

Virginie T.



*Fangs To
My Blood*



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Fangs To My Blood:

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Аннотация

An impossible love story between a vampire and a werewolf After decades of servitude, Dumitru's werewolf pack wants to be free. To do this, they must convince the vampire king to reveal their origin in order to have hope for the future. Their plan falls apart when they discover Tatjana. In the middle of an endless war between vampires and lycanthropes, will love find its place?

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Virginie T.

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« Death begets death »

Prologue

In the remote lands of Russia, life is already difficult of origin, in the Middle Ages. However, life in the service of Lord Vladimir is a real hell. He does not realize all the privileges granted to him by the tsar. He has wealth, women and food in abundance without even lifting a hand, while his people die of hunger and cold working in the fields, but nothing is ever enough. It's really an impossible mission to serve someone who is never satisfied like Vladimir. He always wants more and more, and it is up to me to make sure that his wishes are totally fulfilled. Unfortunately, this time is no exception, he is never satisfied at all.

– Once again! I am disappointed again, Zoran. Do I have to ask you each time to do your job properly?

The Lord's voice raises high so that my humiliation is complete. Whenever he intends to mistreat a servant, he invites his vassals into the great hall. He likes to make public stoning examples to establish his power in this isolated country. He does not need it because no one dares contradict his authority or even think to do so. However, I suspect he enjoys these debasements he does in public.

– The people are poor, my lord...

– Enough pathetic excuses. If they can't afford money to pay the tithe, they only have to send me their daughters as compensation.

His obscene smile scares me. These poor women... their pleading eyes haunt my nights.

– My Lord, they have already sent you all the young girls who are old enough to please you, there are only little girls left...

– Little girls can work until they're old enough to suit me. You make no effort, Zoran, and the other servants begin to think that they will risk nothing to disobey and provoke me.

My fellow wretches can never think that way. I always see them walking along the walls of the castle, with their heads down, silently praying not to be the next to suffer Vladimir's wrath. As I understand them. I wish I were in a less uncomfortable place myself.

When it comes to punishment, my lord has a great sense of imagination. He has a deep affection for ear amputation or tongue piercing. Beheading and the pyre are also his favors. So many torments suffered by servants who have only the misfortune of having found themselves in his path. For these same absurd reasons, I have already lost an ear and my tongue still feels the warmth of the poker that pierced it. I begin to tremble, worrying about the devilish smile displayed by Lord Vladimir. What part of my body is going to have to suffer his wrath? How much more pain am I going to have to endure without flinching and reacting?

– I'm tired of your mistreatment and your flippant attitude.

I see from the corner of my eye Vladimir's most faithful vassals approaching me, encircling me and thus cutting me

off any possibility of retreat and escape. My tremors are intensifying. I know for a good reason that amputation will not be appropriate this time. Cutting off my second ear would be of no interest and cutting off one of the four main limbs would prevent me from performing my tasks. Vladimir followed the same stream of thought.

– Mutilate you won't make you any more effective. So, I'm going to make you a visible example to everyone in the country.

My stomach starts clenching. I am afraid of what's going to happen. Yet, I could not have imagined my punishment, even in my worst nightmares.

– Zoran, by the power I have over you, I sentence you to death. You will be led outside the ramparts at nightfall, then tied up by the four limbs, upside down, and left there until death ensues. What remains of your body will then be thrown into the dung pit, where you belong, if there is anything left after the feast, of course.

I pray that the ball that clogs my throat will kill me before the sentence is carried out. I would not do him with the pleasure of begging him to save me. Too many servants tried and their deaths were even more horrific. Vladimir was increasing their sentence with each plea. Although in my case, I don't see how it could be worse. I'm already on death row. Being driven outside the enclosure means being thrown into the pasture of hungry wolves lurking at night, in search of fresh flesh to devour in these times of winter devastation where no prey remains.

My death was even more painful than my mind could have imagined. The vassals of Vladimir took a malicious pleasure in slashing my body in multiple places so that the smell of blood would attract the wolf packs in a herd. My anxiety became disproportionate as the grunts grew closer. Then the jaws began to snap into the void, each canine wanting to plant its fangs first in my body and fighting between them to have the biggest piece of my person. I prayed that the wolves would fight amongst each other and forget about me. I obviously did not have that chance. The first bite was a real heartbreak for my soul. After all the sacrifices and bad deeds done on behalf of Lord Vladimir, this is how he thanked me. Wolves tore my skin and flesh, feasting on me until I succumbed, to the end. I knew that my soul would go directly to hell after being in the service of Vladimir. One cannot work for a devil man like him as long as keeping his soul. I did not expect to wake up in the dung pit. In fact, I didn't even expect to wake up, at all. Ultimately, death is just the beginning of another life. A life where the prey will become the executioner. Never again will I let a person think they are superior to me. From now on, I would be the sole master of my destiny and the world would tremble before me.

Nowadays

Chapter 1

Tatjana

As far back as I can remember, Koudykina Gora has always seemed grim to me, but it is taking on uncontrollable proportions. Obviously, we are in the middle of winter when the polar cold reigns over the city and this could have had something to do with it. But the problem is not the temperature. Throughout more than two centuries of existence, I have never seen the city so deserted. From the top of my observatory, I see that there are no longer souls living for miles around and boredom threatens to make me fall into a catatonic state. Only mine walk the cobblestone streets, probably looking for their lunch, but there is nothing and nobody to hunt in these places. This doesn't bother me. I don't really have the same diet as my people which is a secret that I treasure very carefully. My father already locks me in my room far too often. Learning my peculiarity will certainly not improve our relationships and will probably not be my ticket out for the outside. A deep sigh breaks my lips when I think of my father. He is not really my father, not in the strict sense of the term as humans understand it. But, undoubtedly, he is my father. Vampires have no children, they have descendants.

Finally, they did. I was the last to be created. The last vampire born, the last transformed by the original vampire in person: Zoran. As far as I know, I'm also the only female vampire. Zoran had, until me, only converted men. When I asked him about the reason behind this choice, he replied tactlessly that women are too fickle and that such power should not be in everyone's hands. I personally believe that he refuses to have to share his power with a woman and that he therefore did not want to transform them at the risk of succumbing to the charms of one of them. Today, the question no longer arises since no transformation is allowed anymore by Zoran and he fiercely ensures that this measure is totally respected. Any vampire who has the misfortune to go against this law is inflicted a second death, a death from which he does not rise again. And yes. Summum of supreme power, I am immortal. Pfff, what a joke. It is just a wind to tell the poor so as to scare them. As if they needed more reason to fear us. My people have been so lacking in restraint and discernment that all the surrounding villages have become ghost villages. Just as empty as the city that sprawls at my feet. There is no longer a human who lives less than fifteen kilometers away and only a few fools in search of the great thrill dare to venture into these woods. Rumors are widespread about the monsters that roam there after dark. No human ever comes out alive, their disappearance fueling rumors a little more. I hear the screams of agony of these unfortunates from my room and it deeply hurts my heart. A heart not entirely dead, by an oddity of chance

that Zoran refuses to explain to me. Anyway, He never explains anything to me. I am only a woman, the daughter of a man born at a time when the feminine sex was seen only to give birth. This is something that it is impossible for me to do. It's the irony of fate. It's better that way. I will never impose a life like mine on anyone, not even my worst enemy. I have no use, no future prospects. Zoran is content to hide me from the world. I feel the heavy weight of all the years of loneliness at every moment. Very simply I am frozen in time, out of the world.

– Good morning princess. Slept well?

Anton is my guard. In fact, he is my only connection to the outside world. He is, by force of circumstance, my friend. I needed an ally and he tacitly agreed to be mine. I don't know why. I know he's loyal to my person than to that of our king. And it could cause his final death. In spite of everything, he remains there, by my side. He accedes to all my requests, even the most farfetched, without asking me the slightest question. His daily visit is my only distraction of the day.

– I slept like a dead woman, Anton. Just like every day.

– Hey! I don't see any dead here. We already talked about it, princess. You walk, you talk, so you live.

Although, the fact that Anton is a vampire, he remains a good man, as he should have been during his lifetime. He tries by all means to make me understand that I am more than what I seem to be at first sight. My friend hasn't changed since his transformation, like all of us. His athletic physique makes him

a perfect killing machine and his face is always marked with a smile in my company. It's too bad that his faint skin makes him look so... dead. I feel a little angry with him for the condition though I know he is doing it for me. But I can't help it. I can't stand the idea that he would come to see me right after killing someone, even indirectly. So, he never eats before he visits me, which makes him look so white and waxy. He'll take back the colors as soon as he drinks the blood of his next victim that I'd rather not think about.

– Are you hungry, Tatjana?

My stomach rumbles before I can respond, giving him a smile.

– I'll take that as a yes.

– I'm starving.

A tray appears in front of me in a second; a glass filled with red syrupy liquid.

– What do we have here today, Anton? Was the hunt successful?

– Pretty much. Werewolves have been making themselves scarce lately, so the forest is teeming with little beasts. Tonight, I was flushed out of the rabbit hole.

Perfect. I love that. I grab the glass and voraciously drink the blood of this prey which allows me to do without exterminating innocent people. The blood of animals is not as rich as that of human beings, but my satisfaction at not being responsible for the death of someone is more than this sacrifice. Anyway, I don't need to be full of energy to walk around my room over and over

again until dawn, a sign that it's a bedtime.

– Your cheeks are rosy. You needed it. You were almost fainter than me.

He's right, the thirst was starting to twist my stomach. I nodded and smiled at him, thanking him.

– Zoran wants to see you.

I lean my head to the side as my smile vanishes. The king rarely calls me near him. I'm his little secret and he keeps me jealously out of sight. As he refuses to show me to my people. My exits require to empty the castle, which does not fail to awake the interest of some curious at each time.

– Do you know why?

– I have no idea, but he wants me to go with you. His summons concerns both of us. The castle has been in ebullience for a few days. Something is coming, but nobody knows what. Besides, Zoran gives orders to everyone without any explanation as well as without any connection between their tasks. He has also sent out of his land all the little unstable vampires.

– I don't understand.

– Me neither, princess. Only Zoran is sufficiently tense. It is wiser to obey and join him without delay in order not to thwart him even more than he is. Prepare yourself. I'll make sure the path is clear.

I nod and keep staring at his place in the room long after he left. I have a strange feeling. The feeling that my whole life will be turned upside down and that I will have a key role in the events

to come. Again, one of my little specificities.

I shake myself out of this semi-consciousness and rush to change. My father is struggling to live in our time. He's not trying either, mind you. He was stranded six centuries earlier, at the time of his death, and can't stand to see me in jeans, t-shirts and sneakers like the humans of today. It's really so astonishing compared to the Middle Ages when he was born. I love it. I was able to adapt and evolve thanks to the magazines that my friend regularly brings me from the city. Anton often says that this century sticks more to my personality. He is not wrong. It seems that nowadays, humans think about ecology, recycling and well-being. Yes, I am a bit like that except vegetarianism, since this is a matter of survival for me. You have to believe that I was two centuries ahead of them and that they finally caught up with me. Or that I lived more than I would have expected. In any case, I hurry up to put on a dress that drags on the ground and that suits more to someone of my condition. Notice: the princess of the most powerful king this land has ever seen, the Vampire King Zoran. It's too bad that nobody knows about my existence. This title would have more meaning among people. However, it is just an empty pompous title in my case.

– Are you ready?

The fanatic outburst of Anton makes me jump and my red is now spreading on my cheek instead of my lips.

– Sorry. But Zoran's not tense anymore, he's nervous. We have to go now.

I barely take the time to clean up my mess before I make a scarlet mouth. This red blood makes my skin look even whiter, but Zoran likes to see me wear it.

The corridors are deserted, giving the place a sinister aura; to the point that there is not even a murmur that reaches us. It seems as if the castle had been emptied of all the inhabitants. We reach the king's quarters, recognizable among all by their sumptuous decoration and above all by the poor humans chained to the wall. This vision lifts my stomach. Men and women are held captive without any hope of escape, destined to serve meals to the king and his subjects before being devoured by much worse. These poor bastards are considered only food and not entitled to more account than livestock. The contrast between these filthy and defenseless prey and the gold-embroidered tapestries adorning the walls is really absurd and grotesque. I look away before returning my meal and bow down to my father, who sits in the middle of the room. Protocol, over and over again. Reverence is in order in this realm, for me as well as for other vampires.

– Tatjana. You made yourself desired.

I keep my head down as a sign of repentance.

– Sorry, father. I took the time to put on an outfit that would satisfy you.

It rises with disconcerting ease for a man of six centuries. His steps make no noise on the stone floor, as if he were floating above without touching it. I have no discretion. Too bad, it would allow me to escape from my mausoleum on occasion. He turns

around me and I have the unpleasant feeling of being a prey among the raptors.

– You chose well. This white dress suits you perfectly and I love your scarlet lips.

He returns to his seat after a last approving look.

– Stand up. We need to talk.

I execute and scrutinize the face of my father, in search of the slightest clue. His austere gaze reveals nothing of their depth as black as ink. Yet another difference between us. My eyes are bright and Anton confirmed that I was the only vampire in this case.

– This is a serious time. my daughter

– What is going on?

– [Come and have a seat here next to me.](#)

Sitting next to him is a very strong word. In reality, I must take my place on my knees, right on the ground before the feet of our leader as a sign of submission, showing the good girl that I am. I realize that I get bitter with time. I feel tired of stagnating in the same place, reduced to having contact only with Zoran and Anton. I dream of integrating into the world and living among the common people. I realize a little bit late the heavy silence that reigns around me. My dad takes off the hood that disguises marks of his old age. It's not a good sign when he takes it off. He only does it when he wants to scare his interlocutor. The people who usually face him think he's funny, but I doubt it. Anton told me how the king intimidates his subjects. Zoran's cruelty is

legendary, but seeing the physical stigmata that led him to the throne is another whole story. The absence of one of his ears, as well as his bald scalp marked with countless bites, is a reminder of what he went through before rising from the dead to avenge these executioners. This denotes the strength of his spirit that conquered death itself. He is the very first vampire and creator of our race. The father of all of us.

– Do I bother you, Tatjana ?

His voice is dry, as sharp as a razor blade. I am the princess. However, I am not immune to his anger and the consequences of it. He has already struck me and whipped me for my disobedience. And when it wasn't enough to establish his authority, he went after Anton and attacked him. He knows that despite my condition as a vampire, I have kept my soul and my conscience and that it hurts me much more to watch someone being punished in my place than to be beaten myself. It is my point of weakness and he exploits it deliberately. It is also the threat that he makes me hover if I want to escape. He warned me that he would set the country on fire and blood to find me and that no death would be too much to get me back.

– Absolutely not, my king. I am all ears. You have my full attention.

He takes an extra minute to observe me, as if to probe me and guess what's running through my head, before he starts again.

– Many of our people have disappeared without a trace in recent weeks. They left with their dogs and never came back.

I squeeze my lips not to say that they are not dogs. I've done it before. Once. It cost me a day's lash and three days without eating. I thought I was dying. And when Zoran brought me a human to lift my punishment, I killed that creature without any restraint, tasting his blood on my tongue with unspeakable pleasure until he was bloodless. It was for my survival. The remorse I felt then almost ended me. It was the only time I ever drank human blood and there is no way that it would ever happen again. I'd rather starve than repeat the experience.

– I don't see how I can help you, father. I never leave the castle. So, I don't know where our brothers went or what happened to them.

His voice gets louder and severe.

– Never forget. They are not our brothers. They no more than our subjects; and I know exactly where they are.

Of course. Always this need to be above others. This constant desire for distinction will lead to his loss.

– They are all dead. All of them.

Here we are. When I said that we were not immortal. We are not aging, but we can absolutely die. Again. We become vampires when one of them bites us and leaves us at the gates of death. A dead man does not age anymore. We're living dead, not quite alive and not quite dead. We're stuck in the middle. However, they can end us by burning us alive by the fire or the sun, beheading us or starving. Simply, we are very nice deaths. Although we have an extraordinary capacity for regeneration, we

surely can be more or less seriously injured. Well, for the other vampires anyway.

– How do you know if they disappeared?

– I felt the death of those I created. Don't ask stupid questions, will you? This is a serious situation.

Vampire venom is powerful and effectively creates a certain connection between the creator and the creatures. Zoran feels the presence of all the vampires he has begotten. Whereas, we cannot know where Zoran is at all.

– How did they die ? Were they surprised by the sun's rays ?

– Don't talk nonsense. It's only the novices who burn out because of the UV and there haven't been any young vampires for decades. You are the youngest in our nation and you know it.

He takes a break. My father likes to make the suspense last longer.

– Their dogs ripped their throats like the scavengers.

Really, I'm still speechless. I have never seen one, and I can hear the sounds of broken bones during their evening meal. But I can't imagine such a thing. Why ? Why would they do that? They've lived with us as long as I can remember.

Chapter 2

Adrian

I didn't think I could get away so early in the evening, but Anton asked me to go for a walk for a few hours and come back just before dawn. That sounds good. I'll take opportunity to join mine and listen to Dumitru's latest recommendations. Our leader has decided to launch the assault soon. We have to be ready. The pack is already gathered around the rostrum, waiting for the speech of our leader. We feel the tension crackling in the air. Everything is too quiet and silent.

- Hi Adrian. I didn't expect to see you at this time.
- Neither do I, but Anton let me go me until sunrise.
- Your vampire is one of the strangest. Why does he never eat before going to the castle? No bloodsucker can stop eating except him.

My best friend is right. Anton is a very special vampire. First of all, nobody knows what his function is with the vampire king. He goes to the castle from sunset, sometimes until dawn, but none of the servants know why he is there and his visits to the vampire king are the only ones to be done behind closed doors. Besides, this story of not drinking blood before going there makes it even

weirder. I do not doubt for a moment that depriving him of food causes him physical suffering. Yet he never deviates from that rule. One might think he feeds at the castle, but that is rarely to happen. He generally waits until he finds me to hunt together, both of us. The arrival of our leader on the stage interrupted my thoughts. Dumitru is the oldest werewolf in the pack, the firstborn, and our supreme leader regardless of what the vampire king thinks. We sincerely obey him and we have sworn loyalty to him until death. In fact, the death which has already happened to some of us.

– Good evening, everyone. I won't keep you waiting or give you a long speech. My brothers, it is time to act and free ourselves from our chains now and forever for all of us. We have been slaves of vampires for too long. We will act tomorrow night to gain our freedom.

Is it that early ? It seemed to me that he had just begun to eliminate the weakest and the least effective vampires in the kingdom to reduce Zoran's army.

– Why haste ? There are still many vampires.

One of my comrades asked loudly the question that everyone asks. A few weeks ago, we all decided that our freedom must be earned and not to be under the vampires' domination anymore. Only a coup takes time and requires the organization. Some of my comrades already began to free themselves from their vampiric trio by exterminating them without attracting attention. However, many of us are still at the service of at least two

vampires and their power play. Moreover, their exceptional strength and regeneration could cause our loss. It's true that we are powerful, but not as much as vampires.

– Would you question my decisions, Ivan?

Dumitru jumps from the podium where he was perched and stands right in front of the young wolf. Ivan is one of the last born of the pack. He's only forty years old and the vampires he serves are rather kind towards him, exactly as Anton. So, he doesn't feel the urgency of the situation. This is not the case neither for all the werewolves, and certainly nor for our leader whose angry tone clacks in the night air.

– It's definitely not, Dumitru. I just think ...

Our leader grabs him by the throat and lifts him above the ground, cutting off his breathing.

– You are not asked to think. The pack has been suffering for too long under the yoke of these murderers. I'm getting tired of us being the villains in history.

Too many deaths, too many massacres. We have been doing the dirty work of vampires for two centuries. And for this sole purpose we were created by Zoran himself. We are the guardians of the vampire king. Our duty is exterminating humans bitten by vampires to prevent their transformation. Zoran did so in order to put an end to the untimely increase of his people without having to get his hands dirty. He did not want to bend down to finish his own meals. Protecting the castle all day is also one of our duties. Since vampires are the most vulnerable as they are

confined inside, with no way to escape in case of danger. He just forgot that wolves are by nature wild. Some of our people have already tried to escape to live differently, but Zoran tracked them down so easily and eliminated them to the last man; thus, making them an example to other lycanthropes who would tempt to do the same.

Dumitru releases Ivan who collapses down to the ground, taking a steady breath after some laborious inspirations.

– The vampire king is preparing to flee after his losses and the desertion of humans in the region. The only choice he will have is to leave his castle. It will be a unique opportunity for us to capture him and make him confess how he created us.

Dumitru has been looking for the secret of our creation for two hundred years without any significant progress. He did some research. He integrated into the human world to learn every single thing related to genetics. But he unsuccessfully didn't manage to create a werewolf. At one point, he even believed that vampire blood was flowing through our veins, but it turns out that our lycanthrope nature violently rejects the venom of vampires. The thing that caused paralysis and excruciating pain to our body for days. This is a very common way of punishing us in vampires' compound. I've never paid for it. The only vampire I serve is Anton and he has always been so kind and respectful to me. A rare commodity among vampires who most often consider us as a sub-race. Our leader has long wanted to increase our numbers to provide relative protection against any attack through

numerical superiority. He also thinks that it is a specific feature in our blood that allows Zoran to easily find the deserters of the pack. It has never been a question of capture, but of killing. Why this turnaround? Something is going on.

After an hour of talking about which strategy to adopt, each werewolf goes back to his business. We agreed upon keeping our habits without any change so as not to arouse even more the suspicions of the vampire king. For my part, I have a few hours left before I have to find Anton. I take this occasion to go see Dumitru. Like Ivan, I find it curious to embark on a war for which we are neither ready nor able. I walk into our leader's house without knocking. One of my privileges. We have known each other for nearly a hundred and fifty years and have been friends for as long as I can remember. As a result, I became his second and I do not understand why he did not keep me informed of his plan earlier.

– I suspected that you would come to see me.

After a hug, I take the time to check my friend who is changed a lot. He becomes more tired than usual. In fact, being at Zoran's personal service has been wearing him down for so long. If I were him, I'm not sure I would have survived more than a century without going crazy.

– What's going on, Dumitru? I know you well enough to know that you wouldn't risk an attack on Zoran without a good reason.

His deep sigh does not bode good things. I have never seen my friend so tired and so defeated.

– You are right, Adrian. I have to admit that I am putting my personal interests ahead of those of the pack for once, but I will not apologize and nothing will change my mind. I'm running out of time.

– What do you mean ?

Certainly, He has been working in secret for years, to protect our people from Zoran's madness putting his safety in the back. Sometimes he provokes the Vampire King's wrath. How are things different today?

– I'm dying, Adrian.

– What ? It's impossible !

– Look at me closely, brother.

I concentrate on his face and then pick up what disturbed me at first: wrinkles have appeared at the corners of his eyes and I see discreet white hair among his thick black locks. Signs of aging in the same way as humans.

– You are getting old.

– Yes, absolutely. I am the oldest lycanthrope in the pack and we mistakenly assumed that we were immortal like vampires since none of us showed signs of old age. That is not the case. Time catches up with me and my end comes quickly. Every day, I feel a little more of my strength abandoning me. Our decline begins probably after our two hundred years and it is much more precipitous than for humans.

Then I understand why he wants to quickly launch the offensive and capture Zoran.

– You hope to counteract the effects of aging by learning the secrets of our birth.

– Yes. Zoran has always been a master of our destiny for far a long time. And I would not allow him to be a master of my death. Why would these monsters roam the earth indefinitely without any respect for life when we would only have two hundred years? Two hundred years of slavery, what's more. I've been thinking about my revenge for more than a century. It's high time to act and take our revenge. If I have to leave this Earth, it will not be alone. I intend to drag the sharp teeth into my fall.

Indeed, Dumitru has been brooding over his reprisals since the death of his blood brother a hundred and fifty years earlier. Andrej died under mysterious conditions and Dumitru never accepted it. The wolf was my predecessor to Anton and I'm sure the vampire had nothing to do with this arbitrary execution. Or at least, he never gave me a reason to think differently. Our leader is convinced that his brother was killed because he saw something at the castle that he shouldn't have seen. Consequently, they shut him up. I do not think that this is a sufficient reason to risk the lives of our comrades by acting without thinking.

– We could take the time to develop a stronger plan...

His groaning voice echoes in the room.

– NO.

He is taking up a calmer tone, which in no way removes the virulence of his remarks.

– I wouldn't die because of the vampire king. We will capture

him and make him reveal to us the secrets of our existence even if I have to make him suffer for hours for it. And then I'd kill him after I tortured him to the height of his black soul.

I realize at this moment that he's scared. Afraid of death. A death that he can do nothing against. Our leader is strong. One does not remain at the service of a tyrant for two centuries without hardening himself. He always wanted to control everything related to the punishments inflicted by the vampires on the leadership of the pack. However, he can do nothing against the time that passes and that steals his life. He can't fight time himself.

– Will you support me?

– As always. But I want to talk about the trap again. I do really understand your thirst to live but it won't be to the detriment of our brothers' lives.

He nods slowly, realizing that he is crossing the line.

– Will you be my safeguard if madness awaits me?

– I can put you in your place if necessary, but I'm sure you won't give me any reason to do so.

– Who knows? The approach to death changes everything. I wish you never see this torment. I'll make sure that it never happens to you.

Finally, my discussion with Dumitru leaves me sad and depressed. These words run around my head on my way to Anton. I have to meet him at the foot of the castle so he can feed himself and I can finish the poor bastard who served him

food before he was reborn as a vampire. Our leader is determined in his quest, but his personal reasons take precedence over the common good. He thinks collateral damage is acceptable. I do strongly disagree with that. His health conditions must not make the death of any of us acceptable. Furthermore, attacking Zoran head on is a sheer madness. It's a death sentence for the wolf that will be captured, and the same thing for the whole pack. If we do not succeed, nothing can stop the vampire king from killing us until the last one. All he has to do is recreate younger, more obedient werewolves, like Ivan. Undoubtedly, I am certain that Zoran will have eaten before leaving his home and his strength is much greater than ours. It is also faster and more devious. The only occasion we will be left with is to capture him just before sunrise, where he will be most vulnerable. The sun is the vampires' biggest enemy, before us and our desire for freedom. UV rays are fatal to them. In his search for shelter to spend the day, the vampire king may be less attentive to his surroundings. This would allow us to capture him alive. Because the difficulty is there. It would be so easy to attack him numerously and tear his throat without waiting or hesitating. But that's not our goal, because if he dies, we won't get the answers we need to survive.

Lost in the midst of all these ideas and battle plans, I realize that I arrived at the meeting point by guessing on the ground the gigantic shadow of the place guardian. The silhouette of the three-headed stone dragon is really enormous. There is a legend that talks about it. By the way, Russia is full of legends,

some concerning me. Myths about werewolves and vampires are passed down from one generation to another. But I like most that one of the dragons. It's about the dragon Zmeï Gorynytch, guardian of the Kalinov Bridge, the only access to Zoran Castle and which marks the border between life and death, was defeated by a brave knight with a pure heart who came to free a princess held prisoner. Legend says it that the horrible fire-breathing dragon will come back to life when a princess needs him and a soul of such extraordinary blood as his murderer comes before him to ask for his assistance. Actually, I prefer this story to that one about werewolves in the surrounding villages. We are described as soul devourers, cannibals and monsters of the underworld. certainly, there is not that soul pure enough to awaken the legendary dragon and make it appear. I don't know what the blind windows of the castle are hiding in the background of the statue, but nothing good can remain with the vampire king, the greatest murderer of the Middle Ages.

Chapter 3

Tatjana

My mind is boiling, I prepare myself unconvincingly. I am thinking about a war. My father said that a war was going to be raging on our doorstep. Werewolves call for their independence. I have had the displeasure to propose to negotiate with their leader. I rub my cheek, which is still sensitive after the huge slap this idea brought on me.

« We do not negotiate with dogs. They are nothing more than garbage. They swallow our garbage and stand guard. That is the only purpose of their existence. They have no leader. Their only master is me, and it is time to remind them of that. I'm already giving them too much freedom. I'm going to fix it. Instead of thanking me, they want to overthrow me. I will crush their desire to revolt and everything will come back to normal. »

No wonder they want to break free from their chain because of the little consideration that the king gives them. After the life he had that led him to his death, one would think that he would have learned from the mistakes of others. That is not true, when I was younger, I had a hard time accepting this life of confinement. I asked him why he kept me locked up at the castle. He then

told me about his own birth to supposedly open my eyes to the darkness of the world.

«Listen to me, Tatjana. I was born at a time of the jungle law, when the strongest reigned. I was at the service of Lord Vladimir, a rich man, very high placed with the tsar. He reigned over all our land with an iron hand, and woe to him who dared to stand up to him. I was one of his servants, or rather, his slave. I had to collect tithes in the surrounding villages. The villagers hated me. Every time I made my rounds, they slammed the door in my face, spat at me, or threw their trash in my face. I was synonymous with suffering for them, hard work for a miserable salary. They had nothing and I took everything from them in the name of Vladimir. One day, I came back to the castle with less money than expected because the locals had no more. Nevertheless, instead of attacking his subjects, Vladimir cut off my ear as punishment, because I should have found a solution to make the wretched pay their debts in one way or another. Then I had to remove all women of childbearing age in payment of their debt. Suffice to say that they hated me all the more. I destroyed their family. I was taking the poor women to the castle for Vladimir's pleasure. I didn't do it out of choice or cruelty, but it didn't make any difference to them. »

I was horrified by Zoran's actions. I thought then that he should have resisted. He should have helped those poor people. Of course, he guessed my fear.

« Don't look at me that way, Tatjana. You don't know what

sacrifice we're willing to make to survive. Every time I tried to protect those who did not hesitate to strike me with their contempt, I paid the price. »

He then showed me his tongue pierced in the center and his hands with missing phalanges. I went through hard times to realize that the Middle Ages was totally different time in everything. While I was living sheltered from the world, in total self-sufficiency. Yet, I was not at the end of the horrific tale of his rebirth.

« Then, there was no more woman or money to recover. I could not take the men to him as they had to work in the fields and I was reluctant to take the children to Vladimir. I still had a bit of a conscience. So, I tried to reason the Lord and make him see my reason. That was my last mistake, the fatal one to me, indeed. »

My father never shows pain or compassion, but the suffering that had transversed in his voice was the first time. These are my father's reflexes of the weak unlike Zoran who is not weak. I brought him trouble.

« Vladimir knew my greatest fear and he used it against me. In the Middle Ages, the woods were invaded by wild wolves that came out at nightfall looking for food. I couldn't bear to hear them howl at death. Vladimir tied me up outside the compound and left me at their mercy. Those scavengers devoured me alive while I screamed with all might. »

Zoran had tensed his fingers on the armrests of his armchair, a

terror mask on his face, reliving the worst moment of his human life. Then I had a gesture of compassion for him. I had put my hand on his arm as a sign of support and felt hollows and bumps through the fabric. Then, he escaped my touch suddenly.

« I woke up amidst the excrement of the castle's rich people. My remains had been thrown into the dung pit as if I were not worth more than that, without any respect to the person I had been. Can you just imagine what I felt when I woke up half-puffed, the pain and stench still sticking to my skin shreds? »

To be clear, I really couldn't imagine that. I lived in autarky, I had no memory of my human life and I did not know any kind of suffering. Loneliness and rejection are my daily portion. Even though Zoran has already inflicted physical abuse on me, I don't know what it's like to be betrayed by my own people or to be tortured to the point of wishing to die.

« I went to the nearest village to ask for help. When they saw me, they all scream out loud claiming that I was a monster from hell. There I was, half of my body, devoured and bloodied, by wolves, in front of them. Unfortunately, instead of giving me a helping hand, they threw me away again. »

He had smiled in a way as an icy shiver went up my spine and bristled with little hair on the back of my neck. Insanity had taken its place in the depths of his dead eyes.

« The thirst for blood overpowered me. I bit every one of them all. I felt delighted with every drop of blood I drained of them. I really enjoyed killing them all, even the children. I was a little

disappointed when they finally got up a few hours later. I did not expect it. At that time, I did not know the power of the venom contained in my canines. Fortunately, the sunrise burned most of them and taught me that I should be wary of UV rays! »

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