every other part of you! I want to leave right now. Let’s go to your place where I can kiss you properly. Do you understand me?”

He embraced me again, then took my arm, and led me to the coat checkroom. We walked into the early morning mist. I was relieved to be free from my blood-seeking urges. I had never made love before but I knew I wanted to make love with Zoltán that night, while I was in peak energy and would not be tempted to dine upon him.

This time we did not take a taxi, enjoying the cool air as we walked, holding each other close, causing us to stagger over the cobblestones like merry drunkards.

We approached the Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. At this point I don't remember how we got to Zoltán's studio apartment near his laboratory, except that there were many stairs. I was contemplating how I was going to pull off getting home so late. I knew my father would be all right about it. He was amazingly liberal in his opinions about sex and love. I knew he trusted Zoltán and trusted me. My mother was the worrier in this case. She had given me plenty of lectures on not cutting my life short with pregnancy and childbirth. She is the one whose reproaches I would have to contend with when I got home this morning.

But now Zoltán was unlocking his door. He picked me up and carried me to his bed, a narrow twin whose mattress was predictably hard and thin. It was chilly in his flat and the heat radiating from us produced visible steam. He kissed me tenderly each

time he removed another item of my clothing. Then I did the same with him until we were completely nude, facing one another, shivering and steaming at the same time.

I had never seen an erect penis before except in anatomy books. I had doubts that such a big member would be able to fit into me and I was afraid. I stared at its venous crenellations with a combination of scientific curiosity and dread. Zoltán read my thoughts and said, “Don’t be frightened Emma, it will be very good. I won’t hurt you. And if anything hurts, tell me and I will stop.”

He put me under the rough brown wool blanket lined with linen sheets and lay down next to me, kissing me on my mouth, neck, and breasts. I loved it and loved him and, for the first time, loved my body. My hands were touching him, delighting in the smooth skin on his back, the taut globes of his buttocks. Our mutually exploratory nakedness was making me feel dimensions of pleasure, rapture, and incredible gratitude to be alive.

Zoltán made a trail with his tongue down the center of my body, starting between my breasts to the opening of my yoni, and began lapping hungrily, making me extremely wet. He flicked his tongue all over places my inexperienced fingers had explored during my relatively inept masturbatory investigations. My crude fingers were nothing like the sensitive slickness of his muscular tongue. I was clutching him by both shoulders—A huge moan

was forming in my throat as his tongue licked me like a flame of unbearable delight until I exploded in a ferocious wet gush.

Now he ripped open a condom's wrapper with his teeth and in one motion, slid it over his taut penis. Then he thrust it slowly into my throbbing opening. I felt a moment of stinging pain but warm, full feelings of satisfaction soon replaced it. I looked at his face and smiled as he moved inside me. Oh, so this is sex, so this is love. This is love. This is sex. This is the blending of sex and love. Nothing will be the same for either of us from now on. I watched with great attention as he neared his climax. His eyes rolled back in his head and he heaved a huge sigh as he hastened his thrusts. Then he collapsed on top of me. We both breathed loudly and in time with one another, relaxed, at peace.

We slept for an hour or so in the moist sheets, feeling surprisingly warm and snug in the chill of the room.

I awoke to Zoltán's kisses. "Hey, I've got to get you back to your parents now. Let me start the heaters up and we can get dressed. It's 5:00 AM." Zoltán covered my lips with kisses. I didn't want to let him go. I could feel my passion rising once again and I wanted more of him.

I also felt dread as I thought about my worried parents waiting up for me. After this experience and all the nightly wanderings I had been up to lately, it

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was more difficult to accept being my parents' little girl.

Lurking Suspicion

My mother was sleeping on the sofa when we walked in. Luckily my father had the sense to go to sleep upstairs. “Is that you Emmushka? You had us both so worried. We don’t understand your late hours these days. Oh, Zoltán, I see you are with her. Why did you bring her home so late? Or should I say early? It’s six in the morning! I don’t understand you any more, Emma!”

“Mrs. Gábor, I want to ask your forgiveness. Emma and I fell in love tonight. Yes, we love each other. We made love. Yes, I am not going to lie to you about this. Don’t worry. I used protection. We don’t want Emma to get pregnant yet. Only after she marries me!”

“Oh, so you are in love and that excuses being inconsiderate and frightening me half the night and morning! I don’t want to hear about condoms and sex. It doesn’t help. I am Emma’s mother! How would you feel if your daughter came home at 6:00 in the morning after losing her virginity, and all her devirginizer can talk about is love and sex? This is not easy to take, Zoltán.”

At that point, my father appeared at the top of the steps. “What is this I hear about ‘Only after she marries me?’ Are we getting married so soon Emma?”

I was feeling the numbing exhaustion the usually signals bedtime for vampyrs, when the dawn light set off an alarm for us to disappear. But as you know, I have been fighting this tendency. “Mother and Dad, let’s stop all this talk about sex and marriage. I am very tired. I realize I should have called to let you know that I wouldn’t be in until morning. But I am also grown up now and you should be able to trust that I am not in danger, just because I am not home or at school every hour of the day or night.”

“But that is precisely the problem,” said my mother. “Aliz Tóth came by here late last night, more like early morning. She was frantic, saying that her oldest daughter, Magda, disappeared at the Pedagogic Ball at the Castle of Fraknó, where you were with Zoltán. The police were out searching for her. None of the friends with whom she went to the ball with could find her.”

“I told her you were also at the ball and maybe when you came home you might have some information. I didn’t expect that it would be hours and hours until you finally arrived. I was frightened out of my mind that you had disappeared too. It’s as if every place you go Emma, someone ends up disappearing, dying, going to the morgue, or whatever. Don’t you see how dangerous it is out there?”

I thought back to my recent feast at the expense of Magda Tóth. I recalled the rounded softness of this girl. She had been a particularly delectable treat and very filling, like a large stick of yellow butter, leaving me more than satisfied even now, almost six hours later.

“Mother, there were hundreds of people there last night. Besides, Zoltán and I were completely wrapped up in each other. How am I supposed to remember one particular girl whom I hardly know?”

“It’s true, Mrs. Gábor, Emma and I were deeply immersed in conversation and other forms of interaction. I don’t think we noticed one other person except for the liveried attendants who took our coats. Even their faces were a blur. The only time Emma even left my side was for fifteen minutes or so to go to the Ladies’ Room.”

He then looked at my father. “Mr. Gábor, I want you to know that I love your daughter. I want to marry her, if she will have me, and if that will make her happy. Emma, will you marry me?”

I threw my arms around Zoltán, almost knocking him to the floor. We both fell into a heap on the sofa where my mother’s blankets were piled.

My mother’s eyes softened. “Ah. So we are going to have a bride and a son-in-law! She leaves the house a virgin and comes back engaged!” She stretched her arms around both of us, pulling us up

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close to her bosom. Her eyes shone through the rays of wrinkles in her tired face. She motioned for my father to join us in a family embrace.

“I couldn’t be happier, my Emma and my new son Zoltán. May your combined intellects produce breakthroughs in molecular genetics research. May you produce gifted children who will also leave the world a better place than they found it.”

Manipulating and Lying

After Zoltán left, my parents were in high spirits. Shortly afterwards, Mrs. Tóth called to say that Magda was home, pale and behaving strangely, but otherwise safe and asleep right now.

“Emma, with all this nonsense going on around town, I feel safer knowing that Zoltán will be accompanying you when you go out.”

“That’s not so, Mother Dear. Kati, Eszti, Gizi and I are going to take a trip to Budapest this weekend.”

“Don’t you think now that you are engaged you can stop running around with your pals and spend time with Zoltán? It’s the first weekend of your engagement and where are you going to spend it? In Budapest with your girlfriends? That doesn’t make any sense!”

“Mother, we had pre-planned these little excursions for quite a while now. I don’t want to let them down. It’s bad enough that Kati and Eszti are in love with Zoltán and must bear this upcoming marriage. If I forsake them now just because I am engaged, what is that telling them? That being with a man is more important than spending time with your oldest and best female friends?”

“What do you mean, ‘these little excursions?’”

“We were planning to spend at least one day in Vienna, and one day at Lake Balaton too. Not all at once, of course.”

“Thank God for that!” wailed my mother. “I just can’t fathom why you are going out so much now, Emma. It’s ridiculously out of character.”

“And when do you think you will be getting your studying done with all these trips? You are about to begin your first semester!” my father interjected. “And, my pretty bride-to-be, where are you getting the funds for these excursions? I have to say, Emma, this is not like you. Studying always came first. Your behavior is mystifying.”

Too aware of my manipulative reasoning, I persisted: “This is what I mean, Dad, when I say that I don’t want to be treated as a child. I am eighteen years old. I am going to get married. Isn’t it time to allow me my decisions? I have money saved away from my birthdays that I can use for our trips. And you know I haven’t been eating much lately, so I won’t overspend there. We will stay at Kati’s aunt’s place in Szentendre and at Gizi and Eszti’s parents’ cottage in Balatonfüred. And we will all share one hotel room in Vienna, for only one night. Before I settle into marriage, don’t you think I have the right to experience some carefree times with my friends?”

“All right, My Dear One. Just understand that your mother and I are not happy about the things happening in Sopron lately and are concerned about you, that is all.”

“Then don’t worry Dad, because I will be in Budapest this weekend.”

Capital Infestation

Kati, Eszti, Gizi, and I were as joyful as perpetually awake beings were capable of being. That is, we were happy to be going on the train to Budapest but everything in our lives had a tinge of tiredness that cut the keenness out of our feelings and left us with a frustrating desire to enter a dark, dank coffin and get the rest we really needed during the day.

Instead, we were on our way during the glaring daylight hours, hurtling towards the most exciting city, for us at that point, in the world. I didn't want to spoil Kati's or Eszti's pleasure by breaking the news about my engagement to Zoltán. I wanted to find a good time to do it and did not expect the opening to come up so soon. It seemed so precipitous; maybe they wouldn't take it seriously anyway. It did seem hasty, that after one short discussion in the afternoon and one evening out, we would be planning to intertwine our lives in earthly matrimony for the duration of our mortal lives. So I would not mention it for now.

“This is great fun,” said Kati, “the only thing that’s missing is Zoltán Szabó. I still can’t get him out of my mind since that night at Club Colosso. He looked so good under the swirling colored lights. Not that his gorgeousness needs enhancement with lighting effects!”

“Ah-oooh, Zoltán Szabó! Ah-oooh, Zoltán Szabó!” crooned Eszti. “I agree. He is the one male that needs to be cloned. There is just not enough of him to go around!”

They got up and started dancing in the aisle while singing the song Eszti had written and had so innocently sung the night Kati and I turned her into one of us.

The rest of the passengers pretended not to notice these ethereally pale nymphs flailing their arms overhead to the beat and shaking their hips.

Kati stopped. “But who was he dancing with practically the whole time he was at the club?”

I could feel myself get hot in the face. I needed to tell them everything. They were my best and lifelong friends. Like a diver plunging into Lake Balaton in January, I chanced it.

“Zoltán and I got engaged last night.” That is how I put it. Simply, directly. They knew I wasn’t the person to tease over something like this. I didn’t like practical jokes.

Gizi’s eyes glittered as she continued to survey the countryside as it flew by. Eszti and Kati stopped and froze in place, like those mime statues at tourist spots. They both faced me from the aisle. Then Eszti covered her eyes and began to cry. Kati followed suit. Now the people on the train were

pointedly ignoring the sobs and bent postures where writhing dancing bodies used to be.

Eszti was the first to come over to me and put her wet cheek upon mine, her arms around my shoulders and kissing me, as she held my head in her hands. “I am happy. If anyone should get him, it would be you Emma. At least he will stay in this circle of friends.”

Kati joined Eszti in her hugs and kisses, covering me with their tears, steaming up the windows of the train on our side. “Emma, we love you and are glad for you. That’s what love and friendship are about. What kind of a friend would I be if I begrudged you your happiness with the finest man in Sopron? But tell us, Emma, does he know about our condition?”

“No, he does not know. I will eventually tell him. I think that he and I can work on a cure for our syndrome that will release all of us. The time has not been right to tell him, so far. So, please don’t take it upon yourselves to inform him of our state. Maybe I should have told him after the ball when we slept together.”

“Wait a minute girl, you slept with him?” asked Kati. “I want details!”

Knowing that all three girls were still virgins, I did not want to create any preconceived ideas in their minds about methods of sexual intercourse. So I told them that in general I loved it, it was more than

I thought it would be, that it hurt for a moment, that I was sore the day afterward, and that they would have to have the pleasure for themselves one day.

We sat quietly after that in a lulled state as each reflected on the implications of my upcoming wedding and the other revelations about love and sex. Within ten minutes they each showered me with questions about the time, place, date, and particulars of the wedding, most of which I could not answer because I didn't know myself. And at last we arrived at Nyugati station.

We took the M2 Metro subway to Újpest (New Pest) and the train to Szentendre, which is about a half an hour ride north of Budapest from there. It was time for us to strategize about our feedings and how we would occupy our time until then. It was late afternoon when we arrived at Kati's aunt's bohemian apartment in the heart of the artists' quarter. It was decorated with her paintings, which looked like a cross between Markó Károly and Kozina Sándor. Her themes were supernatural and chilling, however. There was a contrast between the calm 19th century pastoral settings and these objects that looked innocent but radiated impending evil.

The tiny figures in the landscape had the surprisingly exact details that miniaturists working with extremely fine brushes create. They mirrored us four. Four pale, ghastly young ladies in a pastoral setting too bright and cheery for their countenances.

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Pulling the thick, dark curtains across the tall windows, we decided on a nap until ten at night. It sounds wasteful that we spent our first hours in Szentendre asleep instead of going to Pest right away and seeing the sights, or at least partaking of some of the well-known restaurants. Of course, we weren't there for the usual tourist frolics. We were in Budapest to more evenly spread the number of vampyrs we were creating, rather than have them all concentrated in Sopron.

When we awoke, we took the HÈV train to Batthány Square and the M2 train to the heart of the city. Our idea was to wander the more populated streets around the nightclubs and pick out bands of tourists, or easy Hungarians, much as we had done in Sopron. I realized this was not very original, but it was a good scheme because of the general incapacity of this hedonistic segment of the population and the fact that we would go unnoticed in the general party atmosphere.

Riding the subway and the trains gave us a view of all the delicious looking people, with so many different nationalities from which to choose. If someone from another country wants to travel to Hungary, they always spend at least a day in Budapest, whereas they may ignore Sopron completely, unless they are ancient music buffs and want to attend the music festival. Sopron was much narrower in its selection. It consisted of mostly Hungarians and Viennese, a few Americans. That one spic East Indian guy was an exception. But

here, we could hear Dutch, French, Finnish, Swedish, you name it, and gaze at their national characteristics with culinary curiosity. We felt as if the universe was offering us a large box of fascinating confections, all for our consumption.

“I think I want to try Dutch tonight,” said Kati. “Look at those blonde beauties, filled with Edam and Gouda cheeses and hearty split pea soup with ham. Their even features and smooth, fair complexions remind me of vanilla and cream. I’m hungry already and it’s only 11:30. May we get started early tonight?”

“Let’s use some restraint,” I cautioned. Again I was assuming the role of group leader. “We are supposed to feed only after midnight. Let’s not transgress the laws by which we live. Rushing ahead to pre-feed might cause blood-processing problems. We have so many to choose from, there’s no point in being greedy.”

We passed a poster announcing a food festival to take place tomorrow. It was called A Taste of Hungary. Eszti began reading the poster out loud as we jokingly smacked our lips:

“A Taste of Hungary will take place in the City Park just beyond the Heroes' Square, which was erected to commemorate the thousandth anniversary of the Conquest of Hungary.”

“Don’t they mean the thousandth time Hungary was conquered?” Kati joked.

Eszti continued, “During the evening, the Gypsy Virtuosi Orchestra will give a concert. The evening will also provide an introduction to traditional Hungarian cuisine. Rustic Hungarian dishes with abundant wine will be served during the evening and participants also have the possibility to visit - free of charge - collections of three beautiful historical buildings: the Museum of Fine Arts, with its valuable Spanish, Venetian, and Dutch collection, the Art Gallery, surrounding the Heroes' Square, and the Vajdahunyad Castle in the City Park which houses the Museum of Agriculture.”

Gizi exclaimed in a low, sensuous voice, “I’m ready for a taste of Hungary right now. Let’s forget the Dutch. They seem too skinny anyway. What’s wrong with a few well-chosen, well-fed rustic Hungarians? Now?”

I said, “Let’s hit the Taste of Hungary and the museums tomorrow. We might find some interesting prospects there. Right now it’s time for the club district once again.”

“My aunt said we should go to Piaf on Nagymező utca. She said it has the artistic crowd, writers, poets, painters, actors,” said Kati. “They might be flavorful.”

“Why don’t we try this,” I suggested. “First we hit Piaf, then we go to Fat Mo’s on Nyári Pál utca. I’ve looked into it. It’s supposedly a place for a more middle-aged, middle-class crowd. Then we could hit Bahnhoff and Face Klub, both next to each other and right behind Nyugati Station. Bahnhoff is a favorite amongst university students I have heard. Face Klub is known as a place for teenagers. That would be a good mix: artists, older people, college students, and teens. We came here to mix it up a bit and we should spread our blood orientation amongst all age groups and inclinations.”

“‘Blood orientation’, whoo-eee!” squealed Eszti. “I like that spin!”

Gizi emerged from her engrossed silence as she watched the variety of passersby, like a cat at a fishing pier, waiting for the catch of the day. “I think we should start out with the older population as an appetizer. Move to the artists as the soup course. Take on the college students for the main course, and finish with the teens for dessert.”

We all agreed it was a great plan and set out for Fat Mo’s first. It was a rustic-looking place, crammed with people, designed to look like a 1920’s speakeasy, with funky gangster posters, rounded arched ceilings, and a live jazz band, Szilvestri Somebody. It was very crowded and small in some ways for our purposes. Logistics might be a problem unless we lured our prey out into an alley or behind the building.

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Our entrance attracted attention from a group of what appeared to be Hungarian businessmen, four clean-cut men in dark suits, a little paunchy, two slightly balding, all with thick moustaches. Probably away from their wives and looking for some adventure.

We found a tiny table towards the back. Even before we had a chance to order, the waiter told us that the four gentlemen wanted to buy us a round of house ale. Who knew it would be so easy to capture our game? I signaled thanks to the men and motioned for them to come over and join us, albeit the table was small and we would be forced to squeeze up against one another.

“Good evening ladies,” said the meatiest of the men, “My name is Csaba and these are my friends, Tivadar, Péter, and Ferenc.”

We shook hands all around and sat down. The sweet smell of Péter’s cologne mingled with the cigarette smoke in the air. Tivadar smelled like spices. He said he was a manager in a food plant. Ferenc was a restaurant owner. How soon these unknowing men’s lives would change irrevocably! But they didn’t even think of such possibilities, in their satisfied joviality. They were out on the town, enjoying a drink with four attractive young ladies. Life could not be better for them at that point.

We talked about their town, Héviz, and the well-known spa in contains. It was just an hour from

Sopron, so we were acquainted with it, dredging up banal small talk but thinking about our next tactics.

The men were squeezing in very close, even more than was warranted by our forced proximity. It was to the point where it was difficult to reach for our glasses of ale, which sat neglected in front of us as we signaled to each other with our eyes. The men drank without remarking on our untouched brews. Gizi began to wipe her chest and neck with a paper napkin.

“You know, it’s getting so warm in here with the body heat from the crowd. Would you like to take a walk with us into the cool night air?” she asked. “We want to see the city at night with all its lights!” She looked like Kim Novak in *Picnic* that night. A robust vampyrette, she was. It would be very hard to resist any invitation from her. And so our Héviz companions came out into the night air with us.

Péter offered, “We could go for a boat ride on the Danube, eh, Kati, and look at the city lights from there! Isn’t that what all the tourists do?” He picked Kati up off the ground and whirled her around, laughing as he sang part of a gypsy tune. She looked like a limp doll though she continued to smile happily. Only we knew the nuances in her smiling expression, foreshadowing her imminent victory.

Csaba had his arm around my shoulders. It felt heavy and muscular. This man had a substantial

amount of the vital fluid that interested me. This gave me incentive to tolerate his overly familiar physicality. Tivadar had selected Eszti and had his arm around her tiny waist. He was a well-sized food source for her smaller capacity, though muscular and tough-looking. Ferenc was walking by Gizi's side, taking sidelong glances at the voluptuousness of her chest. His beefiness was promising in terms of sheer volume. Or, rather, his "porkiness," as it is well known that Hungarians prefer their traditional staple pork to the less easily obtained beef.

Yet I could see that we were fools for not planning better than this. We had chosen four strong-looking, healthy, though comfortably drunk men to overpower. That was stupid. As you know, usually we went doubles and two of us would take on one person. I was angry at our lack of foresight. We should have zoned in on just two. But there we were with this huge catch. We were like fishermen who pulled in orcas when we were trawling for herring. At this rate we wouldn't even have an appetite to go on with the rest of our own version of A Taste of Hungary this evening.

I pulled away from the grasping Csaba to walk next to Gizi and whispered, "These appetizers threaten to be the main course, because of their hugeness, but it's too late to stop now."

"What are you girls whispering about?" asked Csaba as he caught up with me.

“I was just saying that we’d love to go to the movies, rather than go on the boat ride. It’s getting chilly out here.” I said, looking meaningfully at Kati, Eszti, and Gizi. They picked up on my logic, as if I had telepathically communicated that we needed to do to get these guys into a dark, secluded place where we could overpower all four of them.

“First you girls are hot, now you’re cold! My mother told me about the women of Sopron and how fickle they are,” laughed Csaba. “But we are here at your disposal this evening, ladies, so do with us what you will!”

“Yes, we are at your mercy, ladies,” said Tivadar with an exaggerated bow.

How correct they were! Kati, Gizi, Eszti, and I all laughed gently and looked meaningfully at each other. We were headed towards Rákóczy Út and saw the sign for the Uránia Cinema. Fortunately for us, they were showing a Dracula retrospective. I say fortunately, because of the potential amount of camouflage screaming in the films. Posters displayed Bela Lugosi’s suave elegance and Lon Chaney’s menacing, yet comparatively crude rendition of “Alucard.” This would be perfect. We could sit in the back of the theater and when the first howls or screams came along, make our moves simultaneously.

I enthusiastically exclaimed, hoping I didn’t sound too contrived, “Oh! Just what we were looking for

this evening, ‘The Dracula Retrospective!’ Let’s check it out for a while. I love the part where the wolves are howling and Dracula says, ‘Listen to them. The children of the night.’” I looked at my friends in a way to let them see that at that point, when the wolves howl, the cries from the men would go unnoticed and that would be the precise time to pierce their necks and extract their blood. At first I thought it would be better to wait until the insane character, Renfield, starts his hysterical shrieking, but reconsidered as the time was getting close to critical and we couldn’t wait much longer, to, as Csaba so aptly put it, “do with us as you will.”

“On the other hand,” said Ferenc in a slurred voice, “Why should we waste our time in Budapest going to the movies when we can see movies every day in Héviz? Besides, who wants to see gory vampyr stories? Let’s go for something a bit more titillating!”

“This one might be trouble,” I thought. But I needn’t have worried.

Gizi took the momentarily rebellious Ferenc by the elbow and snuggled into him. “We like to kiss handsome Hévizis hunks like you in dark movie theaters. It turns us on. Don’t you understand? We aren’t really interested in the movies, per se. We are interested in getting closer to you.” She pressed her breasts into his arm.

Our quarry became docile after that, paid our admission, and we walked in, arm in arm. Luckily, the back rows of the theater were empty. After we were seated, I leaned across Csaba and whispered to Eszti, who was by then sitting in Péter's lap, "When the wolves howl, we will strike." She whispered that she had figured that out already by the way I was looking at them all every time I mentioned wolves. I told her to pass it on to Kati, who was stroking the back of Tivadar's head and hovering over his neck with her pursed lips. "And make sure Kati passes it on to Gizi."

It was like one of those childhood games of "telephone," in which you start a whispered message at one end and see what comes out after it passes down the line of people. But in this case, we all were of one mind concerning our plan of action. These girls had been shaping up very well lately and were appreciably more disciplined than when they started out. I was confident that we would leave the theater with no blood spatters on the wall behind us, or on the floor.

The first, original Dracula with sound opened with its strains from the Suite from Ocskay Brigaderos and Tchaichovsky's Swan Lake. We immediately started kissing and petting our men. The eerily evocative movie sets were hospitable to our sensibilities and were intriguing us more than the male-shaped containers of blood sitting next to us, even though we were hungry. My God, how crude I had become! But that is exactly what these men

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were to us. Nothing more than epidermal containers of plasma! Sacks of blood, with some bones to support the structure. We didn't care that they probably had families and children who depended on them, or that they had humanity or feelings.

We had gotten to the part in the film where Count Dracula beckons his guest Jonathan Harker to the table to partake of dinner and wine. Harker sits down and begins to eat as Dracula hovers solicitously nearby. The wolves begin their echoing howls.

"Listen to them, the children of the night. What music they make!" Dracula lilts. "Ah, sir, you dwellers in the city cannot enter into the feelings of the hunter."

By this time all of us had plunged our fangs into our victims' necks in unison. It was beautiful to behold, like a perfectly synchronized water ballet. The wolves howled and we plunged with such precise timing. Our victims howled, but their cries sounded like the prolonged yowls of the cinematic wolves. Our hunger was so feral, we drained the men in less than 10 minutes. Then we got up and left four limp corpses, sprawled over every other seat.

How were we to know that others would find them before they had a chance to re-emerge into the night? But that is exactly what happened, as we found out from the newspapers the next day.

I don't know what we were thinking when we planned to take on so many people our first night. At this point we were overfull and had no desire to sit in a club just to enjoy the music and dancing. In our condition, we could never go to a place just for the sake of having fun and relaxing. All our excursions had one purpose and when we were not pursuing it, life was dull, painful, and had to be gotten through as best we could until the next feeding.

How wrong Dracula was when he said, “. . . you dwellers in the city cannot enter into the feelings of the hunter." Obviously, we were hunters many times over, and we were city dwellers. How misleading to imply that vampirism applies only to the countryside!

We walked towards club Piaf on Nagymező Utca. It would take us a while and maybe some of the edge would have returned to our appetites. Maybe we could all share one person from Piaf. As we strolled along, we didn't speak much, each watching the sheer numbers of potential alimentary delights walking by.

By the time we saw Piaf's red neon sign, some of our old yearning had returned. The color hinted at a promise of what and who was inside. Piaf looked like a secret club. We had to ring a bell and wait for the burly bouncer's approval to be admitted. This did not bode well for us as far as taking anyone down in the club itself, though the bouncer looked

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like a juicy morsel, with his shaven head and gleaming gold earring in his right ear.

This club was obviously more sophisticated than the quirky and cozy Fat Mo's. The red velvet furnishings reminded us of our favorite beverage, as we took our seats in a plush booth. While the resident pianist tinkled jazzy music, we observed the bohemian types dressed with originality and flair.

“This is so much more interesting than Sopron with its earnest forestry students and petit bourgeois natives,” said Kati. “I love that guy over there in the maroon cape. He looks like a poet. Do you think he'd be tasty?”

“I like the bouncer,” said Eszti. “What do you think of our chances with him if we all just concentrate on this one person?”

“Well, I wouldn't mind taking a couple of sips of him, but I'm still full from those Hévízi hulks,” said Kati.

I reacted, “I don't understand why you want these muscular hunks, Eszti, when they are so much harder to subdue? I keep saying this over and over again: for our purposes—blood is blood. You are too consumed with the packaging. Look at that sensitive looking poetic type Kati pointed out. He's thin; he's nervous, and weak-looking. Look at the dark circles beneath his eyes. He is tired. It would

be far easier to take him on. But how to get him interested in us?"

"Why don't we write a poem and send it over with a glass of champagne?" Kati offered. She borrowed a pen from our waitress and quickly wrote on a napkin:

"Blood

A woman talks of blood
Like some aphrodisiac
She stands in its ruby flood
Like an amnesiac
Her blood is ripe and red
Young and fervent
Her body leaps from bed
She is your servant."

"That's great stuff," Eszti said with a laugh, "But is it supposed to mean something? It doesn't make any sense to me. Do you honestly think this is going to bring him to us? He might turn the other way and run!"

"Don't be so middle-class, Eszti," said Kati. "If he is an artist, he will understand that poetry suggests, it doesn't make statements. The poem is its own meaning and has no other significance apart from its existence and how it makes us feel. At least, that's what I learned in my literature class last year. Let's see if he responds to it."

We watched as the waitress, her hair a blaze of different shades of red, presented him with the champagne and the napkin with the poem on it. He read it with a smile, looked over at us with interest and began composing something on his napkin, asking the waitress to stay and then deliver it to us.

The waitress, whose tattoo of a horse with a crimson mane looked like it was going to gallop off her arm, delivered the napkin. “Don’t you know, that’s the composer, Attila Vértes? He is quite well known in Budapest. I am surprised you don’t know him, but it is a great privilege that he even sent this to you, as he is known to be standoffish. We love him around here though. He created the amazing opera, *Bloody Tears*, performed at the Budapest Opera House since last April. I’m surprised you don’t know about him!”

“Another Attila!” said Gizi. “I can’t believe how popular that name has become here in The Land of the Huns! I doubt that his namesake was as emaciated as he is though. He looks too thin to be nourishing. If I weren’t so full already, I think I’d go for that bouncer too.”

Our waitress ignored that remark, probably because she thought she heard wrong and the music was getting louder anyway.

“Yes, Hungary is full of Attilas,” said Kati. “I don’t think any other country in the world has as many, or any, for that matter.”

“And tonight we will ravage our own Attila the Hun-garian!” Eszti sang.

The waitress stood bemused as Eszti read aloud in English the poem Attila sent to us. He watched for our reaction from his table.

“The Sick Rose -- by William Blake

O Rose, thou art sick!
The invisible worm
That flies in the night,
In the howling storm,
Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy:
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.”

I liked this poem and I liked the looks of Attila. How perceptive of him to choose that particular item out of all the literature in the world. Did he understand how aptly it applied to us? He couldn't have known that the invisible worm is our blood affliction that destroys our lives and everyone's with whom we come into contact. It is our dark, secret love of blood itself.

Attila walked slowly over to our table, focusing his attention on Gizi. Gizi, who, as we know, preferred muscular pinup types, and cared very little for artists or intellectuals, colored deeply. He took a nearby chair and placed it between her and me.

“You are beautiful women,” he said, as he looked at each of us for what seemed like several minutes. Kati and Eszti laughed nervously. This was something new, the potential victim turning on his victimizers and making us feel awkward. “But I detect something not quite usual about you, as if you were characters from my most recent opera, *Bloody Tears*.”

“What is it about?” asked Gizi, fastening her eyes on his. I could feel the heat developing between them. She unfastened the first three buttons of her blouse, presumably to cool off. Attila unashamedly gazed at her generous breasts. His gaze moved upwards to the barely visible puncture scars from that fatal night when Kati and I had converted her to one of us. He put his hand on hers and kissed her gently on the scars.

“I know about you. I am not one of you, but I have been fascinated by vampyrs since I was a child. My mother had received ‘the embrace’ when I was about eight years old. She was an amazingly loving woman. She protected me from the same fate as hers and never allowed any of her kind near me. She is gone now, thanks to a Dr. Barabás from Sopron. He applied the traditional devices: driving a stake through her heart and then cutting off her head.”

Attila’s large, dark eyes filled with tears and he stopped for a moment. In silence, we waited for him to continue. Even Kati and Eszti, who usually make

light of everything, began crying silently. I mentioned that we had heard of this Dr. Barabás, who considered himself the twenty-first century Van Helsing.

“That stopped ‘The Hunger’ and her very existence in this or any other world. I have always resented Barabás for this. My mother and I both recognized that what she was doing was evil, but she was powerless under the ‘call of the blood’ as she used to say. And she was always extraordinarily kind to me and to others, when she wasn’t in her feasting mode. Actually, my mother preyed mostly on gypsies and homeless people and was low key about it, usually taking them while they were asleep. But one person a night can add up over the years, so the carnage, during the six years of her vampyrhood was almost 2,200 people! Nevertheless, Barabás deprived me of the one loving parent I ever knew, and I was left an orphan in my early teens, as my father had died when I was an infant.”

Gizi took his right hand and kissed it on each knuckle. I had never seen her like this. Heretofore, she had been amorally sensuous, aroused by the surface attributes of meaty-looking studs, and game for any feeding frenzy. Attila’s story and presence touched her deeply and her tears were flowing onto his hand.

“When I saw the four of you walk in, I felt very much at home. The way I felt with my mother.”

Gizi held his hand and said, “Attila, to tell you the truth, we sent that poem over to you to lure you as our next prey.”

“Yes,” laughed Eszti, “In an hour or so we were going to feed off of you like jackals on a rhino carcass.”

“I knew that,” he said with a warm laugh. “That’s why I sent over that Blake poem. I wanted you to know that I knew. But I also wanted you to know that I understand the dilemmas you face; what you have to go through just to survive. As I said, my opera, *Bloody Tears*, is about this subject. Specifically, it’s about my mother and what she went through, ending, unfortunately, with the extremely bloody termination of her existence by Dr. Barabás.”

Kati said, “But we would never use you as a blood meal now! We promise. There are a few people who are on our exempt list: our parents, Eszti and Gizi’s brother András, and a guy named Zoltán Szabó— but everyone else is fair game.”

“Wait a minute,” said Attila, “What town are you from?”

“We’re from the Transdanubian home of forestry and charm, Sopron,” said Eszti.

“I knew a Zoltán Szabó once, albeit it is a very common name. Is he the Zoltán Szabó of genetic immunology repute?”

“Yes,” I answered. “He and I both are involved in genetics, though his field is immunogenomics and mine is molecular genetics relating to environmental sciences and forestry.”

“It must be the same person. Very handsome, right? With startling green eyes? He was my roommate during my first year at Eötvös Loránd University here in Budapest. I lost touch with him after he transferred to the molecular genetics program in Sopron, but I remember his brilliance. He was such a serious student, he had even less of a social life than I did! How do you know him? This seems to be an incredible coincidence!”

“I’m going to be his bride,” I said quietly, feeling strange disbelief at my future matrimonial situation.

Eszti and Kati laughed softly. “*The Bride of Dracula*,” said Eszti, with mock horror. “Did they ever make a movie about that?”

Kati replied, “No, silly, that was *The Bride of Frankenstein*! Anyway, in this case it would be *The Groom of Draculette*.”

Attila did not laugh. “How can you be engaged to be married to him? Does he know about your condition?”

“No,” I said, ashamedly.

“I don’t like such deceptions but you needn’t fear that I will tell. I understand that these things take time. My mother didn’t tell me until one night when I was about 13 years old. I got up to go to the bathroom at around midnight. I saw my mother standing at her bedroom door looking ghostly. Her eyes seemed to look through me. ‘I am one of The Kindred, Attila my dear. I must go out every night and search for the substance that keeps me alive. One night when I was asleep, a large bat came into my room. I can barely remember, but it seemed like a bat that soon transformed itself into a human being. It only took seconds for this being to pin me to the bed and insert his fangs into my neck. I felt my life drain from me in minutes. He then turned around and seemed to fly away, again in the form of a bat. Look closely at my neck, my dear.’

“I saw the two holes, which she deftly concealed with makeup during the day, I later learned. She also told me that she would never harm me. On the contrary, she would protect me from other vampyrs who visited and might have seen me as a convenient meal. This was true. She was as solicitous of my happiness, safety, and well-being as the most unselfish and careful of mothers. I miss her every day of my life.

“I’d like to be your host for the rest of your visit here in Budapest, if I am not being too forward.”

He was staring at Gizi as he said this, with an expression of tenderness and devotion.

I tried to be polite as I explained, “Since you know what it means to be like us, I hope you won’t be offended if we pass on your offer. Our plans for tonight, after we finished with you, were to go to two other clubs for feeding diversity. Tomorrow we were going to cruise the Taste of Hungary festival and some of the museums, for our specific purposes. This requires us to be flexible and opportunistic. We cannot be concerned about your feelings while we are involved with our unsavory activities. You might be offended with the particulars.”

“But I would like you to call and visit us in Sopron,” said Gizi. She wrote her phone number and address on a napkin and put it in the pocket of his black satin shirt.

With a flourish, Attila got up to leave us, his cape billowing behind him. He placed 10,000 forints on the table. “Get yourselves something you want tonight,” he said.

Everyone in the club followed his striking figure with their eyes as he exited.

He must have forgotten that what we wanted money could not buy.

Topping off the Evening

The rest of the evening was an exercise in superfluity, as we were already full enough from Csaba, Péter, Tivadar, and Ferenc. Gizi and I, especially, had our thoughts elsewhere. But for Kati's and Eszti's sakes we started out on foot to Klub Face, deciding to skip the college hangout. We might be able to manage a couple of skinny teenagers to top the evening off, but that would be it. The walk would burn off some of the Hévizi Four and might leave room for a snack.

Attila had given us much to think about. I was nervous because he knew our secret and he also knew Zoltán. I didn't think Attila would reveal my secret to Zoltán but I still felt uncomfortable for having been found out. Yet it was also satisfying to know that someone, who was not one of us, understood and had compassion for our plight.

Gizi, I could see by the glow on her face, was infatuated. She was highly intrigued. I had never seen her like this before. Her expression was different from when she lusted after other fleshy morsels on legs. "I loved those lines from the poem, how did they go, something, something, has found out thy bed, of crimson joy: and his dark secret love, something, something. That Attila definitely has something-something fascinating about him, don't you think?" she said.

“Oooooeee!” shrieked Eszti, “Big Sis is in love! Never thought I’d see the day! This calls for a song, right Kati?”

Eszti and Kati began composing and singing a song as we were walking. They were bandying the lines back and forth, clapping, moving their hips, walking like ducks on rocky terrain. I was embarrassed but faces in the crowd, as we headed towards Klub Face, looked approvingly as we passed.

“You ruddy boy
My crimson joy!
Get out of your head
Get into my bed!
Your dark love
Can’t be from above. . .
It’s from below
My deep, black crow!”

“That last line is downright stupid,” said Gizi. “How can he be crimson and black at the same time? I wish you would grow up and stop calling attention to yourselves! You wouldn’t act like this in Sopron!”

“All right, the last line is lame,” laughed Eszti, “but at least we’re not walking around moonstruck over some guy in a crimson cape we met twenty minutes ago.”

“He’s not just some guy. He’s Attila the Honey,” drawled Kati, exaggerating “the H-o-n-e-y,” and growling like a lioness.

We were all laughing over her antics as we approached the entrance to the club. This time the bouncer was a throwback to those orange and green haired, spiked Punk days. I thought he had possibilities. But Kati and Eszti had other ideas. Their eyes were gleaming as they took in a feast of teens, dancing in the semi-darkness. Gizi’s eyes showed an inwardness that betrayed, to me at least, that her thoughts were elsewhere.

“Look at those cute little snack packs over there,” said Eszti. She was indicating a pair of identical twin boys about seventeen years old. Their flaxen hair fell in long, shaggy bangs over their eyebrows and into their eyes. Their noses were sloped, ending in symmetrical teardrop-shaped nostrils under which were silken, almost white moustaches, probably their first growth. They were dressed in identical red and black striped rugby shirts with white collars and khaki shorts, strange for an autumn night. The blonde fuzz on their legs shone in the neon lights.

“They won’t be too difficult to subdue,” I said.
“Look at how weak and out-of-tone they are. Also, look at their slack faces, they’ve either had a lot to drink or are on something.”

Kati said, “I like them, even if there is a spacey quality to their expressions. They look Dutch to me. Eszti, we’re going to get our Dutch treat after all tonight!”

“No, we’re going to treat them,” I said. “Let’s do this quickly. We’ll treat them to drinks, take them for a walk down the railroad tracks, and call it a night.”

“I’m ready for the calling it a night part,” said Gizi, “So let’s get it over with.”

“Hey, you’re taking all the fun out of this, Gizi!” said Eszti. “Getting over with it is not the point, it’s enjoying the flavors of the moment. Look at those Netherlandish tidbits. How can you resist?”

It was very easy to fulfill our plans. The twins were docile. All they did was smile. They didn’t even speak. We bought them beers, led them outside, took them down the tracks, quickly had our way with them, and left their depleted bodies in some bushes.

But as we were leaving, I began to feel nauseous, something that had never happened to me with any feeding before, even with all the drunken tourists I had imbibed in the past. Kati, Eszti, and Gizi began retching.

“I told you we should have just called it a night,” said Gizi, kneeling on the ground. Her voice

sounded like a distorted tape in slow motion. Her head was breaking apart like a kaleidoscope containing fragments of colored glass. I tried to reach for her but could not move my arm. I tried to speak but only the howl of a wolf escaped my lips.

“Oh. My. God!” Kati said. “What was in those twins? My arms feel like they are covered with glass and I can see through my skin into my veins. The sky is warped and the stars are falling into one another! My legs have turned into limp ropes.” Eszti was lying on the side of the tracks waving her arms and watching her hands as they fluttered like inebriated butterflies. She was chanting, “from below, black crow, from below, black crow” in a whispery voice.

I decided that we had better stay there and let some of the effects of whatever substance those boys had ingested wear off. It was hours before we could return to the soothing darkness of the apartment in Szentendre. I had to admit to Gizi that her instincts to end the evening early had been correct.

Strange Aftereffects

We slept far into the afternoon the next day, still feeling the effects of the Dutch twins. We only made it to the Vajdahunyad Castle's medieval art collection in the late afternoon. We walked around feeling insubstantial, like ghosts, gazing at the paintings from Transylvanian churches and nobility before the castle closed at 6 PM. Still feeling shaky and unreal, we took the train to the Taste of Hungary food festival.

Our trip to Budapest had taken on a strange flavor. To put it back on an even keel, we decided to feast on garden-variety Hungarians and did so later on that night with little fanfare, picking plump, docile pairs of men who were happy for the companionship of four young ladies.

To our dismay, however, we saw newspaper headlines on the newsstands. Four businessmen from Héviz had gone missing from the morgue after they were discovered dead in the back row of the Urania Cinema. I felt a sickly sense of dread as I read about the punctures in the neck. I pictured my parents reading about this in the Sopron papers and getting upset that I kept going locales where such things were happening yet again.

We searched through the newspapers to see if they mentioned the Dutch twins. No mention of them at

all. We surmised that they re-emerged from the side of the railroad tracks without the intervening steps of being discovered and going to the morgue.

The time approached for us to bid farewell to Pest, as inhabitants call Budapest, and resume our normal lives in Sopron. I wanted to get back to Zoltán. Gizi wanted to get back because she had given Attila her number in Sopron, not where we were staying in Budapest. Only Eszti and Kati wanted to stay longer.

“Kati and I are going to have to come back without you two Older Women, aren’t we Kati?”

“Yes, Miss Black Crow from Below, these two senior citizens have lost the zest for having fun,” replied Kati.

“I hope I don’t need to remind you that we didn’t come here for fun. We came here in a humanitarian quest to spread our scourge out a little, instead of concentrating it solely in Sopron. Let’s get our priorities straight, girls.” I said. Their friskiness was wearing on me now.

I wanted to get back to my studies. The first semester had begun and I already felt behind in the goals I had set for myself. My father and mother were correct in their concern about my schooling. I had been neglecting it, especially in the light of how many hours of study I used to put in every day. It did appear that I was frittering away my time

sightseeing when I should have been furthering my career in the field that gave me more pleasure and meaning in life than anything else heretofore.

Before this unfortunate vampyristic circumstance, I had been a devout believer in genes being the driving force behind every decision, selection, and operation in living organisms, including humans and plants. We think we act independently, but we are really puppets of our genes, which pull the strings of our DNA to propagate themselves. Once the genes have assured their survival, we, as their carriers, become superfluous. Our organisms have accomplished the genes' purpose. It's the genes that, for their own propagation, are manipulating the bodies they ride around in. The individual entity is a survival machine for its genes.

Before this vampyr flightiness, I was fascinated with recombinant DNA technology, which relies on techniques that combine DNA from one source with DNA from another. I would take the DNA of interest (passenger DNA) and combine it with another DNA molecule (vector DNA) that served to ensure its replication and selection. Some of the major obstacles I had been encountering included purification and isolation of the DNA to be cloned, as well as the identification and selection of the cloned DNA of interest. But I was not frustrated by these exacting tasks.

What frustrated me as a scientist-to-be was this never-ending quest to replenish my blood! Such

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detailed studies were bound to suffer. So you can understand why I wanted to get back to my lab exercises to continue with my tree cloning project for reforesting selected tracts. And I was very lucky to be able to work in Dr. Kemény's lab on the campus, even though I was only a freshman in her first semester. It probably helped that my mother and Dr. Kemény's wife were the closest of friends for over forty years.

I needed Zoltán to help me free myself from this bondage. Our combined intelligence would find a solution. I was astonished at how much I missed Zoltán. Since our first and only love making session, I thought about him constantly. My body yearned for him. He was in my blood, if I had any blood of my own left.

Decisions in Sopron

“Next time in Vienna,” I said to my three friends as I kissed them goodbye at the train station on our return to Sopron. I walked home hoping that my mother would not be waiting there for me. But there she was, as I entered the arched front door of our house, sitting in the old leather armchair, reading the newspaper. She did not say a word to me. She just got up and tossed it lightly on the coffee table, headlines up, “Four Hévizi Businessmen Missing from Budapest Morgue.”

I went to my room exhausted, pulled the curtains, and began to undress. My white skin was glowing incandescently in the darkened room. Mother knocked softly on my door.

“Emma, your trip to Budapest did not do you well, you look depleted. Let me heat up some gomba-
leves with the wild mushrooms your father picked from the forest. It will fortify you.”

“No thanks, Mother, you wouldn’t believe how much we ate in Budapest!” I said.

“Well, you don’t look like you ate anything. Look at yourself in this mirror and see how frail you look.”

“No Mother, please, I just want to lie down for about an hour, then I want to call Zoltán and meet him over at the lab. I have work to do and I realize all this gadding about Budapest has been a detour. And mother, you don’t have to mention about those Héviz casualties you were reading about when I came in. Violence and murder happen everywhere, you can’t keep trying to protect me from the world.”

I kissed her and pulled the bedcovers down.

“Mama, I appreciate your concern and I love you. Now just let me get a little rest and I will look better,” I said. She looked behind at me as she left the room with downcast eyes and a worried hunch in her shoulders.

“Oh, just let me get rid of this endless exhaustion,” I thought as I drifted off into a fitful sleep.

I awoke to my mother’s voice calling me, sounding like she was under water. My body felt like it was encased in sticky cobwebs. “Emma, it’s Zoltán on the phone. While you are on the phone, see if you can find out when you will be getting married so we can start embroidering the wedding gown. You know how long something like that can take.”

I didn’t care about my wedding gown at this point. It seemed too pushy to broach the subject. “That’s going to sound really good, no sooner do I say ‘hello,’ than I speak about our wedding preparations. No ‘How are you, how was Sopron while I was gone?’”

“Emma, be realistic. If you want a real Hungarian wedding, it takes time. So tonight it would be good if you worked the wedding into the conversation. Otherwise, I might have to do some prompting.”

I took the phone out of my mother’s hands just as she was starting on the subject of the wedding. “Zoltán, I missed you,” I said. “I missed my work at the lab. Can you meet me over at the main entrance of the university tonight? I need you to help me with something specific I can’t mention over the phone. And by the way, Mother wants to know when the wedding will be!”

Zoltán was laughing so loudly, my mother could hear him. I had to hold the phone away from my ears.

“Emma, you are too funny with your bluntness. Tell your mother -- in the spring. How about April?”

Mother’s ear was up against the receiver when she heard “April.” She could barely contain herself. “April it will be,” she said, into the receiver. That was when I decided I would tell Zoltán that night about my vampyric situation. I couldn’t go on lying to him and I wanted to give him a chance to stop the wedding before my mother invested time and money in it. Traditional Hungarian embroidery required much preparation, gathering of materials, and hour-by-hour labor to produce the bright, jewel-like effect for which it is famous.

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“I’ll see you in an hour,” I said, sending him a kiss over the phone. I wanted to take Zoltán to the lab, talk to him about my problem, do some work, and get a feeding in on the streets before I returned home. I also wanted to make love with him, which would be difficult if it were to take place before my bloodmeal. I was afraid I would not be able to control myself and in the heat of the moment, my kisses might turn into irreversible love bites.

Passion Restrained

Zoltán was early and was waiting for me on the steps at the front of the university. He looked so delicious, my heart ached. Self-control was going to be difficult tonight.

As I approached, he walked towards me. He grabbed me up in his arms and lifted me a few inches off the ground. “Emma, I can’t stop thinking about you. Don’t go away again for a while. I missed you too much!” We drank in each other’s eyes, relieved to be together. “Now, show me to your lab. I am very interested in the mysterious problem you think I can help you solve. On second thought, let’s not go to the lab—come back to my place.”

We kissed for a prolonged minute. We continued to kiss until we were out of breath. At this point, I was trembling. I wanted to take him up on his offer, but controlled myself, again. I needed to show him my work, so he would respect my sincerity as a thinker and problem solver. I needed to enlist his mind and bring it to bear on what could ensure our togetherness in a non-lethal way.

No sooner did we enter the laboratory than he pushed me up against the wall and covered my face and neck with kisses again. I wrapped my right leg around his legs and we both lost our balance and

fell to the floor. Zoltán blocked the shock of our fall with his hands behind my head and back. Our bodies intertwined like mating snakes. Undulating, we shed our clothes, like snakes molting their outgrown skins.

Zoltán put his coat on the floor and we desperately kissed each other all over until the desire to unite became unbearable. The union was explosive. Through this amazing act, I felt completely joined with Zoltán. He was plugged into me and a loop of electrical current circulated between us, enveloping us in a force field of warmth and love.

As we lay panting afterwards, I began to speak of my cloning project. Then I decided to break the truth about myself to Zoltán.

“Zoltán, you know how you have described me as being different from most of the women you encounter? Well, I am more different that you can imagine.”

“Than I can imagine?” asked Zoltán. He was stroking my hair, neck, and bare shoulders.

“Let me put it this way. What if you found out that I am not the person you think I am? Would you still be able to love me?” I asked.

“I love you for the person that you are, not the person I think you are. Your intelligence, your beauty, how happy I am in your presence. This is

all I know of you. But it depends on what you are talking about. If you tell me you're a heroine addict, for example, I would be shocked but would stand by you while you went through detox and rehab."

"I'm something like a heroine addict," I said, crying into his shoulder and trying to ignore the unassailable stirrings of hunger that were warning me that feeding time was approaching. "Every night, after midnight, I am compelled to go out in search of human blood."

"What are you talking about, Emma?" laughed Zoltán. "Is this a joke? Are you doing this for one of your experiments? And what does this have to do with cloning trees?"

"Nothing, absolutely, nothing, Zoltán! Now listen to me. One night, several weeks ago a being entered my bedroom and vampyrized me. Look, can you see the faint scars where his fangs entered my neck?"

Zoltán began to laugh uproariously. "Emma, you have a droll sense of humor. This has to be a joke!" He pretended to be Bela Lugosi and growled, "I vant to zuck your bloot!" He grabbed me and acted like he was ravaging me.

"Zoltán, no! I'm serious! Please believe me! You know the night we were at Club Colosso and those men were reported dead by the newspapers? That was our doing!"

“What do you mean, ‘our doing?’” he asked. His face was becoming greenish white. His eyebrows were tensed, his forehead creased vertically between his brows. He was not smiling or laughing now.

“Gizi, Kati, Eszti, and I – It’s a long story, which I don’t want to tell right now. I just want you to know the essentials. This is why I need your help. I need you to help me manipulate my genes to overcome this incredible, inexorable desire to replenish my body with the blood of others. I think it is our only chance to reverse this taint that has infested my life. Please, Zoltán, help me. And it is not just about me, but about stopping the epidemic in its tracks. Hundreds of thousands of people are at risk if we allow it to continue.”

I was crying and thoroughly miserable because time was ticking by and the call of the blood was loudly pounding in my veins.

“What about those businessmen in Budapest that just happened to die and disappear from the morgue, just as those Club Colosso guys did from the Sopron Morgue? I suppose that was your doing too?” He started putting his clothes on, a look of revulsion pulling his face downward.

“Yes, Zoltán. I don’t want to lie to you, ever. I love you too much for that. The whole time I was in Pest, I thought of nobody but you—how you make me feel, how happy I am now that you are in my

life, how much I loved our lovemaking. The only thing that took precedence over my constant thoughts of you was this wretched instinct to victimize others for my survival.”

Tears were streaming down Zoltán’s face. “This disgusts me, Emma,” he barely whispered. “I can’t picture you doing these horrible things. I can’t live with someone like that. I need time to think. Right now, I feel like I never want to see you again.” With that, he put his coat on and walked toward the door. “I’m amazed that you didn’t try sampling my blood! You sicken me Emma! How could I have been so stupid to have fallen in love with a predatoress that feasts on human misery? Who takes people into her world of destruction, and perpetuates misery?” He raced out of the lab, almost shattering the frosted glass in the door as he slammed it.

It was getting late. I could either go home, pretend to go to bed, and then sneak out for my feeding, or stay in the lab, do some work, and snag a quick meal on the way home. I decided to do the latter, knowing that I was risking my parents’ displeasure for coming home after midnight once again. Perhaps because they knew I was with Zoltán, my groom-to-be, it would be all right.

My groom-to-be? Whom was I kidding? Who would want me in my condition? Who would trust me? My God, that is the worst part of being a vampyr—vampyr’s cannot share in the world of love. Love is not for them. Murder, enslavement,

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and love are mutually exclusive! I was sobbing as I worked for a few hours on my projects, barely being able to see from the constant tears in my eyes. Then I let myself out of the lab and locked the door behind me.

I hurried home, watching as I went for a likely victim the way a fox observes the young, weak, and infirm in a herd of wild boar. Like a fox, I was up for the swift kill. But at this hour, around the university, all I saw were a few people in pairs. I didn't need a very large meal—one person would do. I decided on a taxi cab driver and hailed one over. This was a lucky choice. He was middle aged, well-fed and rosy, jovial and welcoming. Soon I was going to turn his rig into the Taxi of Death, which he would use for his convenience to entrap his own victims. My plan was to let him drive me home and when it came time to pay, I would make my moves. True, he would be stalled in front of my house until the time for him to re-emerge for his own feedings, but the hour was so late, no one would notice. It would just look like he was dozing while waiting for a fare.

It was disgusting really—only hours ago I was engaged in the ecstasy of love and now I was depriving yet another Sopron family of a loved one; a son, perhaps a father, perhaps a husband.

The Heartbreak of Rejection

Because of the strange angle when I struck the taxi driver on the neck from the back seat, some of his blood sprayed onto my face. But I didn't see it or feel it, in my emotional numbness. So I walked into my house with the taxi driver's still warm blood dripping from my nose, mouth and chin. My mother had been dozing in her chair. It was irritating that she still was waiting up for me.

"Emma, it is so late!" she said, as she yawned and stretched. "What were you and Zoltán doing? I would hope he'd have more respect for his future mother-in-law than to keep her daughter out at all hours." Then she shrieked, "Oh my God! Why do you have blood on your face?"

She rushed up to me with the handkerchief she kept stuffed in her sleeve and wiped my nose, displaying copious amount of blood saturating the cloth.

"Zoltán didn't hit you did he? You can tell me, Emma!"

"No, Mother, Zoltán did not beat me up, nor was I mugged. It must just be a nosebleed. I'm not in any pain."

"I don't like this, Emma. I am completely upset by seeing you like this! You seem to want to destroy your life with these unwholesome behaviors. Now

you go out with your fiancé and you come home with a bloody face!”

“Mother, you’ve got it all wrong. Zoltán would never lay a hand on me in violence. All he has been is kind. But Mother, I have to tell you something disappointing.”

At this point I began sobbing so hysterically, my tears and the residue of blood on my face ran in rivulets down my neck and onto my blouse, staining its whiteness a watery pink. “Mother, there is not going to be a wedding.”

“Oh Emma! What happened? This is impossible! I already called Erzsi Kemény and she is excited about helping me work on a replica of your grandmother’s gown. This is crazy! One minute you are getting married and now it is completely off? I thought it was too soon for you and Zoltán but I believed you both had the maturity to know what you wanted. I thought you would be a good team, like your father and I, only you would have the chance to make some important scientific contributions.”

“Sorry about the inconvenience with the wedding dress, Mother,” I said bitterly, “but Zoltán doesn’t want me.” I fell on my knees, my entire body wracked with sobs. I just wanted to die so as to stop this extreme torture. Now I know why Dracula said, in the movie that night in Budapest, “There are some things worse than death for the living.”

Those are not his exact words but I kept hearing them over and over in my head. Dying would be such an easy way out, but I cannot do it. I am condemned to never experience the eternal rest that death brings to the normal human being.

My father came downstairs, his hair mussed and eyes puffy from sleep. “What is this commotion going on so late at night? Let’s get this family back to normal sleeping hours! Emmushka, I am making a rule that as long as you are under this roof, you will obey our curfews. No more coming in after midnight! I will not have so many disruptions. It is not good for your mother’s health and it is not good for yours either. And what is that mess all over you? This has got to stop now!”

“István, please,” my mother pleaded, “Our Emma is upset over her broken engagement.”

“Yes, Dad, Zoltán doesn’t want me any more,” I said, barely audible.

“A few weeks ago, we didn’t have this nonsense, sudden engagements, coming in at all hours of the night, covered with blood, crying hysterically. We had a household in which the hours were regular and our daughter studied and applied herself to her schooling at which she excelled,” my father continued. “At this rate, I don’t think you are ready for marriage and starting a household of your own, Emma. Now clean yourself up and go to bed!”

Predatoress

I felt my heart twist with shame as I saw his face and the disappointment he felt towards me.

He then spoke kindly to me, patting my trembling shoulders, “Don’t worry Emmushka, you have plenty of time to find someone else. It’s your schooling that matters now.”

“But I don’t want anyone else!” I shouted and flung myself up the stairs.

Feeling the Love

After that blood-sodden night, my life had taken a decidedly downward turn. Nothing was as important to me as Zoltán and his opinion of me, and now he was gone. My studies, which used to have the highest importance in my life, next to my parents, had lost their luster because of my continuous exhaustion and quest for blood. And my parents—what had become of my love for them, when every night I sneaked away, lied to them, and went against everything they had ever taught me?

In contrast, Gizi was happy, as she let me know when she phoned me the next morning. She was never very animated, even in her previous life, but now I could hear her quick, excited breathing as she told me the news. Attila was coming to town tonight and they were going to see each other. He was staying a whole week at his friend's house.

I rushed over to Gizi's house, with a purpose in mind. I wanted to arrange a talk with Attila about Zoltán and also ask his advice. Eszti let me in. She was smiling winningly, looking as innocent as any 16-year-old. What is there to smile about under these conditions? I wished I were as simple as Eszti. I don't think the horror of her deeds have affected her deeply the way they have me. She just goes from moment to moment, like a true Zen Master,

living in The Now, untroubled about the future or the past.

“Emma, Attila the Honey will be arriving in a few hours,” giggled Eszti, “And I have never seen Gizi like this before! I actually think she is in love! All this crazy love stuff happening! What unpredictable timing. You with Zoltán and now Gizi with what’s his name.”

“And if I am in love with Attila, what of it?” Gizi said, blushing slightly, looking like a white rose tinged with pink.

“Nothing, really, I wish I were so lucky!” said Eszti. “It’s not happening for Kati and me. We are both so jealous of Emma and her loverboy Zoltán. I want to be in love like that!”

“No you don’t,” I said, “If the person whom you love doesn’t love you! Or is disgusted by you!”

“What do you mean?” asked Eszti. “I know what it’s like to have a crush on Zoltán and have him not even know I exist. Kati and I both want him and he just sees us as nice little sisters. But he actually loves you, Emma, so what are you complaining about?”

“Not any more, Eszti. I told him about myself, and us, last night,” I said.

Gizi looked shocked, “That may have been stupid, Emma.”

“No, that was stupid, Emma. He will tell András and others and our secret will be out! Then Dr. Barabás will come around and exterminate us all. Not very smart, Emma!” said Eszti with annoyance.

“He promised he would not tell anyone,” I said.

Gizi replied after some thought, “Zoltán is a man of his word, so I wouldn’t worry about his telling anyone. It’s just that I feel so bad about your loss of his affection and esteem. Look, let’s arrange a meeting between you and Attila. Later Attila can get in touch with his old friend and influence him more positively.”

“How to win friends and influence vampyrs, eh, Gizi?” laughed Eszti.

“This isn’t funny Eszti,” I said. “Not everything is a joke. I am suffering horribly because of Zoltán’s revulsion. I adore him and he is sickened by me.”

“Emma, this vampyr thing is turning you into a head case,” Eszti continued. “A few weeks ago you didn’t know guys existed and now you’re in love and sleeping with them! Or at least one of them!”

“Being a vampyr has nothing to do with being in love! Unfortunately it happened concurrently with my new condition. One would think they would be

mutually exclusive, but now I see that it is possible to be a monster and at the same time feel love, caring, and protectiveness towards humans.”

I turned to the glowing Gizi and said, “Thanks Giz, for your suggestions about arranging things with Attila. That is what I came over to talk to you about. Attila has a sympathetic view towards our compulsions. He can explain to Zoltán about his mother.”

“Attila is sympathetic, period,” said Gizi. “I have never met a more compassionate or sexy man. The combination is irresistible. Now, my thought is that Attila has a vested interest in our cure so that we can be together at last. I am sure he will bring all his charm to bear on Zoltán.”

I left to go to the lab and worked for several painful hours before I phoned Gizi.

Eszti answered the phone. “Hey, Emma, A the H is here right now,” she whispered, trying to suppress a laugh and having it spurt out her nose in a snort. “Those two love bats are going over the edge right now. All they do is stare at each other. Anyway, Gizi told me to tell you to come over if you called. Attila wants to talk with you.”

I left the lab and ran through the corridor to the main exit. There he was: Zoltán entering, just as I was leaving. He nodded his head and promptly looked away. I felt my stomach sink to my feet and

sweat prickle in my armpits. I missed him and wondered if he missed me at all, or if he put me out of his mind, like some kind of traumatic memory he'd never want to relive.

I looked at the curve of his high cheekbones that I loved. I remembered the feel of those lips, now curled in a twitch of repulsion, and how they felt on mine, how softly he kissed me and when the passion mounted, how firmly and demandingly! I didn't know if I would ever feel those lips again. His eyes never met mine.

I could barely see the stones of the street as I walked to Gizi's house. My eyes felt numb and watery, as if I had just been to the optometrist and he had inserted dilating drops. But these drops were my own salty tears, blurring and distorting the streets. The lump in my throat hurt so badly, I felt as if I had swallowed a porcupine. "The Joys of Youth!" What a ridiculous phrase. I'm not enjoying my youth at all. Happiness? What is that? Do you think I like the fact that I will go out tonight and indulge in another gore-fest, permanently altering yet another being's life, instead of being home with my family, studying, or feeling the delight of Zoltán's arms around me?

I knocked softly at the Kovács's door and the dancing Eszti let me in, her eyes brimming with mischief. "If Zoltán doesn't want you any more, may I have a crack at him?" she asked, half-

seriously, skipping sideways as she accompanied me into the corridor leading to the living room.

“No, Eszti, don’t you understand, he is not repelled by me, he is repelled by what we do—the infiltration and destruction of lives. What makes you think he would like you any better? Besides, you know he already knows about you, Gizi, and Kati and our prey,” I said impatiently.

I had become such an imperious grouch because of my perpetual discomfort. This constant irritability replaced my sense of humor. My moments of happiness and inner peace were getting scarcer. Nevertheless, I smiled as I entered the living room and saw Attila and Gizi wrapped up in each other’s arms, pressing their cheeks against each other. They looked like something out of a Victorian valentine, wholesome and completely innocent.

“Emma,” they both called out at once, demonstrating how attuned they had already become with one another. “Come and sit by us,” said Gizi, patting the sofa. “Attila and I have been talking about your situation with Zoltán. Attila definitely wants to talk with him about finding a solution. Tonight, he will be meeting with him at the Hotel Pannonia. I will have to part with my darling only hours after he arrived—but this is of utmost importance. None of us wants to go on like this any longer.”

Eszti said, “I was talking with Kati this morning and she got into a lot of trouble at the casino last night.

She lied about her age to get in. Then, apparently she took on a kickboxing trainer from Győr for her midnight snack. He did some major damage and escaped before she had her way with him. She thinks he can identify her and she is scared. All we need is for word to get out to Dr. Barabás. He is so keen on making a name for himself. Imagine the sensational headlines: ‘Barabás Vanquishes Hungarian Vampyr!’ It’s a career maker!”

“Well, it’s a career ender for us if we don’t play our cards right,” I said, hating the gambling pun even though it brought laughter from Eszti. I knew it would be only a matter of time before one of us slipped up, didn’t overcome our target victim, and was identified. It just made me angry that Kati chose someone too difficult to overcome when, probably, there were more than enough drunken weaklings at the casino! Maybe I needed to give her a refresher course on survival and practicality.

Attila interrupted my thoughts about how I was going to approach Kati. “Emma, I will do everything I can. I know Zoltán is a genius when it comes to genetics. I have never told him about my mother, but I think I will win him over when he finds out. I am sure he wouldn’t like the traditional cure for you or for the rest of your friends either, and especially not for my beloved Gizi.” He gave Gizi a kiss on the lips and continued. “Like your friend Kati, someone else is bound to slip up and besides, this multiplication and breeding of your kind has to stop before all of Hungary becomes

infested. And obviously, I don't want to see you all decapitated with stakes driven through your hearts, as happened to my mother.”

The endless horror of our lives was presenting itself in all its hopelessness. Attila and Zoltán were the keys to reversing our condition. I knew I could do most of the legwork if Zoltán could arrange for the Rife. We talked for about an hour before it was time for Attila to meet with Zoltán. While Attila was with him, I decided I would visit Kati.

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Immerse yourself in my story: the war I had to wage inside my own body against forces over which I had no control. I confess, I'm ashamed of what I was compelled to do. Yet this is also the story of love's victory, told for the first time to you, my dear reader, and the world that must know the truth.



My downfall starts in September 2003 in the ancient town of Sopron, Transdanubia. One of Dracula's spawn turns me, Emma Gabor, an 18-year-old college freshman, into one of The Undead. I become a blood-thirsty but reluctant vampire, constantly questioning my morality as I foist myself upon victim after victim.

Compelled by survival and unwilling to tread this path alone, I vampirize my three best friends, Kati, Gizi, and Eszti. We go on bloodthirsty rampages every night, luring our victims through charm and sexuality or simply overpowering them with tricks and violence.

Out on the town one night with my friends for a joint feeding session, I dance with Zoltan Szabo, a genetic research fellow, who is also the love object of my friends, Kati and Eszti. We become friends, discussing our mutual scientific interests and fall in love at a charity ball in the ancient castle of Frakno. We consummate our passion! I must, with great pain, hold back from telling him the truth and from making him one of The Undead....

Devour I shall, nevertheless...and to make that an even more memorable experience for you, I have a truly special treat:

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