

Chapter 1

A light moonbeam tickled her pale, cold skin. A shiver ran through her numb body, gradually bringing her back to life. She moved slightly, her limbs brushing the soft velvet covering the mattress. One by one, her senses awoke, restoring full awareness of her surroundings. The smell of cherry wood and dust caressed her nostrils. The cool night air cooled her skin, restoring her sense of touch. The incessant, deafening roar of trains... Trains, light, where was she? She jerked her eyes open, her heart pounding. Moonlight streamed in through the cracks in the coffin, illuminating the padded interior with a whitish glow. Carmilla exhaled deeply, relieved. It wasn't daylight, she was safe. She opened the coffin and sat up, examining her surroundings.

Instead of the luxurious room in which she had been lulled to sleep, she had awoken in what appeared to be a vault. But the place had little in common with the family sanctuary, sealed in such a way that no one, human or beast, could disturb the rest of its occupants. She looked around the room, her senses alert. It was empty, except for a few stacked boxes and her coffin. The walls were made of solid stone and an opening in the ceiling let in the night air and the light of the city. An exit window, the clue that she was in a cellar, in an unknown city. So they had moved to the city, a noisy, crowded never sleeping city, at that, judging by the noise and the passers-by whose footsteps she could hear through the opening. The window had been sealed from the inside, but brick debris now littered the floor. How long has it been so? She realized how lucky she was to wake up at night, before daylight flooded into the room. She was torn between relief and horror. The sealed had obviously been broken into from the outside and her brothers' coffins were missing from the scene; whether they had not followed the same destination as hers or whether Lukas and Andreas had come out of hibernation leaving her behind, all scenarios led to the same terrifying conclusion: a drama had played out while her sleep.

She extricated herself from her coffin, her muscles aching from too much inactivity making her movements heavy and jerky. This awakening was the most difficult of all times, she was panting and her body cruelly lacked vital energy, the slightest movement, the slightest breath was excruciating pain. The only time she had ever felt that inner pressure, as the organs retracted and emptied themselves of their vital flow like a squeezed lemon, was when she kissed that sweet succubus. A kiss that had been either deliciously horrible or horribly delicious, depending on your point of view. Is that what happened here? Had the succubi attacked the Family? She shook her head at the thought. She had to consider every possibility, but it was so unlikely. Vampires and succubi, having too many weapons in common when it came to sexual attraction, had been carefully avoiding each other for thousands of years. Werewolves were also out of the question; these brainless beasts were incapable of the slightest subtlety and would simply have torn her to pieces. One thing was certain, this cycle didn't benefit her, and she came out of it with a foggy mind and a weary body. Her stomach clenched painfully and her fangs pointed out. Blood, she could smell blood in every single human being miles around and there were a lot of them. She exhaled. Craving was so intense that she feared she couldn't

control herself from killing but she had to come out and feed somehow. She headed towards the only exit, a solid wooden door, trying to open it. It was locked. She sighed and rested her forehead on the aged wood. It was too solid and she didn't have enough energy to make it give way. She turned round, her back pressed against the stone wall in despair. The walls that were supposed to protect her from the outside world had become her prison. Her foot came up against something soft buried in the dirt and dust of the cellar floor. She nudged it with the ball of her foot. It was a large brown envelope. It contained a property deed, dated in 1881, for a building in New York, a set of keys and a note. She recognized Andreas' elegant handwriting: 'We settled on the top floor. May the First Lord preserve you my beloved sister'. Her heart sank with agony, she would have cried hadn't her pain been beyond tears and her body drained from blood. They had left her behind and fled for some mysterious reason. She examined the set of keys, two of which might match the cellar's keyhole. She tried the largest unsuccessfully and set her hopes on the second one. The key turned smoothly and the click of the lock signaled the hour of her release. Behind this door, a flight of stone steps led her to a heavy carved wooden door, which the largest key easily opened. It opened to a large marble hall bathed in light. She recoiled in an instinct for survival, but the brightness, despite its intensity, cast harmless rays on her livid skin.

"Fascinating", she murmured, lost in contemplation of her hand untouched by the white light. A delicious smell interrupted her, hitting her nostrils in the most delicious way. It was 'gold blood', Rhnull, the rarest and most intoxicating of all blood types. It was the sweetest of flavours, a rare treat, and it was accompanied by an exquisite hint of cherry, like a fresh fruit with juicy, plump flesh. It stood out from the crowd of people whom blood scented the surrounding air even through the thick walls of her underground vault. It aroused in her much more than hunger, a desire for possession, an irresistible attraction for the woman from whom it emanated. Carmilla sighed in despair, she was menstruating, she could scent it. She could no longer resist the scent of femininity, which was like a bombardment of pheromones illuminating all her senses. She turned towards a charming black woman in her thirties, carrying a shopping bag who stood staring at her with amazed eyes.

Chapter 2

Charlie was stunned. Not only the door opened, that mysterious door which no-one in the building had ever seen unlocked –and that for generations according to Mrs Goldberg, the oldest tenant– not only that door gaped open, but it opened on to the most seductive of women. Her gaze wandered from the long black strands that fell over her extremely pale face, hiding her eyes, to the Second Empire corset with its plunging neckline revealing movingly round breasts, then down the long black satin dress that hugged her shapely figure.

– “Your costume is magnificent. You could have chosen Snow White with your looks, but Walt Disney’s Evil Queen outfit is stunning. Or is it Morticia Adams?”

– “I beg you pardon?”

Charlie didn’t like her tone that was sophisticated and haughty but she pronounced the ‘r’ with a slight Germanic accent, which had the most charming effect. It was impossible to remain insensitive to her charm.

– “Your outfit. You’re going to a costume party or are you into cosplay? Is there a convention somewhere?”

Carmilla didn’t understand a word the creature said, but she was used to cope with the uncertainty of elapsing time during hibernation. Each awakening brought their own slight changes: language novelty, caprice of fashion, new kings and other petty human leaders. She approached the young human. It was a dangerous move, given her state of starvation and the lure of her blood delicious smell, but she needed intel and this human seemed to inhabit the building. She looked at her attire with a mixture of astonishment, admiration and envy. She was wearing men’s trousers and a shirt as if it was the most usual of outfits and not an undercover for a taste of freedom. She handed her a graceful hand.

– “How do you do? I happen to have settled on the top floor.”

The confirmation of her current establishment that she had been hoping for arrived immediately.

– “The Karstein apartment?! Whaou! That place has been abandoned for ages. (She paused, thinking) You must be my owner then. I’m Charlie, third floor just below yours.”

– “Oh no, no, Dear. I’m nobody’s owner. I don’t actually fancy owning slaves.”

Carmilla fell silent as Charlie gave her a strange, dark look. She had obviously made a faux pas.

– “You have the weirdest sense of humor.” Charlie paused and shook her hand in quite a manly way, “you’re already freezing, you shouldn’t go out with this neckline.”

She interrupted, blushing at the idea of being caught admiring her cleavage. But the woman didn’t let go of her hand, which didn’t make it any easier for her to hide her confusion. She wasn’t moving, fixing Charlie with bright silver cat’s eyes. From her half-open mouth, fangs protruded with the brilliance of two white pearls.

– “Oh my God, you’re a vampire aren’t you? That’s so cool!”

Carmilla stepped back suddenly. She had forgotten herself, intoxicated by the smell of her blood, and to her great surprise her vampire form didn’t terrify her, quite the contrary. She

was confused and lost. When did her kind come out to the world? So many things seemed to have changed while he was asleep: slaves had been freed obviously, and so had the women, or at least they were now allowed to wear trousers, but that –vampires wandering openly around the world– that was too revolutionary for her taste.

Unbelievable, she thought, last time it was just railway and the telegraph. This is way too much to absorb.

Charlie interrupted her train of thoughts with a scream.

– “I know! You’re Countess Carmilla von Karnstein, daughter of Dracula, Queen of the night, Carmilla the lesbian vampire, that’s brilliant!”

Carmilla choked. She couldn’t believe her ears, does this age no longer know about privacy? And how come that silly Dracula rumor persisted?

– “Dracula has never be– Wait a minute, aren’t you even scared?”

– “Oh sure, I’m terrified. Yeh!” she screamed mockingly faking terror. “Seriously this make-up is a masterpiece. Where did you get those contact lenses? The effect is amazing!”

She still thinks I’m dressed up for... How did she say? Cosplay? she sighed.

That was a relief. She and the other creatures of her species always belonged to the realm of fiction and Gothic fantasy. A realm they should never come out from. Hiding their true self had been the safest way of preservation and should stay as it was: secret and secluded. Charlie was approaching her dangerously. Carmilla stepped away, avoiding her touch. She had to keep some distance between their bodies. She needed to gather herself, control her hunger and calm the beast inside. She couldn’t do so with her tempting veins within her reach. She couldn’t which was most appealing: tasting her blood or exploring her skin with kisses. She closed her eyes, inhaled deeply and regained her self-control. She had to further interrogate that Charlie woman and couldn’t do so while struggling with starvation and the urge to bite, not to mention the sexual impulse... She had to cool off and couldn’t do so with a view of her soft, brown cheeks darkened by innervated blood vessels.

– “I don’t know that Carmilla. Is she famous?”

– “Well, not as famous as Bram Stocker’s Dracula, I mean... few people have actually read Le Fanu’s novel, even in the Sapphic community, but she’s like The symbol of lesbianism. You know all the ‘can turn a woman gay with evil attraction and just one kiss’ crap.”

– “There’s a new Sapphic community?”

Carmilla bit her lips, she shouldn’t have asked, right now any confession of naivety could only bring suspicion and raise more questions about her. She couldn’t afford to have curious humans meddling in her life, even cute ones. She had to leave before betraying herself further more.

– “I shall leave, I have a party to attend”, she muttered.

Charlie bit her lips in disappointment. The woman was straight and probably a racist bigot. Why was she always attracted by the wrong kind?

She watched the long, dark figure walk away with haunting grace. She undulated, seeming to fly above the ground as if earth were too trivial to accommodate her footsteps.

– “Don’t you have a coat? It’s freezing outside.”

She couldn’t take her eyes off her sensual curves and letting her go was oddly painful.

– “Wait! I don’t even know your first name.”

But she had already disappeared into the night without a word. Charlie paused, pondering. Maybe it was all for the best, her life was as complicating as it was without adding a love affair with some straight white woman to all her current issues. It was for the best but she couldn’t help but feel a strange sense of loss.

Chapter 3

On the entrance stairs, the bright, chaotic city turmoil hit Carmilla with slap in the face. She staggered and held on to the wrought iron railing to prevent collapsing in agony. Sharp flashes of neon lights tore her corneas like thousands of tiny razor blades. Coming from everywhere, at every frequency sound pulses resonated in her eardrums, bounced and, amplified, came back to bang her heightened senses. Stimuli were echoing frenetically on her sonar system and she felt like a punch dancing under the repeated blows of its boxer. She crawled on the ground and took refuge on the story below curb level. She clenched to the grating of a vent, waiting for the crisis to pass, and for her senses to adjust to this overstimulating new environment. Here, under ground level she was out of reach of disturbing sound waves and could regain control over her senses. She breathed deeply and slowly opened her eyes, through the vent, she saw her open coffin below. How ironic, she had fell down by her vault window. She eyed up to the city crowd passing by, ignoring her presence. People seemed to take little notice of each other in these times, it would be easy to catch a prey in the anonymity of this multitude. She had to find someone vulnerable, someone nobody cared about in case she would lose control and kill, a tramp or a whore. She strongly disapproved of those methods but they had been efficient for her cousin and sometimes the end justifies the means. She wondered whether he was still rampant in London. She hatred him and his cruel ways with women but he might know about Lukas and Andreas' fate. She decided she would use him solely in last resort.

An awful smell hit her nostrils, clenching her stomach in disgust. Some tramp had rejoined her refuge. He nodded to her and sit on a side, holding on his bottle of booze like a shipwrecked man holds his lifeline. The poor soul was the perfect prey, a marginal ignored and despised by his kind but she couldn't pass the smelly mixture of alcohol, piss and sewage that emanated from him. She stood and left their refuge, not without a last look of pity at her unfortunate companion. She recalled her cousin arguing that he was ending lives of misery and sin, but she could resolve to kill innocent souls, even creatures as trivial as humans. This quest for fresh blood proved arduous, she based her regime on too many humanitarian principles hence her choice to hibernate and spare her vital energy. But today, her great principles of life sounded like a death sentence.

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Now that her disorder had passed, Carmilla could take a better look at her surroundings. Her building was a brownstone, four stories mansion. Knowing that Charlie, being nobody's slave, was leaving in it, she concluded that the place had been divided into apartments some time ago. The decor of the entrance indicated a certain standing which meant that living in a block of apartments was no longer the sole fate of poor workers and immigrants. Well, she could adjust to that as long as her new home met all the expectations of a royal residence; and

was dark enough. She looked at the city lights. So they managed to master electricity and transformed the energy into light. That was quite impressive, useless but impressive. She remembered that human sight was poor and they were unable to navigate in the beautiful darkness of the night. She looked at the enlightened sky. All the urban lightning hid the beauty of the stars whose delicate, pale glow had disappeared. What a shame! She had to search for the moon to determine the time, it was around dinner time. She had the night to catch a prey and feed before sunrise.

Her ears went back, scanning the slightest noise in the surroundings. Her eyes pierced the crowded streets to the horizon, scanning the neighborhood in the smallest details, accurately mapping all possible outcomes. She was holding control of her hunting territory like the great predator she had become again. In a distance, she perceived screams and sounds of struggle. Signs of violence excited her senses. She rushed toward the noise, fast and silent, her steps sliding above the ground. In a dark alley, a man was forcefully kissing a woman. She was protesting, struggling and crying, but he forcefully held her against a wall, slipping his hand under her skirt. Carmilla smiled with contentment at this spectacle: a rapist, her favorite prey. That should be so satisfying to tear this loathsome flesh with her fangs.

– “Leave the bitch and take me instead.”

The man let go of his victim and stepped back in surprise, the young woman ran away. He gazed at Carmilla and frowned at the unusual proposal, suddenly ill-at-ease and clumsy. She grinned in dismay, *the bravery of the coward as usual, dear old humanity!*

She approached slowly, her gaze fixed on him, scenting his blood pumping faster in his veins. Fear was a strong stimulant. She held him against the wall with superhuman strength.

– “Get away from me, you bitch!”

– “I don’t mind a bit of violence, you can hit me if it helps you get hard.” She increased the pressure of her grip, crushing him against the bricks of the wall. “Come on hit me. Stand-up for yourself like the strong male you think you are.”

Her pupils had retracted like a thin dark blade, the iris of her eyes had turned silver bright and was shining out of lust. His eyes widened in terror but she devoured his neck before he could scream, sucking avidly on his jugular.

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Carmilla straightened and sat besides the lifeless corpse. She might have drained him to death but couldn’t feel any remorse. Her pity didn’t apply to those creatures. Violence called for violence after all. She looked at her victim. There was still a particle of life left in this body but he won’t survive his injuries. She had fed with great appetite and little control, and left him almost decapitated. The death of the vile creature was pretty annoying but she was more worried about her stained dress. Blood wasn’t visible on the black satin but she could not go unnoticed in soaked clothes with drops of blood dripping from them. She noticed the man’s backpack and emptied it on the ground. Seated on the pavement, she searched its content. There were keys, a blade, a pack of cigarettes and a leather wallet. She eyed to the man who looked nothing like an elegant dandy, with a surprise pout. Fashion and customs had really changed! Thinking of fashion, she had noticed that the female outfits were varied and did not cover the bodies as much as her Victorian crinoline dress. She could walk around in chemise and petticoat and still be fully dressed by the standards of this time. She took off her dress and folded it into the backpack. She picked up the wallet, removed a card of an unknown material,

adorned with man's portrait and read: "Driving License, James Beard, born the fifteenth of August..." She widened her eyes, "1984! Oh First Lord, I slept for more than a century this time!"

Everything made sense now, all the changes in customs, language, fashion, technology: a century had passed. More than a century! The man should in his early forties which meant she had been unconscious for almost a hundred and sixty years. She wondered why she undertaken such a long sleep instead of her usual forty year hibernation. How come Lukas and Andreas didn't wake her up before? She needed a drink to rest and think. Now that her hunger had been satisfied, she could mingle with humanity safely.

She paved the city streets with renewed strength and confidence. Streets and avenues were decorated with red lights and mistletoe bouquets, shops displays were filled with Santa Claus figures, reindeers and elves. She rolled her eyes, *First Lord, don't tell these stupid traditions have continued!* At least, it gave her an indication of the date. It was near the so-called birthday of this dumb Jew from Bethlehem who managed, who knows how, to built an entire religion from his elucubrations. Parties of merry people were paving the streets and as she suspected her outfit only gave her appreciative looks from both male and female alike. How thrill it was to be admired and appreciate by a lady openly! She appreciated the forbidden delights and pleasures of the coded seduction of the Victorian period but this era had the delicious taste of freedom and independance. She noticed a crowd of women only, gathered in front of a drinking establishment. The facade was white with an outdoor parklet where women were chatting and drinking. Pubs and clubs allowing women, that was such an improvement. She entered the bar and headed to the counter. The patrons were mostly women, she noticed very few men. The place was animated with some people dancing –if you could call that dancing– kind of dancing to loud, disgusted music. That music wasn't an improvement at all! She adjusted her senses, determined to enjoy the place despite the din of this terrible music. Leaning on the bar, she observed the surroundings with delight: this place was a dream come true! She thought about her lost human friends and lovers. All these wonderful women whose lives and genius had been destroyed by the almighty power of men.

Anne and Emily, I shall drink to your memory. You would have loved this place. I think I have found the new Sapphic community.

She thought about Emily, sweet, talented, Emily. She wondered if her poems were remembered, she was such a genius. She chased those painful memory, she couldn't afford crying blood tears in public. She didn't want to scare away all those women. She watched with envy as a couple kissed and her thoughts wandered strangely to Charlie. It should be so delightful to taste her skin, her full lips. She exhaled, chasing away her thoughts. She wasn't ready to bond again. Human life was so short and she wouldn't turn people like Lukas did. Immortality was a deadly gift and conversion could have serious consequences. Like ending up with a Count Dracula, all because Lukas couldn't hold back and had to get involved in human politics.

Well at least the guy unified Romania, she thought with a sigh.

– "Would you like to dance?"

The woman was much younger, in her twenties maybe but really cute. She nodded and followed her. They started to move in rythme, their bodies brushing against each other. Carmilla grabbed her by the waist and caressed her lower back. Her young partner took her lips in a long, sensuoual kiss. Carmilla looked around, she was making out with another woman, in full view, and nobody raised even one eyebrow. She deepened the kiss, waking up in that era was a blessing. This new community of Sappho was so much amusing than the original, always in retreat in the depth of some old temple, rehashing all its philosophical chatter. She devoured with kisses the young woman's plunging neckline.

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Carmilla pressed her against the alley wall and gently licked her neck. Her blood was pulsing underneath the thin delicate, pink skin. She smelt its sweet scent, rather delicious, not as delicious as Charlie but...

– “You’re cold. Let’s go back inside.”

– “I’m not. I’m just a cold blood creature. How old are you?”

– “Twenty-two. Is that an issue?”

Carmilla had been dealing with decades, then centuries and millenium age difference, she rolled her eyes with a grin.

– “Not at all. Just checking that you were grown up enough for what we’re doing”, she smiled maliciously.

The young woman smiled back and fiddled playfully with the lace of her corset, brushing the birth of her breasts.

– “I like this outfit, it’s very Gothic.”

– “I’m into cosplay. Do you want to know who I am?” Carmilla had decided to test the potential power of her own name.

– “Tell me”, she whispered in her ear.

– “Countess Carmilla, Queen of the Night.”

The young woman attracted her, pressing her leg between her thighs and offering her neck to her kisses.

– “Please, bite me. I want to feel you teeth on my flesh.”

That was impressive! She didn’t even had to use hypnotic powers to feed on a beautiful woman. Carmilla withdrew, grabbed the young woman’s hand and guided it, under the petticoat, between her legs.

– “Maybe later. For now, I have something you might like. Its one of the advantage of genuine Victorian underwear.”

– “Oh God, an open crotch. I’m so going to fuck you.”

– “Excuse me ladies”, some man cleared his throat, “police.”

The young woman stepped away reluctantly.

– “A woman was sexually attacked in a nearby alley. She reported a second victim: a tall, dark-haired woman in a black dress. The victim could have attended a costum party, she was dressed up as the Evil Queen or something. Did you attend a costume party in this neighborhood? Do you remember someone matching her description?”

– “No, I’m sorry”, Carmilla was on her guards, ready to use hypnosis but the police officer wasn’t threatening.

– “Please ladies, be careful. The attacker is on the run and dangerous, we found a lot of blood on the scene. Please, ladies be more careful.”

Carmilla straightened, he didn’t mention any corpse. She slowly approached the officer. She could scent traces of fear in his blood. The man was still under the influence of a violent emotion. What did he witness?

What’s in your mind, officer. Let me see what’s in your mind. Let’s go back to this crime scene earlier. Let me relieve you of these dark thoughts.

Blurry images of the alley where she had left her victim’s body came to her by flashes. Blood flow running on the cobblestones, the content of the bag she had abandoned. Nothing else, the aisle was empty. The man had gone away.

She rolled her eyes, *Oh First Lord, that was quite a disturbance.*