A Man of Reason and Blood
by Reinette_de_la_Saintonge

Summary

He is an expert in the Revolutionary War, a historian, and sort-of-owner of a grey cat with an Oxford degree and a big house in Exeter.
But underneath the inconspicuous surface, there is more to John Simcoe, DPhil than meets the eye...
He wants revenge.

Notes

It's not Halloween just yet but to get into the festive spirit, here is my attempt at a Halloween fic. There are about two chapters to follow this one. I'm not sure if I'll finish it
by Halloween but I hope you'll like it anyway.

I posted the prologue and first chapter as one because I don't like the fact that AO3 doesn't have a proper prologue section and I don't want the main story to begin with chapter 2.

Also beware there'll be a little bit of foreign language use in the prologue, but I'll translate everything in the notes at the end.

Last but not least, a big thank you goes to Sarah_von_Krolock who endured my ramblings and made some awesome suggestions!

As always, I hope you enjoy!
Prologue: Der Reichenbach-Fall

Gengenbach, Ortsteil Reichenbach, Black Forest, July 1997

Stefan expected to be sick any minute. Turning away from the gory scene, he had to muster all his remaining willpower to keep himself from throwing up over the body. His colleagues from the forensics unit would not be very happy if he did.

“Sowas hab’ ich noch nie gesehen”, his colleague Jürgen, twenty years in service to law and order, said incredulously.

Biting his lip, he turned to Stefan. “Schau am besten nicht so lange hin. Weiß Gott, ich bin jetzt schon zwanzig Jahre im Dienst und sowas ist mir nie untergekommen… Wer- wer macht sowas?“ He seemed genuinely shocked, which did nothing to calm Stefan’s nerves.

The British tourist had been reported missing a week ago by her concerned husband. They had been on holiday here, together with their little daughter and apparently the wife, who had claimed she wanted to take a quick walk in the evening to take a few pictures of the sunset over the dark tree-covered mountains that were eponymous to the entire region, had not returned by eleven pm.

When she hadn’t returned by midnight, the husband had called the police.

They had told him that as of now, they could not help him, she had not been gone long enough to suspect a crime right away and maybe, everything could be easily explained at her return.

But Isabella “Stella” Williams never came home and soon, the whole town was up and about searching for her for days: posters were printed and stuck to lampposts and notice boards in towns and villages in a radius of fifty kilometres, some even appeared across the border in France. A picture of Mrs Williams, taken only a week prior to her mysterious disappearance by her husband, smiled from the front page of the local paper, not to speak of all the local volunteers who searched the popular beauty spots and along the most frequented forest trails for days.

Soon, the search for her grew nationwide and the name Isabella Williams became familiar to a German TV and radio audience from Kiel to Munich.

At times during the last week, it had looked as if perhaps there was an explanation to her disappearance that did not involve a crime, though sad and ugly it was. An anonymous caller claimed to have spotted her at the train station in Offenburg boarding the Intercity-Express to Basel. Another lead had taken them to a petrol station on the outskirts of Strasbourg, where she had supposedly stopped in the early hours of the morning following her disappearance filling up her car, a grey Renault Laguna with a Parisian number plate, and bought a bottle of Coke and some snacks, but that too had been a false lead.
She had not run away with her lover or left her husband and daughter simply because she had tired of them.

Isabella Williams lay dead on the forest floor, the doe-like dark eyes that had shone so brightly even from the cheaply-printed newspapers open, but mercifully turned away from Stefan. All he could see was her hair that covered her head and face almost entirely in dishevelled brown tangles but left her neck, or rather what remained of it, exposed.

The rest of the body was unharmed, her clothing perfectly in place, which at least for the moment made a sexually motivated crime seem unlikely-

Thinking about a possible motive: What in the name of the Lord and all saints in Heaven could motivate a person to commit such a gruesome murder?

Although he would never condone the act of killing another person for other reasons than self-defence in immediate danger to the life of one’s self or another person and possibly without the intent to inflict lethal injuries, Stefan could at least comprehend why some people killed.

He could comprehend the motives of the wife mixing rat poison in her abusive husband’s favourite dish and those of the man murdering his wealthy relation in order to inherit their money; but why would one murder an innocent woman on her holiday, and in such a way?
Most people didn’t enjoy the act of killing, what they were interested in was the time after the kill, after the burial, when they would be rid of their victim once and for all.

During his short career in the Kripo so far, he had seen the bodies of two men shot by members of a rivalling biker gang, a woman stabbed repeatedly by her jealous lover and another man who had been electrocuted by his neighbour.

What all cases had in common was that the murderers had tried to go swiftly about their business. They had had a purpose, a goal why they had wanted to be rid of that person and had tried to minimise the kill itself.

And then there was this.

Mrs Williams’ throat was ripped open. If he hadn’t known any better, Stefan would have put all his money and his prized motorbike on an attack by a non-native wild animal, but the likelihood of being attacked by a tiger or a lion in Central Europe was exactly as remote as his hopes for Freiburg to win the next Bundesliga season.

There weren’t even any imprints in the forest floor that indicated a native wild animal had harmed her.

“One week dead, likely has been killed right here”, a colleague from forensics in one of these unsettling, faceless full-body snowman suits declared.

One week. The chances of finding any evidence that could give them any information about who or what had killed Mrs Williams were bleak to say the least.

Forcing a swell of bile rising in his oesophagus, Stefan forced himself to take a look at the victim once more. Forbidding himself to think of the dead body as a person did make it a little easier. Even from his point of view outside the barrier tape with which the forensics unit had marked its territory the extent of whatever this could be called was visible: her neck was far from intact; there was a gaping hole from side to side below her jaw with bits of hastily torn off skin and flesh dangling along the jagged rim- it was a small wonder the head was still attached.
With a wheezing cough that promised him a second look at his dinner, Stefan turned away once more. He couldn’t handle the sight.

Jürgen, who too was avoiding the body best as he could but fared much better or was at least more adept at feigning composure, patted him clumsily on the arm and led him a little further away from the crime scene, a little more into the soothing darkness of the forest- the same darkness that had proven lethal to Mrs Williams only a week ago.

“This is disgusting. Utterly-“ a female voice coming from underneath a white suit said, almost more to herself than to anybody else.

“What’s the matter?”, Jürgen replied.

“These are bite marks and they look human- in part, at least. Human, but with disproportionately long eye teeth-like fangs. It also appears that who- or whatever has killed her has cleaned all the blood up, except for the blood on her clothing, but not as you’d expect with a towel or something like that, but with its tongue. The attacker has licked all the blood meticulously up, almost like when you give a dog an empty leftovers dish-“ the colleague in white attempted to make an analogy, but the image of an innocent puppy cleaning a Tupperware bowl of sauce transformed into the much too vivid picture of a human tongue licking along the edges of where teeth had ripped sensitive tissue open-

He couldn’t hold back any longer. Stefan barely made it to a bush far enough away from the others before what felt like three days’ worth of semi-digested food came back up. Thankfully, Jürgen offered to take him home; he wouldn’t have known if he could have kept himself on his bike after this night.

The next morning, Stefan, Jürgen and a couple of other members of their team were sitting in the inn-area of the “Zum Hirschen” guesthouse in Reichenbach. They had decided to take breakfast together before going into the forest once more to review the crime scene properly, now that the body had been transported to a morgue.

Although he wasn’t particularly hungry, Stefan did his best to force a few bites of the scrambled eggs he had ordered down his throat, he’d need some strength to survive the day.

“…The whole thing about the eye teeth seems weird to me…”

“…despite the obvious traces the attacker’s tongue left behind, there is no trace of human DNA on her body other than her own…”

“…A human bite? Please, I think we’re being pranked. That wasn’t a real body and the Williams’ are actors and we’re in the middle of a clever PR stunt for that new musical that’s going to hit the stage in October…”

“Jürgen, will you shut up? That’s impious! Why can’t you just…”

It was hard for him to concentrate on anything other than the picture of the body that was still so fresh on his mind.

“I can’t anymore, sorry. I need some air.”

Leaving the half-eaten plate behind, Stefan rose from his chair. The only thing he wanted was to get away from his colleagues for a minute or two. When he reached the door, he noticed apart
from his colleagues there was only one other guest in the room: a man, his upper body hidden behind a copy of the Südkurier, which naturally mentioned last night’s gruesome find on the front page.

As he was about to pass the man by, he put his paper down and greeted him.

“Die Tischthemen Ihrer Kollegen sind Ihnen wohl auf den Magen geschlagen.”

He smiled, a smile that reached his lips but not his unnaturally blue eyes, and invited Stefan to take the empty chair opposite of him across the small table.

The man, he noted, spoke German without any distinguishable regional accent or dialect. His Hochdeutsch sounded polished, each syllable, each letter trained to perfection like the steps of a ballet choreography and yet the “-sch” in “Tischthemen” and “geschlagen” had slipped his linguistic drill.

“Sind Sie Engländer?” Stefan enquired, slowly recognising where on the globe his slight accent might be placed, curious.

“Indeed, I am. And you are a member of the police force? I happened to overhear your interesting conversation”, the man nodded in direction of the others.

“Yes, I’m a policeman.”

“I don’t envy you. Always lagging one step behind the criminal.”

“Until we catch up.”

“But that takes time, doesn’t it? I would not be patient enough to do your job. Anyhow, I am thankful such diligent investigators as yourself and your associates exist.”

And in a lower voice he continued: “You are working on the case of the body they’ve found in the woods last night? Terrible business, this.”

His long index finger traced the headline in the newspaper he had put down.

“Yes. The preliminary results of our investigation however must be kept under wraps, so I’m afraid I can’t talk about anything other than you already know from the papers.”

The man looked somewhat displeased, but quickly caught himself before he began to talk. Stefan wanted to get away from him. He didn’t know why, but he strongly suspected it was the eyes. He never even blinked and the icy depths seemed to see right through his eyes into his soul.

“I thought as much. I hope you find the culprit who did such a terrible thing.”

The man’s face looked devoid of any emotion despite his seemingly empathetic words. It was then Stefan noticed how pale the other man was- unhealthily so, and the skin around his eyes looked red and swollen.

“You don’t look well”, Stefan, animated by the man’s concerning looks and the opportunity to leave the topic of the body behind, remarked. A second body, even if the person died a death in which no second party had a hand in, in the same small town within a day of the discovery of Mrs Williams, would be detrimental to the local tourism industry and keep Reichenbach in the news for the next few months, especially during the slow news season in the middle of summer that always tended to produce the most absurd stories.
“I’m on my way to Switzerland for a cure in a clinic near Lake Geneva. My wife insisted I should take better care of myself.”

At the word “wife”, he smiled somewhat wistfully, but the smile did not last long and faded as Stefan decided to prod a little deeper. Somehow, the man interested him.

“Why didn’t you take a plane? That would have been quicker and easier for sure.”

“It would, but I wanted to take a tour of Continental Europe first, since I had the opportunity to do so.”

“And your wife?”, Stefan continued, “why isn’t she with you?”

“One of us has to stay with the children”, the Englishman answered simply, yet with an undertone that indicated displeasure. Why Stefan could not tell.

“I see. Uhm… You’re from England, right? Did you know Mrs Williams?”

“Tell me, are you sitting here as the nervous young man unable to finish his scrambled eggs or as the respectable, case-hardened investigator you’re trying to be?”

The longer they talked, the more impatient and unfriendly the man grew. His blue eyes sparkled dangerously and his unruly auburn hair that he kept tied in a loose ponytail at the back of his head that stood in awkward contrast to his immaculate three piece suit seemed to glow like fire.

“I’m just interested. You’re English, she was English and Reichenbach is not that big. Perhaps you met on the street before, had a chat?”, Stefan proposed innocently.

“No, I did not know her. Just because we share a few letters in our passport does not mean we have been acquainted and if you are going to ask me now if I have an alibi for the supposed night the crime happened, ask Frau Dettinger, the landlady of this establishment. I went upstairs early and did not leave the house that night. And now, would you please excuse me”, he closed his speech, “My train is about to leave in an hour and I have not packed my suitcase yet.”

He rose abruptly, snatching the paper from the table and went on his way. For a moment, Stefan considered going after him, but he realised that was a bad idea, given the man’s staggering physique. In case of a brawl, and the Englishman seemed like a very short-tempered man, he would have the upper hand and Stefan wanted to save himself a black eye and a lot of paperwork.

Besides, everyone in town was jumpy and nervous after the murder, so the man’s reaction seemed almost normal again in the light of recent events.

He returned to his cold scrambled eggs and his company, who had left Mrs Williams behind and were talking about some children’s novel from the UK Jürgen’s sister had been sent by their cousin in London for her daughter to read. Apparently, the girl was quite keen on learning English now and everyone at the table asked themselves what could possibly be so thrilling about a little boy with a weird scar going to school.

“Back, are you?”, Jürgen commented on his return. “Who was that you were talking to?”

“Someone. A tourist. Not important, I guess.”

“What did you talk about?”

“What do you think people here want to talk about right now?”
“Christ. I hope we find that bastard who killed the poor woman quickly. If only to give closure to her family- imagine what the husband must feel like, and their little girl, barely two years old-“

Jürgen sighed.

“We must protect them best as we can until we know more about the murderer. If it was a person at all- I mean, right now it looks like we’re dealing with a crazy vampire killer-“

“Only problem is vampires don’t exist”, Laura, another member of their team, interrupted. “Let’s see what we can do today at the crime scene and wait for forensics to have a proper investigation of all the traces in their lab. Perhaps things are going to look vastly different then, I mean it was dark, we all were under immense psychological pressure, I don’t need to tell you this is how mistakes are made. We’ll wait. Until then, we don’t talk about our finds to anybody.”

Five heads nodded in unison.

Perhaps it’s for the best, Stefan thought, chewing on his cold eggs once more. Who would ever believe them? Mentally preparing himself for his second view of the crime scene, he quickly forgot about the English tourist.


The day is wintry in all aspects, but not of the beautiful, sunshine-cold kind my students would use as a background for the vain pictures they take of themselves to upload on the various social media platforms I take no interest in.

I don’t take interest in anything they do and they don’t take interest in anything I do, much to my great displeasure.

They lack the proper discipline to come to class on time, in proper attire (“sweatpants” and any item of clothing with stains on or the stench of having gone three weeks without washing clinging to it do not fall under this category) and with the necessary coursework prepared.

I consider myself a warrior. I fight ignorance and fatuousness with rigour. Sadly, my students often show the same response to a firm, guiding hand as the American rebels of the 1770s and 80s which makes every hour spent teaching in the classroom my personal Yorktown at which I surrender after fifteen minutes of battling the seemingly impervious minds of my charges and begin to explain anew, over and over again- I am fighting for a lost cause, week after week, trying to charm the post-enlightenment youth with the allures of history.

Being a historian and teaching students about wars is almost as hard as to fight in one one’s self.

Considering themselves “bright young things” of their very own particular hue, they deem themselves above the principles of discipline and respect I value and demand of them and much rather direct their attention to their mobile phones than to me.

Apparently, the only day they are able to produce a coherent sentence or set of sentences even
about my person and the class I teach is faculty evaluation day.

While a few honest specimens who mirror the virtues I admire and adhere to the principles I hold in high regard write more words about why they enjoy the class than some of their less committed classmates do in an essay, the only thing some others seem to be able to produce are statements of dislike regarding my person in general (“too strict”, “mean”, “evil”, “tests are too hard”) or open mockery of my most unfortunate characteristic (“DAT [sic.] voooooice [sic.] xD [sick.]”, “he sounds like a woman who’s permanently on her period and he’s just as bitchy.”, “should have considered a solo career as a male soprano instead of torturing students for fun.”, “Napoleon was short, Richard III had a hump and Psycho-Coe has his voice. I let my observation speak for itself.”).

I wonder what they would say if I comment on their natural deficiencies in such a manner (although I would never stoop so low as to insult women, opera singers or anybody else except for them). Naturally, I have not had a choice in this matter and I have endured more than a lifetime of abuse and mockery for my voice.

It is always wondrous how the safety of anonymity makes the most cowardly man or woman a brave fighter for what they consider is right, a tendency that can be observed throughout history.

The year I taught a class about intelligence during the Revolutionary War, a few ‘funny’ poltroons decided to sign said evaluation forms, which had to be handed out in print form thanks to a major problem in the faculty’s IT system that summer, as “Culper”, “Culper Jr.”, “711”, “722” etc. One especially creative mind coded the sentence “Kiss my ass” with the print of the Culper Ring coding alphabet I provided them with for me to decipher.

That did not take me long. I have become practiced over the years. In fact, without me, they would probably never have known about the Culper Ring and the full extent of its operations; I devoted a lot of my time and research to the topic and can claim success and critical acclaim in my field, though some of my works have been published under pseudonyms- I have my reasons. Academia is treacherous territory and while some liken it in its complex social structures and hidden traps to an Italian Renaissance court, I tend to compare it to initially organised troops slowly transcending into a gory mess under canon and musket fire, men screaming, shouting, the dead and fatally wounded colouring a formerly lush green meadow red-

Some have told me over the years that my fascination with the American Revolution borders on morbidity, an abnormal delight in the detailed description of bloody battlefields and a peculiarly avid interest in the social and personal life of people of the time of which I am said to speak at times as if they had been friends I had once known.

I have no need for friends, not among my competition, regardless of my Oxford degree and various other credentials, I do not tend to socialise with potential enemies. I did not wait an eternity to graduate from Oxford to be stabbed in the back by “friends” who might snatch attractive job offers or publication space in journals from me.

And yet, they force me to join them on lunch breaks, the men and women who have their office on the same floor as I do, thinking they will one day break me into submission to their “friendship”.


Ah, the false familiarity of academia. I was never fond of first name terms, even my wife tended to use my surname (albeit with a gentle, teasing undertone), especially not if the people inviting themselves to call my name have not asked permission to do so. When I joined Exeter University two years ago, it was simply assumed that I would not object as it was common practice among my
colleagues.

An immaculately manicured hand gently but decidedly pushed the volume I was hiding my face behind to be left alone flat onto the table.

I looked up to signal my dear colleague Francesca Montebello, eminent expert in the field of ecclesiastical history in the 11th and 12th centuries, that my interest in whatever table talk had occurred in my mental absence was rather limited.

“What’s wrong with you, John?”

Oh if only she knew.

“Nothing.”

“You always bury yourself in books. How was your weekend?”

“Fine, thank you.”

“Typically, someone ought to reply ‘and yours?’, if only to be polite.”

Her deadpan face paired with the obvious frustration in her voice made me uncomfortable- and angry.

“Excuse me, Francesca, I am reading.”

“What’s that you’re reading anyway, John?”, another colleague, David “Dave” Cooper, the insufferable imbecile they made me share an office with thanks to shortage of space in the university buildings, chimed in and snatched the book from me. If I had wanted to, I could have grabbed it even before his hand had so much as moved an inch away from its previous location next to his plate, but I did not want to alarm anybody present.

“Matthias Claudius”, he read in the mock-dramatic tone of a thespian imitating Shakespearian speech, “what are you doing here with us historians anyway? You sure you don’t belong in the English Literature department?”

When Francesca shot him a warning glance, “Dave” replied defensively, “Have you ever had a look around his office? Because I have, I work there, too. And he uses up all our shelves with his books, and they’re not even relevant to his studies, many of them quite old, too. Catullus, Schiller, Milton, Shakespeare- you’d think he’s leading some sort of double-life either renting out our space as storage for the campus library or he’s running an antiquarian bookshop from his office!”

“Dave, we’re getting you’re trying to be funny. Give it a rest.”, Prof Marcus Cholmondeley, the only fully-tenured member of our party, rolled his eyes before looking at me with a warning glimmer in his eyes (he had spotted my hand tighten around the knife that lay useless on the table next to the empty space in front of me where everyone else had a plate. If I had felt like it, I would have told him that nobody in the right mind would attempt a murder with such a ridiculous weapon as a table knife. At least none of this kind.) and returned to the watery splatter of mashed potatoes on his plate.

“Give it a rest, Dave’”, “Dave” mimicked Marcus, “give it a rest’? Seriously? Do you know what working in the same room as John Simcoe is like? He’s always there when I hold my office hours only to comment or do whatever silly little things he does behind my back to unnerve me and my students? Or when he’s supposed to hold his own- last time, he was a complete No-Coe and everyone complained to me? But that’s not it, apart from occupying our shared office space,
leaving me to deal with his students and acting up like a thirteen-year-old, he keeps mumbling to himself when he writes. Oh, I forgot, he’s not working. When I say writing, I mean poetry, disturbing stuff. Last time I asked him to stop forcing his fucking twisted imagination on me, I had to evade a book being thrown my way because Edgar Allan Coe here apparently thinks it’s funny to whack my skull in with a complete and annotated edition of Lord Byron’s collected works. He’s a bloody psychopath! No wonder his wife’s no longer in the picture.”

That was enough. I felt the urge to drain him of every single droplet of blood in his body in the most slow and painful manner possible. He could insult me and make stupid puns on my name, fine. It’s not as if I hadn’t heard “psy-Coe-path” before. I am accustomed to not being liked. But dragging Elizabeth into this was too much.

I rose, knowing I towered him easily, even when he was not seated. For one moment, I considered saying something, but decided against it given the number of potential witnesses to something that might cause me legal trouble if reported to the police and went away, back to our shared office, where I locked the key from the inside and left it in the lock. Should “Dave” call a locksmith if he wanted to.

All my colleagues knew about my wife was that she is no longer with me, which they misinterpreted as us having separated and living apart or being divorced.

It never occurred to anybody she might have died.

Mid-December, only two weeks shy of Christmas and our anniversary coming up a week later during the Christmas break, was the worst time he could have said these things.

Rage flooded my body, a rage I knew I would not be able to control if left in the company of people. In this state, I cannot guarantee for anyone’s safety. Locking myself away is, in such situations the most effective method of prevention. I have learned from past mistakes. I tried to focus, concentrate on trying to phrase an email to a publisher I was supposed to write, tried to remember the list of my interlibrary loans, but the only thing I could see before my mind’s eye was the face of a young woman, hazel eyes, her dark hair loosely falling around her shoulders, a serene smile on her face. Since I couldn’t do anything else, I concentrated on her face instead, how the hair that framed it softly danced in the breeze of a golden day in summer, tried to describe the exact colour of her eyes (impossible) and (at least in my mind) traced the curvature of her lips with my finger. In the sanctuary of my closed eyes, I tried to imagine, no, remember what taking her hand had felt like. It was so long ago that I did for the last time it almost feels like a product of my imagination now, unreal.

Almost everything about us had been unreal.

Her warm fingers wrapped around mine, and I felt a soft smile creeping to my lips. I was prepared to hold on to her hand, to follow her as she let herself fall in the whispering grass behind her, half-expecting a tumbling sensation to wash over me when she pulled me down with her, but a knock on the door chased her away, like the loud roar of a car does a doe by the roadside. My eyes opened, and I was in my office in mid-December, not in a summery meadow.

For a brief moment of confusion, my stare lingered on my cold, empty hand that had only seconds ago at least in a slumbering dream state had held hers as if to make sure it had indeed been a dream.

It had been. And would always be. A dream carefully constructed from memories of brighter days.

The knock on the door grew more urgent the second time.
“John? Open the door! Come on, let me in, please.”

Francesca’s voice, not unlike that of a concerned parent, begged for entry. I let her in.

She entered even before I had opened the door properly, one hand holding one of the chipped plates from the small kitchen across the hallway with a cling film-wrapped ham sandwich on it, the other balancing two mugs of coffee. How she managed not to spill or drop anything while pushing herself into the room was almost a miracle.

Without even asking, she decidedly put the mugs and plate down on my desk, on top of my notebooks (not the electronic kind) and papers. I was certain she could read the disapproval in my face, but Francesca, for some reason or other, was one of the few people who were either foolhardy or oblivious to the sort of intimidation I regularly used on most people around me. I don’t like them very much and I prefer solitariness to their sociable lifestyle. People make me sick.

Pulling "Dave”’s chair close (I was already contemplating telling her she was dangerously close to invading my space), she sat down and placed the plate in my hands.

“Here, I got that for you. Eat.”

“Thank you, I’m not hungry. The food at the canteen-”

“Then take a sip. You never eat or drink anything at lunch, you must be hungry and as far as I know –from Dave”, she added reluctantly, “you never have anything in here either. It’s not healthy.”

I lied, I was hungry. But not for a ham sandwich that had spent the entire morning in the self-service fridge in the cafeteria, and I have no liking for coffee either. The smell turns my stomach.

When I pushed the cup she tried to slide over to me away, careful, yet determined, she studied my face with concern.

“You look peaky, you know? If you want to talk-“

“Thank you, Francesca.”

My eyes evaded hers and wandered to the door, where they remained, my stare fixed on the door handle, hoping she would take the hint.

She did, but Francesca was no one who gave up easily.

“I can’t force you. Now, to business. We’ve decided Dave will be moving out.”

I looked to her, my eyes digging deep into the depths of hers, trying to find out if it was just a cheap trick, hoping she was not trying to fool me.

“Don’t look at me like that. To be frank, you have no reason whatsoever to look so pleased, you should be thankful Dave’s not going to report you to the police. He’ll be moving his stuff tomorrow afternoon and I advise you not to be around when he does. “

Finally, I would be rid of him.

“The day after tomorrow, on Friday, your new companion will move in. Do you know Anna Williams?”

“Williams?”, I repeated incredulously. The name sounded familiar.
“Yes, Marcus’ student assistant. She has a small office of sorts on the other side of the floor and when Marcus asked her, she was willing to swap with Dave. I said I oppose this new arrangement” she looked at me, her eyes cattishly narrowed, obviously warning me that if ever a book were to fly in the vague direction of Miss Williams, she would personally see to my undoing. Not that she would be able to accomplish this feat, yet to save myself time and troubles, I let her believe she had the upper hand in this conversation and nodded obediently.

While it would normally have hurt me quite badly to be accused of hurting an innocent person, especially a woman, I was too busy to care about the insult. “She’ll only ever be here three days a week at most, and not all day, being a student assistant. All I ask of you is, be nice to her.”

There was an acidic undertone to the “be nice” part of the sentence, almost as if she didn’t expect it.

“Yes”, I said, only to be rid of her.

Whoever this Miss Williams was, she could hardly be worse than my previous office mate. “Dave”’s juice boxes in particular would not be missed. He tends to slurp apple juice out of these tiny cartons made for toddlers who cannot be trusted with bottles yet and fill the room with the unbearable stench of apples. I hate apples. There is a profound reason to my dislike of said fruit that none of these fools could ever understand.

The following day, I stayed at home, working on my latest publication (“Benedict Arnold- A Looter Unhinged”).

The Calmness of the day struck me, no emails from students asking me to explain things I have told them thrice about in class, no invitations to pre-Christmas activities I wouldn’t attend anyway and not even a call about the gas meter or similar trifles I take no interest in. I did, however, receive a visitor. She comes to me often, stays for a snack and demands my full attention before she vanishes again, mostly through the half-open bathroom window.

Diana is not my pet- the huntress has subdued me, not the other way around. One morning before class in winter shortly after I moved in, I found a shaggy bundle of ragged grey fur sitting on my doorstep. Despite her ill looks, the cat, barely fully grown yet, had looked at me with proud amber eyes and strutted into the house without even politely asking for entry. In another life, I remembered, my wife’s cat had looked the same way at her.

Her every move beneath her coat of matted fur was graceful and with the implicitness of an empress, she laid siege to my sofa, which I spent two weeks and a considerable amount of money on cleaning it from cat hair. Soon, I had learned that throws are an efficient means of preventing cat fur from touching the expensive piece of furniture directly.

Carefully, I had lifted her off the sofa and onto the kitchen counter, where I tried to free her of her felted fur with a pair of scissors. She would not have won a beauty pageant when I was finished with my work, but she looked much more hygienic. As for the kitchen counter, I don’t have use of it anyway. I don’t cook, which is why I felt no reluctance to lift a stray cat on top of it and cut her hair there despite my usual love for cleanliness.

Although I have always been what could be called a dog person, this hissy little creature soon became my sole true friend. We had our first and only major disagreement (except for the time she
discovered I mixed flea medicine into her tuna) when I bathed her on the same day. My carpets
don’t take dirty paws and fur lightly. When I, my arms scratched bloody from her vehement
attempts to escape the well-tempered water and pleasantly-smelling bathing salts, had lifted her
from the dirty tub and put her in a towel, she had stopped glaring at me as if I had committed an act
of the grossest lèse-majesté against her and rolled into a perfect ball, purring as I, somewhat
cautious after her repeated attacks against my person, stroked her between the ears. With the
bundle on my lap, I settled on the sofa and watched as the cat fell asleep.

From this moment on, she started to return every few days and earned her name by bringing me
uncalled for tokens of her appreciation, dead mice, rats and birds- dead when I was fortunate. In the
past, I have repeatedly had the dubious pleasure of chasing a lethally wounded mouse around the
house that Diana had brought me.

As has become our habit, Diana headed straight for the refrigerator, where she knows I keep her
tuna. We have tried ordinary cat food before, but capricious as my stray huntress is, she had made
it perfectly clear that she would not stoop so lowly as to accept Whiskas. Through strenuous trial
and error experiments we could establish that her expensive taste in salmon (preferably from
Ireland or Norway, and not the aquaculture-raised kind), monkfish and even scallops aside, she
could envision making do with tuna on ordinary days.

Sadly I lacked her favourite food that day, for some reason I had forgotten to stock up my
provisions. I don’t usually go shopping, there is not much I need and most things I can lay my
hands on in other ways, but the small supermarket a few streets away has served me well in the
past in situations when I required something post-haste.

“I will be right back”, I told her and received a disappointed and hurt meow in return. So much
about spending the day at home. I discarded my dressing gown and slipped into a black turtleneck
instead, paired with one of my usual work trousers. Since it was an informal outing, I did not pay
much mind to doing my hair and left it falling to my shoulders. As it was winter, I added a black
coat that fell to my knees and then considered myself ready to go.

At the shop, I did not directly find what I was looking for, these imbeciles had re-arranged the
shelving for the third time in five months now. Walking through the aisles and looking confusedly
left and right, I almost ran into a woman with a shopping cart.

“Excuse me”, I said and sincerely meant it.

Instead of simply replying in the usual fashion, the woman, whom I now realised was quite young,
stopped and looked at me.

“Hello Mr Simcoe! I barely recognised you outside the classroom. I was in one of your classes last
semester, “Women of the Revolution”."

“Ah-“, I started, pretending to remember her name-

“Anna Williams.”

She extended her hand to me and I shook it.

“Williams? The same Anna Williams working for Professor Cholmondeley? Then you are moving
into my office.”

“I am. I’m sorry, I have to go- I see you tomorrow at the office, then?"

“You shall. Goodbye”, I sent her on her way before I spied a tell-tale blue and red tin in her cart.
“Wait.” She stopped and turned around once more.

“Where did you get the tuna?”

Third aisle on the left, right hand side, just below the sieved tomatoes.”

Her directions proved astonishingly accurate and within ten minutes, I was back with Diana, who hungrily devoured a whole tin of tuna and some prawns I had bought as a treat in no time.

When I came to the office the following day, nothing reminiscent of “Dave” was left. His books were gone and replaced with new ones, his desk cleaned and the carpet hoovered. Instead, a messy bun of dark hair peeked over the top of the back of his former chair and typed a lengthy email.

“Good morning Mr Simcoe”, Miss Williams said far too cheerily for my taste without even looking up from her work.

“Good morning”, I replied, before I set to my own work. For two hours or so, we worked quietly alongside each other before I, stretching my long limbs that could not be accommodated sufficiently beneath my smallish desk, walked across the room to my assortment of exceptional literature and picked a volume from the shelves.

As I did so, I could not help but notice Miss Williams was no longer searching books in library catalogues or answering her employer’s correspondence. She was immersed in a website called revolutionary-ancestry.com that sported an image of re-enactors at Colonial Williamsburg in British and American uniforms I recognised to be in the style of those worn in the 1770s.

Interested, I drew closer but my plan to read along from over her shoulder proved futile.

“Mr Simcoe? Can I help you?” She turned on her chair and looked directly at me.

“That’s not something Professor Cholmondeley has told you to do, is it?”

“No. I’m taking a break and this is my personal area of interest.”

She seemed oddly offended I was taking an interest in her interest, which puzzled me- as to my understanding, people tended to like it if someone was interested. Delighted to have found a like-minded person, I could not hold myself back: “As you know, this is my area of expertise. If you are interested in a list of relevant publications or-“

“Thank you, but I doubt you can help me with this.”

“Oh?” Was she insulting my academic capability?

“I’m researching my family history. I can trace everyone on my dad’s side back to 1453, but it’s different on my mother’s.”

“How so?”

“My mother was the last member of her family and it was her lifelong goal to get the family papers and archival material that has been passed down for centuries in order, but she died before she even could get started.”

Dark eyes downcast, she averted mine.
“I am sorry to hear that.”

“It’s all right, I was still very young and my stepmother has done everything she could for me. But I want to know where I come from, who my mother’s people were. And I’ve found these documents from the American Revolution in one of the boxes of documents that I inherited from her that mention an ancestor who has fought in America until 1781 and I was thinking perhaps I could research—“

In this moment, her desk phone rang.

“Yes? I’m on it, Professor.”

Without any further words to me, she turned away, back to her desk and closed the tab quickly before she started typing something into an online interlibrary loan search engine.

Williams. Williams. Where had I heard her name before?

In the same moment, I too was called back to order by a knock at the door. The secretary stood there, handing me a parcel I had eagerly been waiting for. Two new biographies of George Washington and one of General Cornwallis as well as, hidden underneath the more scholarly volumes, a book titled *Washington’s Spies: The Story of America’s First Spy Ring* and three seasons of a TV series based on said book I had been told might interest me.

I was already certain I wouldn’t like it, but I would watch it anyway. Alone at Christmas, I needed something to do.

When Christmas came not two weeks later, I spent the entirety of Christmas Eve trying to get through the first season of *TURN: Washington’s Spies*. While the show’s representation of Abraham Woodhull as a cowardly, philandering cabbage farmer who wore a piece of his produce instead of a head and was more than out of his depth as a spy, I could not wrap my head around the fact that he supposedly was the hero of the story. When had Woodhull of all people been a hero? He had always hid behind others, let the dirty work be done by his friends and family.

By mid-season two, I switched the DVD player off and vowed never to watch this piece of libel, calumny and misinterpretation ever again, and I had even tried to suppress my anger at the inaccurate costumes, props and scenery. The only redeeming feature I could find in all this was the fact that the actor playing Captain Simcoe (who should have been a major by season two) was quite well cast.

I switched the TV on to have some company. It was Christmas Eve after all and, if one was to believe the Coca Cola ads, nobody should be alone on this day.

*Fairy Tale of New York* blared through the room and filled my heart with wistful recollections of days gone by; she had been pretty, and most definitively the queen of York city.

When the song ended in a clumsy waltz between Shane McGowan and Kirsty MacColl, I remembered Christmases gone by, when the children had been small and the house full of festive spirit. I also imagined what Christmas in the houses of other people I know or once knew looked like; how Francesca and her boyfriend would likely sit at her parents’ place and share secret snogs behind the Christmas tree; how Miss Williams, her father and stepmother stood in the kitchen preparing the food together and how Anna and Edmund sat around the table with their children, how he placed a kiss on her cheek and made her laugh while she dispensed food to three hungry
toddler.

Not even the bloody cat had bothered to visit me. Perhaps she had somebody else on the side, a
second servant who tended to her whims and who bought better tuna than I did. I had even bought
scallops for her for the occasion.

I could still go home, it was no more than a one hour drive and the roads were likely deserted
during this holy night.

No, visiting Wolford Lodge, or rather what was left of it would not be wise. The old house had
been replaced by a new one which was rented out to holidaymakers who would likely not want a
dark figure stalk around the estate by night and pretending to do my duties at the little chapel there
would look odd given the time and day.

Besides my work as an eminent historian, I work voluntarily for a group of people maintaining the
chapel, built in the 1700s, for the Ontario Heritage Trust who purchased said building many years
ago.

The chapel has for me become synonymous with peace and contemplation, even if the often menial
tasks, such as raking leaves from the path in front of it and being friendly to visitors, do often
require my full restraint and test my patience, the visitors in particular.

I contemplated going to the cathedral to attend service, it was Christmas after all, the time all those
who considered themselves Christian went to church, sheepishly vowing to be a better person next
year and attend service more frequently when they didn’t remember the hymns.

No; I had stopped believing in God or indeed any higher order a long time ago and I had other
reasons not to want to go there that convinced me to stay home and wait for my little huntress to
grace me with a visit and write a few lines of poetry or finish my article on Arnold in the
meantime.

The treacherous animal did not come and thus, I spent Christmas Eve all alone.

Hungry, I took a transparent bag from the freezer and microwaved it carefully until its red content
had become fluid and was about body temperature warm. I don’t like it any hotter or colder, 38°C
is just right. Pouring the contents of the bag into my beautifully cut Waterford Crystal wine carafe,
I went to the bathroom and settled in the tub, letting hot water warm my skin while I emptied two
glasses in no time.

This was my life –if one could call it that. I dove under the surface of the water and remained there
for far too long, thinking about the world, about myself, the job, all these boring things that marked
my existence. How I long for the old days in moments like this.

The week after Christmas, just one day shy of New Year’s eve, I left early in the morning and
drove my green Range Rover Sentinel to Devon, a bouquet of red roses wrapped in transparent
plastic foil in the empty front passenger seat. Thirty in total, the ones with the big heads and a black
velvety sheen to them. Anything less would not have done. I would never forget the date, as other
spouses I have heard of have done or do. She commands my heart and I revere her, even after all
these years, just as I did on our first day.

“Ah, Mr Coe!” the young lady in the florist shop of my choice had greeted me jovially. I have
become a habitual customer during the past two years and the proprietor, as well as her daughter,
the purple-haired Miss George occasionally earning a little on the side behind the counter, have
come to like me- but then, I am a good customer.
“My regards to Mrs Coe, she’s a lucky lady”, George, whose real name was Georgianna, winked. “My mother said only last week you’ve-“

“It’s for a special occasion”, I said plainly, unwilling to talk about my beloved Eliza.

“Speaking of special occasions, last time I spoke with your mother I heard you were accepted into the scholarship programme you applied for. My congratulations”, I diverted the conversation to another topic.

“I’m beyond excited. You should have seen Mum when I told her. Here-“ she passed me the bouquet and typed the amount of money I owed her into the till.

I paid the flowers and slipped her an additional twenty pound note. When she looked at me incredulously and was about to push the twenty pound note back across the counter, I answered “It’s all right” and left.

The day was crisp and cool, and every tree, meadow and bush on my way covered in white frost. It was beautiful. The beauty of the world made me sad, especially on this day. Many years ago, we might have gone on a ride and beheld these sights together, my wife and I. Or the girls would have joined me for an early morning walk and chattered excitedly about this and that until nature was forgotten and all I cared for was their laughter when they took turns using me as their packhorse.

I turned the radio on and let the canned drowsiness of BBC Radio 4 fill the silence in the car.

Often have I wondered about the fact that there are only two kinds of car commercials on television; either the solitary male driving his vehicle through an eye-pleasing landscape, the epitome of so-called freedom and manliness, or those depicting a chaotic family bickering in a car stuffed to the brim for their annual holiday.

Alone in the scenic hills of Devon, I would have given everything to look in the rear view mirror and find Francis and Sophia ruining the leather seats with markers and Eliza next to me, rolling her eyes in desperation. Wiping the image away, I tried to concentrate on the radio.

...After the news: another episode of Great Lives with special guests Marlene Darnell, author and Canadian ambassador to the UK and art historian Professor Graham Bethnick discussing the life of Elizabeth Simcoe, pioneer and painter-

I changed the station with more force than necessary to whatever else was on air. Through the bad techno beats of some third-rate local radio DJ, I fought back tears.

Tears have no biological purpose anymore, like my supposed breathing, pulse and heartbeat which I consciously reactivated when I courted my Eliza, but even creatures have emotions.

Arriving at Wolford, I locked my car and walked to the chapel.

“Happy 234th anniversary my love”, I tried to smile at the weather-beaten headstone in front of me and revealed the flowers I had hidden behind my back, “you won’t believe what was on the radio on my way here.”

The next hour or so I spent sitting leant against the chapel wall next to her stone, one hand on the frozen earth beneath which she reclines for eternity - the closest I could get to her, sometimes
talking to her, at other times absent-mindedly running my fingers through the coarse winter grass pretending it was her hair.

To think it had been 234 years since our hands had been joined- I marvelled once more at the memories of that beautiful day in 1782 that had me forget my suffering for a short while.

Without my condition, the things that had happened would never have- Oh I would eventually have my revenge on those who had played a part in making me a vampire, a creature of the lowest degree, forced to live when it is dead, unnatural and despicable.

They had hurt not only me, but Eliza and the children as well by having made me what I am during the late American War. It does not matter the people in question are already dead.

Death is relative and suffering timeless.

And they will pay.

Chapter End Notes

The prologue:
I think the origin of the title "Der Reichenbach-Fall" is pretty obvious. It's a pun on Sherlock Holmes (not necessarily the modern TV series) that I liked quite a lot. "Fall" in this case stands for the German word for "case" and doesn't mean a waterfall.

By the way, I invented the whole case and all people involved in it. The place (Reichenbach, a place that joined the town of Gengenbach at one point in the 20th century) is real.

Jürgen: "I haven't seen anything like this before.", "It'll be best if you don't look at it for too long. God knows, I'm twenty years in service now and I haven't come across something like this ever before. Who- who does such a thing?"

ICE: I have no idea if the ICE (Intercity-Express, the high-speed long distance trains in Germany) line 12 to Interlaken via Basel was in operation back in 1997 but for the sake of this fic, it was.

Kripo: Short for Kriminalpolizei, the German police's criminal investigation department.

SC Freiburg finished second to last in the 1996/1997 Bundesliga (German football (soccer) league) season and has not been too successful since.

The musical referenced is "Tanz der Vampire" ("Dance of the Vampires"), which premiered in October 1997 in Vienna. A few obvious allusions to it can be found in this fic.

Südkurier: a quite sizeable paper in southern Baden-Württemberg.

The English guest: "Your colleague's table talk seems to have upset your stomach."
Stefan: "Are you English?"
"some children's novel from the UK": The newly released "Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone". Jürgen's niece can consider herself lucky to be the owner of one of the 500 first edition prints.

"John Simcoe, DPhil":

At least to my knowledge the web page I invented doesn't exist.

I felt it would be funny to mention Alexander Rose's book and "TURN". Who knows, perhaps one day he'll be bored enough to watch on?

"queen of York city": Simcoe deviates from the original lyrics here. He is talking about his wife Elizabeth and their time in Upper Canada where they founded Toronto, which at the time was called York.

The reason why Simcoe doesn't want to go to Exeter Cathedral is that there is a monument in his honour. Said monument also honours his son, who died aged 21 in the siege of Badajoz in 1812. He doesn't want to be reminded of mortality and his dead loved ones.

"Great Lives" is a real programme on BBC Radio 4, but as far as I know, there hasn't been an episode on either of the Simcoes yet. The historian and the ambassador have been made up by me.

Thank you for reading this! Regardless of having liked or disliked it, feel free to leave your critique, remarks, suggestions, questions and thoughts on this story in the comment section!
The Unquiet Grave(s)

Chapter Summary

In the course of one day, John Graves Simcoe relives the events from 1768 to 1806. It's quite long, but I wanted to tell the story in one piece.

Chapter Notes

So this is a little longer than I thought it would get.

I have added "Major Character Death" in the tags because, well- the protagonist dies. That doesn't mean he stays dead, though...

I have also updated this fic to "Mature"- better safe than sorry and today's chapter is quite dark and includes a few warnings.

Warnings: death, self-harm, attempted murder, murder, attempted (almost-vampire) suicide, non-graphic recaps of canon incidents of torture as well as 18th century medical procedures and misdiagnoses.

If these things make you uneasy, I cannot recommend this chapter to you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Mummy! Mamma!”

The little girl stood bare-footed in her mother’s bedroom, screaming at the top of her lungs, frantically clutching her favourite doll she had received for her second birthday from her father to her chest, her face tear-stained and her eyes widened in terror.

She was followed suit by one of her older sisters.

“Annie, I told you not to disturb Mamma-“ the older one, as opposed to the little girl of four already a woman, scolded.

“But the man, the man beneath the window!”

“Come here, what’s going on?”, their mother asked sleepily and invited the younger child to creep beneath her covers, which the little one did, seeking protection at her mother’s side like a duckling under the duck’s wing.

The young woman stiffly remained standing, bolt upright like a soldier awaiting inspection.

“I couldn’t sleep and then I went to Caroline’s room because I could see her light was still burning and then we watched the stars together from her window and then we saw the man standing on the lawn. He was very tall, taller than Francis I think, and his eyes sparkled in the moonlight, I swear he would have come to get us if Caroline had not chased him away.”
The girl gratefully looked up to her older sister with an air of admiration for her bravery.

“Is that true?” Their mother asked, suddenly alerted. She had until then thought her youngest might have imagined things, had a nightmare, but bringing forth an elder sibling as a witness indicated the situation was graver than a child’s bad dream.

“I saw him, it is true. And I called out to him when he gazed to our window, asking him what business he had here in the dead of the night, but he fled into the darkness. We couldn’t see much else, let alone where he went, it’s still dark outside, but his silhouette was tall and his eyes- we saw them when he looked up to us in the window and they met the moonbeams, silvery-blue eyes like-“

“That’s impossible, and you know that.” She had read her daughter’s mind even before the words could leave the young woman’s mouth.

“Go back to bed, both of you. The door is locked and nobody can come in and in the unlikely event someone does, he will have to pass Jack Sharp first.”

“Can Jack sleep in my room tonight, mummy?” the little girl asked.

“It’s an exception, I want you to know that. Caroline, would you be so kind and fetch the dog?”

“Yes, mother. But I know what I saw.”

“It was dark, just as you said, and perhaps I should have burnt your “foreign language studies” as soon as I found them. Die Braut von Corinth. You’ve always had a vivid imagination, just like your father. Now, let us all go to sleep and rest before the morning comes.”

She drifted back into uneasy sleep perturbed by frightful dreams. The little one, yes, children do imagine things, but Caroline was no child anymore and she had insisted the eyes she had seen in the dark-

It couldn’t be.

In the morning, she rose at dawn while the children were still sleeping and quietly, unseen by anybody, made her way into the garden.

At first, she did not find anything that would indicate someone had intruded the property at night until she, kneeling on the grass to inspect the flowerbed beneath Caroline’s bedroom window, found a pair of footprints in the wet earth. They must belong to a man of significant height judging by the size of them. So her daughters had been right. Someone, more specifically a tall man, had been here last night.

Shivering, she destroyed the footprint with her own shoe and went back into the house and later presided over breakfast as if nothing had happened, warning both Anne and Caroline with unmistakeable glances not to speak of what they had seen.

When Caroline left the house later in the day to meet a friend, she slipped into her daughter’s room and found what she was looking for in her desk. Three pages of folded paper that had doubtlessly been ripped out of a book and presented to her daughter by one of her illustrious friends lay hidden, alongside some other literary treasures of varying morality, beneath a stack of paper, old drawings and pencils.

She smoothed the pages on top of the desk and begun to read.

What utter nonsense.
When classes started in early January, I was once more confronted with the ignorant dullness of my students’ minds.

Sometimes, I feel the urge to punish these unfortunate combinations of weak minds and bodies and at other times, I imagine myself in their situation and come to the conclusion that the boy I once was when I attended Oxford University for the first time at age sixteen, would fit in among the crowds of students I have come to dislike.

These young people, experiencing freedom for the first time, eager to try their hand in the game of life (and death) still have dreams, adventures, visions that lay worlds apart from a university classroom at 6 pm. I prefer evening classes- the dark suits me, despite tolerating daylight well, better than the brightness of day.

I was never allowed to dream the dreams they dream- the years between sixteen and twenty-nine I spent transitioning into a vampire.

There are several ways to become one- one of them, perhaps the most merciful in terms of painlessness, is to be bled dry and have one’s blood replaced with that of a vampire.

Mine was a case of infection by bite. Vampire bites, much like the bites of cats, dogs and humans, are highly infectious in their highly specific way, which explains the high numbers of vampire sightings and popular crazes in the 19th century and the low numbers of our kind today:

It has become customary to carry a bottle of wound disinfectant among vampires to ensure that, in the case of non-lethal feeding, which has become the most practised variety of obtaining human blood, it is ensured the blood donor, formerly known as the victim, does not slowly transition into a vampire through infection over time, especially since the lack of supervision by other vampires means the freshly transitioned vampire poses a threat to society.

I was one of them. My boyhood days ended after one night of heedless drinking, as young men of a certain age have done in my day and still do now. When I passed an empty alleyway on my slow way back to my abode where I longed to sleep my inebriated state off, someone grabbed me from behind and the world turned dark forever.

The vampire must have been disturbed; for the wound was not deep yet, which indicated they must have abandoned the plan to feed on me mid-preparations.

In the morning, an innkeeper dragged me off the street and followed my instructions as to where to take me.

For a week, I did nought but sleep- or at least tried to. I could not attend classes and a doctor, sent by a friend, came every day to see me, but the fever would not wear off.
The doctor could not explain the shallow wound in my neck and dismissed it as the bite of some animal that must have tried to bite me while I was inebriated, a stray of some sort perhaps and since it healed quickly, nobody had suspected the *affliction* that had befallen me originated in the two small puncture wounds to the side of my neck.

By the end of the first week, no one believed I had merely caught a cold from my nightly brush with exposure any longer. They speculated I was dying, which they were not wrong about as I learned much later, and suspected a severe pneumonia. After all, it was what had killed my father and thus, a certain proneness for respiratory diseases in my family was supposed and accepted as the most likely cause of my imminent death.

My belongings were packed for me and a coach hired and my sore and weary body tossed into it, barely able to keep myself upright, to send me back to my mother, to Exeter, to die there.

I would not see Oxford again until two hundred years later.

They thought it was mercy to let me die at home; in the end, it was the cruellest thing that could have been done to me.

I fell from the coach directly into my mother’s arms after several days of traveling I had passed wailing and crying for mercy, to stop the carriage and let me lie down by the roadside in peace to *sleep*. The driver never listened.

My mother’s arms supported, nay almost carried me, even though she was weakened with advancing age herself and by no means capable of manhandling a youth of six foot three on her own, into my room in her house. She would not let anybody else near me.

For the first time in days, I felt safe, secure, and started to accept that the Lord hadn’t granted me any more time on earth than sixteen years, which was more generous than what he had given to my brothers, Paulet, John, whose name I inherited, and Percy. And yet, I was angry, weeping at the unfairness of my situation, why I should die while my friends lived, weeping with guilt when my mother’s gaunt face came into my room, because now I had failed her, the last of her sons, the last living image of her husband, my father, who had died nine years ago.

If only I had never-

One night, I remember waking from a fevered dream, I could hear the doctor consult with my mother. She was sitting by my bedside, clasping my hand in hers, the other holding one of her scented and lace-trimmed handkerchiefs with which she dabbed my burning forehead.

They thought I was delirious and thus permitted themselves to speak these words that they would normally have hidden from me in my presence.

He stood behind her and, being a friend to her, put one arm on her shoulder as he said “Let us not indulge in false hope, Katherine. The boy will not see the dawn.”

“Is there nothing you can do?”

“We have done everything we could do for him. I fear we shall lose him within the hour.”

My mother cried, rose abruptly and took my fevered face between her soothingly cold hands, pleading with me to stay alive and invoking all religions, saints and deities known to her in one jumbled, tear-stained prayer.

Like a madwoman, she set herself the task to save me, the only member of her family she hadn’t
buried yet, the only son she had seen live past childhood. She stripped me of my blankets and instead covered my heated body in wet rags and forced me to drink.

With desperate patience, she pushed the rim of the cup between my lips even when I, with what little resistance was left in me, turned my head away, moaning in pain.

I had come to the point where I only wanted it to end and refusing the substance that might prolong my suffering seemed like the only and most logical choice open to me.

In the end, I yielded and allowed her to support the back of my head, as I would later, at the birth of my first child, learn infant children are handled, and instil the cool liquid into my sore and swollen throat.

Slowly drifting into the darkness again that I thought had finally come to claim me, she started to talk to me and told me of more pleasant days. My mother told me of my father, the day she had been introduced to him, their wedding day and my childhood, how I had been a difficult infant who had refused to feed, but she had known I would survive when I had blinked at her or the day when during a visit to Hembury Fort House, my godfather had heaved me on top of his mighty steed, which scared my parents almost to death. Apparently, the Admiral had prophesised to my outraged mother that with my natural ability and posture I would one day make a dashing cavalryman. She recalled my pride when the older man gave me a military salute befitting a general and called me the “Little Lieutenant”, an honorary rank I apparently had attempted to live up to by following my godfather’s every step and diligently fulfilling “missions” for him, such as fetching a book from the library or enquiring in the kitchens what we would have for dinner when he asked me to.

I watched as in front of my mind’s eye, conjured up by my mother’s narration, my five-year-old self ran through a corridor in my godfather’s home, down and down the corridor that I knew should have ended and led me to a room but didn’t-

Everything around me turned to darkness.

Spots of bright light teased my eyelids when I came to again. At first I was convinced I must have died and opening my eyes, I would find myself in the afterlife, but after a short while of simply lying still and observing my surroundings with closed eyes, I realised my head lay on a cushion, not a heavenly cloud or a flowery meadow in paradise, and that something inflicted pressure on the left side of my body. I opened my eyes to find a head of hair much like my own except for a few tell-tale strands of silver resting slumped forwards against my chest. My mother had fallen asleep in the chair beside my bed.

“Mother”, was all I could say before my exhausted body demanded I lean back and sleep once more.

As if summoned by a spell, she woke. It took her a few moments to realise, but when she saw the sun breaking through the windows and looked at me, my eyes half-open, she flung herself onto the bed and wept into my nightshirt, thanking all the heavenly forces she had invoked to keep watch over me for my deliverance from most immediate danger.

I had cooled, she informed me, and sent for the doctor once more, who declared my survival a miracle.

All seemed well. I would recover and return to Oxford once I was strong enough and had recuperated somewhat. I would excel in my studies, as I had promised her, I would-

Nothing.
The first signs of what truly ailed my body had shown approximately three days later.

It started with my sudden sensitivity to open sunlight which scorched my eyes and skin with its much too bright golden gleam. I pleaded for the curtains to be drawn shut and curled up beneath the covers of my bed, keeping my eyes closed for as long as possible.

Next, my other senses started to sharpen in erratic episodes: one day, my skin would sting as if penetrated by a dagger at the slightest touch, the next I could smell the butcher’s shop a few streets away or the doctor when he entered the house even before he announced himself to the maid downstairs and lastly I started to hear the whispers in the street as clearly as if those walking by beneath my window were in the same room.

Not knowing why or what my body was doing, I raged like a frightened animal, demanding to know what was happening to me, but the answer always was that I was still affected by weakness and my body and mind prone to dream-like fabrications such as these. Besides, I had been given milk of the poppy and my “strange” descriptions of my senses revolting against me were ascribed to the substance’s side effects.

But they were wrong. I was not drugged beyond reason. The most horrifying of these experiences was that throughout my ordeal, I knew I was sane when everyone around me slowly suspected I was dwindling down the spiral to insanity- the fever must have done too much damage to my brain, they said and did not mind my pleading cries and gave me even more milk of the poppy instead to quieten me.

Nobody could predict the third phase of what they misdiagnosed as an *exotick* disease.

The longer I suffered from bouts of abnormally sensitive senses, the more desperate I became until one day, plagued by a particularly painful episode of hypersensitivity to being touched, which even transformed lying still in bed into a pit of hell, I discovered I could throw both my mother and the doctor, a sturdy man with the physique of a blacksmith, off when they tried to push my writhing body back into the cushions.

Although I have never been particularly patient or longanimous, my temper worsened due to the frightful experiences and, as I found out later, the beginning of my transformation.

I made use of my sudden strength that had arrived with even more severe violent episodes; the phrase “blinded by rage” offers an apt description of the outbursts that lay beyond my control.

When before I battled my carers with the weak limbs of a sick boy, I suddenly fought them with the strength and fervour of three Herculean warriors.

I kicked, hit and scratched, often with little reason or no reason at all to do so and at times even turned against myself when there was nobody else against whom I could direct my rage.

During one of these dark hours, I learned about my new lust for blood: On the day I first drank blood I remember I had another seizure, of which sense I am no longer able to recall. Since it was too dangerous for anybody else to enter, fearing the person entering would feel my wrath, and I found myself fighting alone against myself, I dug my fingernails deep into my forearm and drew blood. It had not been my intention to do so, but blinded by unbearable pain, fear of myself and my condition and the rage I could no longer control, I was capable of almost anything.

The sight of blood welling up from the deep scratch mark I had left on my forearm oddly calmed and exhilarated me at the same time. Its ruby colour against the canvas of my pale skin, the teasing, sweet, warm, metallic smell- *delicious*.
Without realising what I was doing, my head bent to my forearm and I greedily licked the blood that had begun to run down my wrist from the wound I had created myself.

Disregarding all temperance, I smudged more of the red liquid around my mouth and chin with occasional droplets spoiling the white linen of my nightshirt, but the taste I had been able to gain from what little blood found its way to my mouth left me in an ecstatic want for more.

I recalled having fallen and split my lip as a child; but the taste of blood in my mouth that had nauseated me at age eight had changed, changed utterly- I could not remember ever having tasted anything so intoxicating, so sweet, so good.

With impatience, I waited for the cut to fill with blood once more and, when enough of it had accumulated, greedily cleaned the tingling groove in my flesh with my tongue a second time.

Much too late I noticed the door had been opened and I watched; my mother, terror etched into her face, had borne witness to everything.

Often have I wondered how she continued to love me despite having seen me feed on myself, my face red from my own blood, saliva dripping from the corners of my mouth and my pupils dilated with hungry ecstasy.

She never spoke of this incident to me; and she did not even utter a sound when she had stood in the doorway on this fateful day. Her eyes had filled up with tears and she had turned away, locking the door behind her.

In the evening, she returned with the doctor and five strong men of his choosing who overpowered me and held me down on the bed while the doctor strapped my wrists and ankles tightly to the bedposts.

“It is for your own good”, my mother had tried to soothe me after the doctor and his henchmen had left, pushing strands of hair that had fallen into my face away before she lowered her gaze to her feet and left me, too.

Not even she could bear to look at the monster she had birthed.

I have no accurate recollection how many days or weeks or even months passed that I spent in my crepuscular cell. At first, I had writhed and fought against the ropes and leather straps that bound me, shouted at the top of my lungs, threatened, demanded my release. It was not long until my voice grew hoarse, the skin beneath my ties sore and my body fatigued and I, too exhausted to fight anymore, could do nothing but sob and plea whenever my mother visited me thrice a day to feed and wash me.

Only twice a day was I unbound, under strict supervision, to allow me use the chamber pot and change into a clean nightshirt.

I barely ate and for a week held the design that if I would refuse food and drink, death would eventually find and free me. Since I did not know I could no longer simply starve myself to death, the vampire-infection having already spread through my body, I tried in vain and when force-feeding was not only contemplated but employed on my person (once more with the aid of the good doctor’s associates), I submitted myself to fate.

Slowly, I too started to believe what everyone else around me suspected, either openly in front of me or in secret. My ears having gradually attuned to their new powers, I could hear my mother and the doctor converse even when they shut themselves in in a room on another floor whenever I
wanted to.

I was going mad, if I wasn’t mad already, I was certain the day would come when I no longer recognised myself and, waking in the morning, would have forgotten who I was. Thus I became terrified of falling asleep, terrified of every sound that I could not directly ascribe to a logical source, fearing I was imagining things.

There was talk of sending me to Bedlam for treatment, but my mother refused the doctor’s proposal, saying I was still her son and not another curiosity to be added to London’s human menagerie.

Eminent experts were brought in to view me, and when none could find any cure (for no amount of blistering, bloodletting and medicines that made me turn out the contents of my bowels would cure the dark mental night they said I dwelt in), a vicar was brought into the house who read from the bible and prayed at my bedside. Next was an Irish Jesuit who performed an exorcism on me and after that a quack claiming he had learned the art of voodoo from a slave on his travels to the Caribbean, whose “magic” seemed to meet the same divine approval as the Jesuit’s demands to the devil to leave my body and the vicar’s prayers.

When over the course of several hours a cold water therapy was administered to me, strapped to a chair and unable to move while being time and again showered with buckets of cold water, I could endure no more. It was by far not the worst that had been done to me, but it broke my last reserve.

I broke. Deep inside me, a string of my heart, an indescribable thing, a piece of my soul, snapped. A person, dead or living or in between, can only take so much pain. I started to feel empty and detached from this world that had treated me so cruelly and limited myself to staring at the ceiling in apathetic stupor. Pain, both physical and emotional, stopped to matter, as did most other emotions. I only wanted my peace.

My world turned grey, numb and cold and it felt (and still feels at times) as if there is a wall of impenetrable ice between me and most people.

Every night, my mother would sit by my bedside and read to me. The Odyssey, the Iliad, all literature modern and ancient she thought would be to my delectation or that she knew I had once enjoyed, her words the calls of a wanderer lost on a foggy moor and separated from her traveling companion, calling out into the clouded void in search for the child she had lost but could still see in my dull, expressionless eyes.

It took them another eight weeks to be convinced they could loosen my ties without having to fear me.

Weak, I lay in bed. This time, it was not my body that was weakened, it was my mind. I needed diversion and too tired to rise but missing the intellectual nourishment Oxford had provided to me, I demanded a tutor to be hired to teach me at home. A suitable man was found, I recognised him as a former teacher at Exeter Grammar School which I attended previous to my Eton-days and for a few hours each day, I let him distract me with tales of days gone by and the intricacies of military tactics.

Always having pursued an interest in a military career, I was intrigued. The military would allow me to get away from Exeter, from Oxford, likely from England even.

My mind was made up and I informed my mother that I wanted to join the army, to honour my father’s memory and become a man in my own right and she agreed and wrote to a distant relation to recommend me for an officer’s career. Both of us knew it was a lie. I wanted to flee from my
old life, from myself, from her even, who had let these abominable things happen to me, thinking whatever had been done to me was in my best interest when in truth it had done so much harm to me-

“Mr Simcoe!” I must have lost myself in my thoughts again and realised that the room had been quiet, awaiting me to speak.

“Mr Simcoe”, the boy in the front row repeated, “there’s somebody at the door to see you.”

Turning my head to the door, I saw David Cooper standing in the corridor, uneasily shifting his weight from one foot to the other and kneading his right hand with his left.

“What’s the matter, Cooper?”, I asked in the same voice I would have spoken to a private under my command many years ago.

“Your office. Water main’s broken. I- I was only there because I’d forgotten something when I moved out and then I saw-“

I had never seen the man so serious.

“Dismissed”, I turned to my students and followed Cooper, not even caring to see the classroom locked and the electronics switched off.

When we arrived, Miss Williams was there, too, frantically carrying heaps of library books she must have procured for her employer out of the danger zone into the corridor. Luckily, the water had not yet reached my prized miniature library, but it was evident from the increasing flow that the seepage was growing by the minute.

I shed myself of my jacket, loosened my tie and begun to empty the shelves as quickly as I could to save my books from drowning, while Cooper unplugged the computers and monitors.

For the first time, I was genuinely thankful for David Cooper’s existence. When he was done, he helped me moving my books, alongside Miss Williams, who was done evacuating her and Marcus Cholmondeley’s belongings.

“Ah. Now that’s the one you nearly killed me with”, Cooper said suddenly, “fun times.” and carried the complete edition of Lord Byron’s works alongside another armful of books out of harm’s way.

Twenty minutes later, we were finished. The corridor looked like a mess, but at least nothing too valuable, save for some furniture and a few binders of paperwork had been exposed to the water.

I called the fire department and an emergency plumbing service while Cooper offered to go and try to organise some boxes and storage room to put the contents of our office in.

The office was a case for the university’s insurance company and, for the time being not useable since before any work could be done restoring the room or even draining the walls of the water that had seeped into them and would make them prone to mould, which would be fatal to my books (not to me, luckily), an assessor would have to come and evaluate the damage.
When the fire department, some bystanders that had accumulated and the caretaker, who too had rushed to the scene, had left for the night, it was only Miss Williams, David Cooper and myself left.

“Here. I got those. Homebase was still open.” He carried approximately ten removal boxes under each arm. The three of us started to fold the boxes and then fill them with as many books and assorted other office supplies as possible.

As the university was, perhaps due to the late hour, rather non-compliant with allowing us to store the boxes in a classroom for the next few days before different arrangements could be made, we decided that I would store them in my house.

Cooper and I heaved the heaviest boxes and since I could not persuade Miss Williams to go home, I hesitantly permitted her to carry some lighter boxes and the computers. I would not want her to hurt her back. It was discourteous enough already to keep her, especially at such a late hour and under such spontaneous circumstances, even in the 21st century.

In the car park, we noticed that not all boxes fit into my car.

“Come on then, Let’s load the stuff into mine.”, Cooper sighed and started to flip the seats in his big VW family van so it would accommodate more cargo.

I gave him my address and he drove off, following his sat nav to my house. Miss Williams volunteered to help with the unloading and thus, I found her next to me on the front passenger seat on our drive through Exeter in the early night.

“Thank you, without your help, I would hardly have-“

“Oh, not for that. It was the least I could do. Besides, my flatmates aren’t home anyway tonight, so nobody’s going to miss me before 3 am.” She grinned, though obviously strained by the exercise in heavy lifting from the slight glow on her forehead, and pulled her phone from her sizeable black handbag.

For lack of anything to do while Miss Williams was typing, I switched the radio on and tried to concentrate on the road through the soft piano of Coldplay’s *Everglow* and the scent of human perspiration that reminded me of my nature, from which I must protect those around me at all costs.

What could happen when I let my nature run wild is best illustrated by my army days in the 1770s and 80s.

Almost immediately when I joined the army as an ensign in the 35th of foot, I had learned that my physical strength and almost infallible senses that had eventually settled and established themselves, were an advantage I could use to my own betterment. I rose to Lieutenant, to Captain, feared by the ranks and met with cautious respect by my fellow officers.

It suited me. In the army, my occasional violent episodes were easy to hide or easy to live out on a battlefield or when administering punishment.

My past I hid behind a cleverly engineered lie about a tragic childhood in India that would satisfy
the curiosity of anyone who asked in its gory details and diverted myself from the actual past that tormented me and that I could not talk about by burying myself in my work, my self-set task to find the rebels operating on Long Island and eradicate them and everybody standing in my way.

Fighting gave me an outlet for my strength and rages, a chance to be recognised as someone among the other men- a purpose; something that I lacked so often adrift in between ages and eras many year

Naturally, Hewlett, the major under whom I was stationed on Long Island prior to becoming commander of the Queen’s Rangers, a self-proclaimed man of reason, philosopher and astronomer, opposed my methods and my bellicose nature. I began to hate the man, hate his condescending ways, hate his holier-than-thou-attitude to life and the fact that he always considered himself to be on moral high ground- it only fed my rages that became more frequent once more and led me to commit crimes that I myself can now, with more than two hundred years of reflection, no longer condone. I was wild, unhinged and unafraid of violence, which I perversely enjoyed inflicting upon others, perhaps because their pain reminded me of my own that I could no longer feel, because their cries and pleas for mercy penetrated the wall of ice surrounding me and momentarily gave me the illusion that I was human, which I no longer believed in and saved me from the numbness inside me. I have tortured and killed to find in other souls what my own lacked and when I myself was captured and tortured, bound once more, the only thing I could do was scorn my captors, for no other emotion that would have been recognisable to anybody else was left in me and thus, I continued my bloody travail, vowing I would take vengeance one day on my captors who had forced me to relive the ordeal of my youth and caused me to lay sleepless at night for a long time.

A hurt animal fights with thrice the fervour of an unharmed one. And so I, the “mad dog”, bit back and tore lives apart, telling myself I was doing what the King dictated me to do when in truth, all I did ever was about finding reason in my existence, finding the feelings I seemed to lack, finding the man I thought I should be or the one I thought I might have been.

But I shall never forget those who hurt me. They shall burn in hell on earth, posthumously at least.

And of course, especially on the various battlefields, there had always been the blood that I could secretly lick from my fingers or clean from my bayonet.

I knew that drinking blood would hardly be accepted in the army and therefore had to be careful about my timing. While I at the time still lacked the teeth to draw my own blood to feed on in the classical manner, my bayonet served me well and often I, under cover of darkness, made my way back to the battlefield to find a fresh enough corpse which I could, with a few expert cuts, drain of enough blood to saturate me.

Later, when my transformation was completed, I started to feed and sometimes kill with the sole intention of feeding, which has caused me several unpleasant memories that I do not pride myself with.

I would not want the same to happen to Miss Williams as did to the bashful page in 1813, the coquettish actress in 1932, the tourist in 1997 and so many others whose names I forced myself to forget but whose pleas for mercy, howls of pain and tears have never left me.
And there is no way ever to apologise, repent or make amends, no release and no redemption. The hunger never ends and I have to hunt on. The only remedy I have found is to further my contacts to several hospitals that will illegally sell me blood bottles, usually those that have expired or are close to expiration. It is by no means the same as freshly drawn blood from the pulsating veins of a human being, but it cures the appetite for some time.

A crime I commit in either case, but at least I can choose one in which I do not need to murder.

“I was texting Professor Cholmondeley to inform him of what’s happened— I couldn’t reach him earlier, he’s been invited to speak at a conference in Princeton”, Miss Williams looked up from her phone before she slipped it back into her bag, “and he said I should contact his secretary tomorrow, who has a key to his flat, pick up the key and drop his stuff off there. Would it be alright if I would come get his things tomorrow at eleven from your place?”

“Yes. If you need help transporting his belongings, I will gladly assist you as thanks for tonight.”

“No problem, I’ll borrow my flatmate’s Fiesta, as far as I can recall we only had five boxes of his things plus one computer and screen. I can manage that.”

When we arrived at my house, David Cooper was already waiting there. Once more we carried the boxes around and temporarily put them in my living room.

“Do you fancy a drink?”, I invited my colleague after the work was done, but he declined.

“No thanks. Got to drive and besides, if I hurry I might just be able to say goodnight to the kids. Wife’s probably thinking I’m having a lover on the side anyway, coming home late at night with a weird story.”

He grinned the imbecilic, bearded grin that reminded me uncomfortably of someone I had known a long time ago and that I had envisioned punching many a time but did presently not find myself in the mood to do so.

“If I ever find out who—” I began but was cut short by Cooper.

“Likely the penny-pinchers in the upper echelons of university administration who don't give a rat’s arse about health and safety and the standards in our buildings. In case Sherlock Coelmes does however find clues pointing in an altogether different direction, I’d like to know. I have an inkling it wasn’t the Read-Headed League, though”, he patted my arm and winked.

“Thank you, David. I mean it.” Lowering my eyes, I found it hard to look him in the face and held out a fifty pound note to pay him for the boxes.

“Guess that’s just who I am- I have my good nights every now and then. No, that’s alright, keep it. I owed you something after what I said to you the other day- that was unkind. Listen… If you ever want to grab a beer and talk- about anything, that is, life in general and stuff- call me. Just don’t ever throw anything at me again.”

He left, which left me with Miss Williams, whom I had ushered to the sofa to make herself comfortable there on while David and I finished the night’s work.

Just as I wanted to close the door behind my colleague whose change in personality made me somewhat ashamed of my behaviour towards him, a graceful grey shadow slipped through the open door and into the house and ignored me completely when she determinedly strolled to the living
room and climbed nonchalantly into Miss Williams’ lap, which vexed me for reasons I could not discern.

“I see you have met Diana.”

“She is absolutely sweet.”

I did not know what to answer and settled down next to her at a respectful distance.

Now, seated mere inches away from me on the sofa, I realised once more she smelled good, and I was not thinking about the hint of lavender-scented shampoo that emanated from her unruly hair.

A dragging, almost sensual pain in my abdomen tried to persuade me to pull her close, kiss her, seduce her, employ my hands in such a method to make the beauteous vessel that promised the sweetest nectar underneath cream-coloured skin shiver with anticipation and coax her into heedless, unsuspecting desire that would make the greenish veins running down her neck throb deliciously, inviting me to break our kiss to break her skin and taste her, who would, her attention diverted, hardly even feel it-

Almost instantly, I hated myself for the vivid image, or rather, for having liked it. I felt dirty, unclean, and ashamed.

Sometimes, the creature inside me overpowers the remainder of reason and humanity that has been left to me after my transformation, which does not make being a blood-thirsty demon of the night easier, no; while other vampires accept or embrace their nature, I cannot.

It feels as if I am Frankenstein’s creature, assembled from parts not belonging together and yet forming a fully functional automaton, sentient and in constant pain, aware of its status as a creature that does stand in a harsh contrast with the mind embedded in the fiendish body.

But Frankenstein’s creation had, at least to me, never been a true monster apart from its looks that seem to speak so much to the Halloween-obsessed minds almost two centuries later. I, on the other hand, fully qualified for this category.

“Thank you”, I said instead, if only to break the awkward silence, folding my hands in my lap and looking down on them, as if to keep mistrustful watch over their movements, “without your help I would not even be half-finished by now.”

“Hardly, I think the biggest credit should go to Mr Cooper”, she smiled, ready to rise, “I’ll be going now- I have to do some shopping if I don’t want to eat instant ramen noodles again tonight.”

She smiled as if it was a joke and not the sad culinary reality I had heard students sometimes faced. She could not have known the emergency would send her to my house and take up her entire evening and besides, it was dark outside already and the night advancing. I would not let her go like that.

“I cannot let you go like that.”

She, already halfway across the room, turned around as if it was an odd thing to say.

“It is dark and you are hungry and I haven’t thanked you for your help properly. Do you eat pizza?”

Since my experiences with human food have come to an end more than two centuries ago, I tend to
ask my human guests, in the rare cases I invite or entertain company, what they like in advance and make arrangements.

From all that I could gather from observing people eat and possessing a very fine-tuned sense of smell, almost everybody likes this thin Italian bread with tomato sauce and various condiments.

From one of the kitchen drawers I pulled the card of an expensive Italian restaurant not too far away. They don’t usually do delivery service, but the owner, for various reasons that I would not want to hear repeated in front of any law-enforcement officials, makes exceptions for me.

“‘You really needn’t- I should be on my way-‘"

“Nonsense”, I said and typed the restaurant’s number into my phone.

“Niccolo? Is that you? I want a pizza and a bottle of your best red wine. What?-“

I turned to Miss Williams and looked at her enquiringly.

“Tuna”, she answered, obviously acquainting herself to the thought of receiving a reward for her help. Offering her food was the least I could do.

When I put the phone down on the coffee table, I realised that we had returned to the same awkward silence from before and the only thing that could break said silence, namely a pizza decked in fish, was still miles away.

While I was considering potential conversation topics, Miss Williams suddenly exclaimed “You watch *TURN*?” and pointed at the box on top of the DVD player.

“I tried”, I answered truthfully.

“Tried?”, she echoed, “You mean you don’t like it?”

“No, not particularly, I don’t. You do, I take it?”

“Yes, if you can bring yourself to forget how historically inaccurate the timeline is and if you’re a little merciful regarding people’s ages and where they historically were at certain events, the storyline is great- I mean, it’s not supposed to be a historically accurate anyway, it’s a TV drama. And as such, I think it is not bad. I mean, Anna and Hewlett are one of the few examples of a healthy relationship rooted in mutual respect and love in the TV and movie industry and-”

“Then why don’t we just-“ I switched the TV and DVD player on with one well-directed flick of the remote control, “watch an episode?”

Despite my dislike for the show, at least it would ease our wait together. I had broken off after episode five and put episode six on.

I should not have done. For my on-screen portrayal was less than flattering. Or was it only less than flattering because I had never watched myself from an outsider’s perspective?

“Wait-“ Miss Williams’ eyes widened, “I never thought about it but now that I realised- are you related?”

“To whom?” At times, I myself am at loss how slow my mind operates under certain circumstances.

“John Graves Simcoe”, she said and pointed at the screen where I, or rather the man pretending to
be me, stated that I was no monster.

I am. I am a monster. But those too are in possession of a heart.

“Yes, he is my ancestor.”

“Really? I mean, the resemblance between you and the guy on TV is striking - they must have done a lot of research to find someone fitting your family looks.”

“They did. I was consulted”, I tried to evade further questions that made me more uncomfortable than the court-martial I remembered enduring once.

“And - sorry if this is rude - but was Simcoe that bad?”

Finally, the question. “I wouldn’t know. I did not know him”, I lied, praying the pizza would arrive soon.

Thankfully, shortly after the food and wine were delivered and even I could bring myself to a taste of human beverages while Miss Williams, who was eager to share her food with me, devoured her pizza while on-screen-me stole a kiss from the woman I fell in love with during the war.

Maybe I would have stood a chance had I not been the crippled creature that I was and to some extent still am - and yet maybe Anna Strong’s rebuke of me was the most fateful thing that had ever happened to me, for had she not denied me the happiness she later had given to Hewlett, I would never have met my Elizabeth.

I met her shortly after I had found out I was a vampire.

After sustaining grave injuries at the Battle of Blandford at the hands of one Abraham Woodhull (once again everyone spoke of my imminent demise), I was shipped out on the HMS Bonetta, a ship evacuating sick and injured officers from the field at Yorktown to York City.

I was feverish from an inflamed gunshot wound and a great many bones in my body were broken, I could barely move let alone stay conscious for longer than short periods of time when suddenly, I found Hewlett by my bedside.

Of all the misdeeds I have been and still am guilty of against Hewlett, whom I regarded as my personal nemesis, he had taken the murder of his horse, which had had to die to further my own goals, the worst. I had poisoned Bucephalus in a ploy that should have brought vengeance to my former captors and thus, ironically, had had nothing to do with the Major himself - far less at least than my design to have him killed in order to win the love of the woman we both tried to win, Anna Strong.

My fever was critical. It was, as I know now, the last chance I had had to die - and I had even wished for it and sometimes still do. The gunshot wound I had received was inflamed and despite blood-letting and purging, methods that reminded me painfully of my boyhood ordeal, no improvement in my condition had shown. By today’s medical standards and knowledge, they had done more to kill than to save me and only pushed me closer to the edge of eternal sleep.
Reliving the days in my mother’s home at sixteen, I prayed my condition would not return in the same way it had tone in my teenage days and once again lived in fear of myself.

And then, Hewlett had sat down at my bedside, an apple in one hand and a knife in the other, pressed the apple into my mouth and ordered me to bite down. Horrified at first and barely awake enough to know what was happening, I did as he told me, thinking I had been poisoned in the same way as Bucephalus. Although I was horrified at first that my life should come to an end in such a travesty, an apple lodged in my mouth, my mind soon came to the conclusion that my life better ended than going through the pain of thirteen years earlier once more, therefore I tried to provoke Hewlett into making use of his knife, with which he threatened, taunted the soft skin of my neck, but to no avail.

Hewlett would never stoop so low as to kill a man on his sickbed, I realised. His opinion of himself was too high to sully it thus, which he proved soon after by taking a bite of the same apple, accompanied by a short lecture on the bitter-sweetness of granting mercy to someone essentially undeserving.

He told me the reason he had decided to spare me was my show of what he called mercy when I had tried to save my men from certain death at Yorktown, as any decent commander should have done, this, however, was only outward show in case someone was listening in on our –if one could call it that- conversation.

In a lower voice, he had continued “all nature is a circle of creation and destruction. And you, John, are destroyed in a way that does not require my intervention.” He held the knife up to his face and inspected the blade pensively before he spoke again: “It will not be long until the circle will begin anew for you- the circle of life and death, that is. I know what you are, or about to become, and I will not fight you for it. You see, this war is almost over- and I intend to be a scientist, not a soldier. As such, I have respect for the existence of all creatures, be they of the light or the dark.”

I looked at him, with many questions on my lips and too weary to speak them, but he seemed to read the confusion in my eyes and explained everything to me, almost as surprised as myself that I had not known.

“So, ah, you don’t know? You are about to transition into a vampire. You must have been bitten long ago, it has taken you years to meet your inevitable fate while the raging infection you obtained from the initial bite had only taken control of you in part. Your violent temper, your nauseating fascination with blood, your frequent absences at night, the sheer impossibility of any injury to prove your undoing- the signs were there for everyone to see. And now that your body has lost considerable amounts of the human blood that has kept the balance against the vampire in you and is weakened beyond repair, the infection that lay dormant comes to the fore once more and will overpower you in due time.”

He gave me a crooked smile as I knitted my brows and looked at him with frantic disbelief.

I found I could not speak, even if I wanted to. Was he mocking me? Was he trying to frighten me, sick as I was, for his entertainment, like a child poking a stick through the bars of the cage of some exotic animal at a fair?

“You will die, John, and it will hurt. Your body will adjust to its new requirements, you will grow the teeth you need for your nightly hunt and experience your heartbeat, breathing and pulse stop. It is said that it is advisable in this situation to try and focus on something else to make the initial choking sensation as painless as possible”, he advised, possibly pitying me from the vantage point of his high horse.
Lastly, he reached for the skin of my neck that he had not long ago threatened to slice open with his knife to take my pulse.

“You are growing weaker. It is about time now. I will leave you to it, but know this: as we transition into a new life or in your case, life-like existence, at the dawn of a new world that comes after this war, it is time to tend the garden anew. Our feud belongs to the old world we must put behind to shape the new. I still want to kill you, John, and my decision has not come lightly to me, but I shall not end you for good. Regard your new existence as a second chance, a chance for redemption. Use it wisely. You have eternity at your hands. Consider it a gift, tainted with the curse of your appetite, which you must learn to master and control. Nothing comes without a cost. Goodbye, John.”

“How do you know?” I managed to wheeze through a coughing fit.

“As I said, I am a man of science, of learning and of reason. My studies extend to many fields, though astronomy is my true calling. Besides, I am from Scotland- there are far, far stranger and mightier creatures than you have the power to imagine.”

These were his last words to me before he jammed the apple back into my mouth to remind me of my past misdeeds.

“For teething”, he said, testing if the fruit was securely in place, “you would not want to bite down on your tongue.”

The second the door closed behind him, I began to sob uncontrollably. What if Hewlett was speaking the truth? Suddenly, I could make sense of many detailed aspects of my life that had not made sense before. It would explain a lot if it were true.

A vampire. I would become a vampire.

I would die. And yet I would not.

I tried to think of more pleasant things. I tried to picture Anna Strong, how we could have been happy, had she not chosen Hewlett over me, I tried to picture a few childhood memories of days when my family had not yet been ripped apart by Death, who was about to claim me, too, however none of these images lasted long and faded.

My eyelids grew heavy, almost sleep-like, but I knew better. I would not sleep.

A sudden wave of calmness bordering on solemnity overcame me and for a moment, I felt perfectly at peace, my pain gone, my fever reduced to a dulcet warmth that encompassed my body and eased my tensed muscles. Quietly, I slipped from this world only to re-emerge mere seconds later, gasping for air. My neck felt as if someone had put their fingers tightly around it with the objective to choke me. I wanted to cry out, but was kept from doing so by the apple in my mouth. Next, my body began to shiver and shake, hot and cold at the same time, my every limb filled with a pain I could not explain that went beyond everything I had ever experienced while a throbbing ache in my maxilla announced my teeth were about to break through. Hewlett had been right. The apple did prevent me from hurting myself as two sharp cuspids, one on each side, pushed their way through bone and flesh.

I could taste blood and feel it running down the corners of my mouth. It was blood, it pooled in my mouth from the wounds my new teeth had torn into my gums, yet it tasted so different from the substance I had come to appreciate. It was a vampire’s blood- at this realisation, my mind betrayed me and sent me into the dark abyss of unconsciousness.
When I woke up again, it was dark and the apple had fallen from my mouth and rolled across the floor from the stormy waves that were pushing the *Bonetta* about. Two seamen went over board that night, never to be recovered, and one of my wounded brother officers choked in his bed on his own vomit.

All that I cared about was that I was hungry. I had been spoon-fed stale broth before Hewlett’s visit in the afternoon, but the hunger I felt now demanded something stronger and was about to consume me. Unable to think of anything else, I rose from my cot and walked through the room- my extremely sharp equilibrium sense made it no harder than walking on dry land.

Hunger clouded my brain, I needed blood. My mind was so concentrated on finding someone to feed on that I did not even notice I was no longer drawing air into my lungs or that my body felt oddly cold as opposed to the heat of the fever that had plagued me in the afternoon. My yearning for blood was all I cared about as I entered another cabin where five other officers lay in bed, moaning, sleeping, half-asleep and one almost dead. In this precarious weather, not even the doctor dared to attend to his patients, who were thus left to fend for themselves.

The pungent smell of vomit found my nostrils and my eyes wandered to the cot in the darkest corner of the room, where a man lay, too weak to move, while food and almost luminescent yellow bile exited his mouth in an uncontrolled fashion.

He was by no means clean or particularly appealing, but a vampire’s first hunger, especially when unsupervised by an experienced fellow creature, does not discriminate between appealing and unappealing. I solely wanted his blood, and the thick and rich smell of death being nigh coated the air and made my mind spin.

I bent down to the man and turned his face upwards, pushing my hand over his mouth and nose. I did not even pay the mixture of semi-digested food and bile staining my hand and cuff any mind, so hungry was I. He was weak already and I thus not met with any significant resistance on his part.

Not yet knowing how to use my teeth or how to feed, I waited until he was fully unconscious before I rolled up his sleeve and found where they had bled him. The wound was fresh enough, covered in only a thin layer of scab that indicated it had only been a few hours and easily reopened with a few well-placed bites of my front teeth.

As I did not yet understand an increased heartrate makes for better blood flow, I was most disappointed when the blood did not well from the wound like the fountain in a pleasure-garden and trickled slowly down the man’s arm in small beads instead. Frustrated, I let my instincts overpower me and watched myself from a detached corner of my mind as my tongue came to coax the reddened flesh surrounding the wound, trying to get more of it to pulsate quickly from the cut and one of my hands came to rub the man’s wrist where his pulse lay.

Soon a lively stream of red found its way into my mouth. I drank him dry. When there was no blood left in him anymore, I rolled his sleeve back down and placed his head in the pool of his own bodily ejections. He would look like he had died a tragic, yet easily explainable death.

I returned to my bed, slid beneath the covers and fell contentedly asleep without even contemplating what I had done.

In these early days of my new existence, I was like an infant; exploring my new perspective of the world without heeding consequences or fully comprehending what I did.

Two days later, the *Bonetta* reached York City and I was loaded, like cargo, onto another ship.
bound for England. On board, I, still not fully adjusted to my new existence, spent most of the time in bed and trying to explore and understand my new self. Was it not a miracle how I could still move my fingers and toes? My skin was cold, there was neither pulse nor heartbeat, but if I wanted to, I could make both of them drum a hollow beat beneath my skin? My night vision was even more exact and my reflexes more refined. My teeth could, like a cat’s claws, hide within my flesh or come to the fore when I needed them. It was a miracle, and for a short moment in time, I was reconciled with my new non-life.

And then my hunger returned. I had started to realise I could not kill or hurt people at random, risk creating more vampires in the same way I had come to be one, especially not on board a ship where popular suspicion would most likely sooner or later fall on me if inexplicable things happened, and thus restricted myself to hunting the rats and mice hiding between the cargo and supplies. But animal blood did not fill me sufficiently. I managed to hold myself back, but by the time we reached England, I needed more.

My next victim was a black-haired little thing I met at the harbour. My bones, though those of a vampire now, were not yet fully healed and she, in search of a quick and easy customer in need of relief after a long sea voyage, had approached me. She was pretty indeed and my desires at first not for her blood- as soon as the door of her room in some run-down establishment had closed behind us however and she undid the front of her dress with a wanton smile, I knew what I truly wanted.

She was quick to let herself fall gracefully onto the bed at my soft push and accommodated my weight on top of her with the inviting ease of a professional in her trade, biting my lower lip teasingly and running one hand through my hair while the other had slipped between our bodies and fondled the front of my breeches.

Overcome by a plethora of sensations ranging from base carnal lust to the fascination of warm, human touch against my skin to my all-domineering insatiable, endless appetite, I deepened our kiss in earnest and let my hands run down the sides of her body.

She would be delicious.

Her body shivered beneath my touch and I felt the her pulse accelerate when I pulled my lips off hers and speckled her neck in kisses, gentle at first, then rougher, probing where to best set my teeth to achieve the most efficient result.

Sounds of approval and surprise escaped her, obviously unaccustomed to being tended to in such a fashion.

“Wait”, I had pushed her wandering, teasing hands away from me, rolled off her and climbed behind her instead, urging her to lean against me, while I continued to kiss her neck, which she arched so prettily for me before I bit down on her carotid artery.

She gasped and gave a low shriek.

“Shhh”, I tried to comfort her while my strong arms wrapped around her upper body, restricting her arms and holding her in place. Her writhing and kicking was in vain; she could not extricate her body from my grip.

Her taste was divine and yet, at the same time, the struggling body in my vice-like embrace provoked tears to drip from my eyes. I wanted to pull away, let her live, apologise for what I had done, knowing I was about to kill her, but could not bring my mouth to part with the divine source of sweet perfection at her neck.
The raven-haired harbour girl was my first true victim. The man I had killed on board the *Bonetta* would not have survived anyway. She would have lived, had not I chosen to play God and decide the time of her death.

Her frantic movements grew weaker and weaker until she hung limply in my arms, like an oversized doll.

When I finally let go of her, I carefully laid her on the bed and covered her exposed upper body by tucking her in beneath the blankets as if she were merely asleep. The only thing I could do for her was to ensure her body would be found in a dignified pose. I folded her hands, as I had seen them do with my little brother’s body, arranged her hair and cleaned the wound I had made with my white handkerchief, which I then rolled into a necktie of sorts that I tied around her neck to cover my deed. Lastly, I closed her terrified green eyes that were to follow me for two centuries to come. Broken glass beads stared at me, unblinking, so full of expression and yet so expressionless.

With her eyelids closed, she almost looked like she was sleeping. I left the silver I owed her on the vanity and left.

I had killed a woman. I had killed not in a war, not as a soldier, I had killed for *greed*. There was nothing that could excuse what I had done. In the same night, I hired a coach to drive me to Devon, to my godfather’s home, who had invited me to stay with his family.

Of course, I was happy to flee the scene of the crime, but the change of places brought new challenges: would the Admiral, his wife and ward be safe from me? Would I be able to learn restraint before the coach reached Hembury Fort House?

“Thank you very much for the food. But- I really must go now- I still have an assignment sitting on my desktop that wants doing.”

Miss Williams insisted she could take a night bus, but I insisted on seeing her home safely- my own experiences with walking home alone in the dark so many years ago have made me wary. When I learned she was not living more than twenty minutes on foot in moderate human walking speed away, I offered her my company and thus we walked, chatting about this and that to her flat, where she thanked me again (and I thanked her back) and waved me goodbye with a smile.

“See you tomorrow at eleven!”

Lost in wistful memories, I quick-marched back to my own home, where I opened the windows to allow the insufferable stench of human food topped with cat food escape into the open.

The chaos of the troublesome evening aside, it could have been worse than red wine, *TURN* and tuna pizza.

My night was spent less agreeably; memories stirred by the day’s events came to disturb my wish to sleep, memories of walking side by side with a dark-haired young woman many years ago, walking through the beautiful landscape of Devon, her hand in mine.

Eventually, after hours of lying awake when the new day was already nearing the double-digits, I made breakfast, microwaved a blood bag and poured its contents into my favourite carafe which I,
alongside a glass and my beaten paperback bathroom-copy of Crime and Punishment put on the 
small table beside the bathtub and let, accompanied by soft, soothing music, myself slip into the 
wonderfully warm water.

It warms my body almost as if I were human again. I wish I had had the chance to be human, like 
Hewlett, like Brewster, like Tallmadge, like that weakling Woodhull even and experience what I 
later learned all of them had had: love, untainted by fear and ascetic restraint.

I met Elizabeth Gwillim, my godfather’s ward, during my convalescence from what everyone else 
believed were serious injuries and a proneness to melancholy I had obtained during the war in 
America.

She loved me- despite my volatile temper, my pallid countenance and a disposition everybody else 
called “brooding” or “dark”. The tales of my violent deeds did not scare her away from me, no, she 
loved me for the man I tried to be for her.

I tried to be a man, not the monster I had recently become and loathed and lived more than twenty 
years at her side pretending to be the man I could have been had not fate or some other cruel 
supernatural power condemned me to this half-existence.

She had robbed me of my senses the first time we met and my body’s initial response (reminding 
me of my bestial thirst and the smell of the soft groove between her neck and clavicle) soon grew 
into an ache of a very different kind.

I threw all caution over board and asked her to marry me on her birthday that year and she joyously 
agreed.

Although I have no practical need for it as humans do, I consciously made the effort to keep my 
pulse and heart beating and tried to re-adopt blinking, which, I fear, I never quite mastered.

I took walks with her in the bright sunlight because she adored summertime and before I lay with 
her, I often warmed myself in a bath or at a fire, like one does yesterday’s leftovers to make them 
palatable, to give the illusion of human blood flowing through my veins and heating my body to a 
temperature that would be comfortable for her.

She never suspected anything, partly because she was beyond certain creatures like me are a 
fabrication of human imagination and partly because she regarded my cold skin as nothing too 
alarming, having observed that some people’s hands never seemed quite warm to the touch. I 
wonder how many more of my kind she had met.

We were happy. Young and married, I still at an age when I could tell myself I was human and still 
believe it, I pushed my Hidden Face, as I called it, to the back of my mind.

At the time, I did not blame myself for what I did, I was merely doing what almost all men my age 
did and for a long time excused it with not having known any better, for having been inexperienced 
and as yet unaccustomed to my state of existence and still caught in the web of social obligations 
and constructs of the time.

But I had known better. I had known what I was and willingly lied to Elizabeth by not telling her
the truth and thus endangered her countless times every day.

Not even one year after my arrival in England, I was married to the woman I loved, who had managed to grow a blossoming flower in the wasteland of my soul and could slake my thirst with her soft kisses and adoring glances. For a while, it seemed we were happy, until my urges almost overpowered me when I watched her dress for the night one day. In the last moment, reason triumphed over nature and I was able to turn my head away while still maintaining pleasant small talk about the past day with her. Eliza never knew I almost murdered her, a year into our marriage.

I felt guilty for endangering her, for having married her, for even loving her, who deserved someone so much better than me, and raging jealousy for the man who could have saved Eliza with one clean cut two years ago: Edmund Hewlett.

He had known what monster I had become. He had known I would be an untameable beast, he had known everything and still let this happen.

It was not so much about him having condemned me to my fate, in this moment, all I cared about was Eliza. Hewlett had almost murdered the woman I loved.

He would pay.

Two weeks after my latest descend into the darkness of my condition, I managed to track Hewlett down. He lived on a modest country estate he had inherited from his mother in the south-eastern part of Scotland.

As soon as I knew of his abode, I went to Scotland early one morning when Eliza was still asleep. I would have my revenge.

I already knew he was married- to Anna Strong. He had taken her with him when he left the former Colonies after the war- the fate of her first husband is unknown to history, though some suspect he died of an illness a few months prior to Hewett’s and Anna’s departure to England. They had met again in Setauket, surprised to find each other there, and one thing had led to another.

Anna did not interest me at all- I did not intend to harm her nor did she cross my mind until- until-

As good luck would have it, a dark night with violent torrential rainfall graced my arrival in Dumfriesshire. Lightning bolts illuminated the sky every now and then but apart from these brief episodes of violently bright white light, the rain and darkness shrouded me in a coat of unrecognizability.

The Hewlett home was a little outside the quiet little village that bore the same name as their house, which was to my advantage, for even if something would go wrong, no one would hear them scream.

Dim light fell through one of the second floor windows which was, despite the angry weather, a small crack wide open.

Seizing the opportunity, I scaled the façade in no time and pulled myself up onto the windowsill.

It was an exhilarating feeling to know the hunt was over, the enemy cornered and the smell of my prey which was heavy in the air.

There was another scent mixed into the intoxicating smell of blood and human warmth that should have alerted me something was wrong. No, I should have known much earlier- I should not have been able to smell fresh blood standing underneath the window.
But my senses, filled with revenge and hunger, were clouded. Hewlett, who had made me what I am, who pushed a man standing on the edge of a cliff down into the rocky, dark waters below, would pay. He would not survive this night.

For a moment, I waited. The room was silent, despite the burning taper. How careless of him to fall asleep like that— he might burn the house down.

I contemplated what I would do with Anna. For all she had done to me, I did not want her to witness me killing her husband.

I would simply press my hand on his mouth and bleed him dry, quietly, slowly. She would find his body clean and peaceful next to her in the morning, that I couldn’t spare her.

It had been her choice to marry Hewlett and now she would have to bear the consequences.

Wet from the rain, the welcoming warmth of the room felt good on my skin. Leaving watery footprints on the inner side of the windowsill, I, prepared and ready, fangs bare and my hands clawed in rage, almost noiselessly walking to the head of the bed.

Something wasn’t right. There was only one person in it—had I entered the wrong room?

My sensitive eyes had no need of the sorry gleam of the embers in the fireplace or the little taper across the room to identify the sleeping person in the bed:

Anna.

-And someone else who wasn’t Hewlett.

A sleeping babe lay in her arms.

Overcome with a certain fascination and shock, I bent down to take a closer look. The features of the tiny human did not yet reveal their parentage; the day would come soon enough when eyes like Anna’s or a mouth like Hewlett’s would show.

Judging from the faint scent the babe emanated, it was unmistakably Hewlett’s.

A second glance around the room brought a hamper filled with linen to my attention: stained with blood and other bodily fluids men at the time, and especially vampires, were not familiar with, the realisation that she must have given birth mere hours ago sent a bolt of shock through my body.

I was still hungry, but my discovery made me forget about the raging feeling within me and I carefully lowered myself onto a nearby chair, partly because my confusion required a moment of intensive contemplation and partly because I was not prepared for what I had found.

They looked so peaceful, so perfect.

Then the infant shifted, slowly waking up from what was probably their first dream in this world, and opened one blue eye. The colour would likely change over time, both parents being dark-eyed, but for one split second, I wondered if a child born to Anna and myself, had I lived, would have had such blue eyes and if they would have remained permanent or if Anna’s almost black depths would conquer the radiant oceanic blue in a matter of months.

My moment of sentimental apathy had cost me valuable seconds: now both eyes were open and followed me.
“Quiet, little one”, I whispered when the infant gave a low, still somewhat sleepy whimper and stroked a rosy cheek with one of my much too big fingers, trying to lull the babe back to sleep.

My efforts were no good and as soon as my finger had touched the infant’s skin, the child gave a hearty, healthy wail that could have wakened the dead.

Anna woke up; her eyelids fluttered and a split-second later, her eyes found me, her maternal instincts almost as quick as a vampire’s.

A moment passed, her eyes on mine, shock on both our faces. Then I realised my fangs were still visible and I covered my mouth, urging Anna with my eyes not to cry out. Her hand held the wailing bundle close to her chest in an iron grip, as if she thought I had come to snatch her child from her.

She did speak of course, incoherently at first, unable to find the right words to describe such a curious situation.

“Colonel? No… You aren’t here… Simcoe? What…? Go away! How did you…? Your teeth.”

She pointed at my face and probably slowly realising what she had seen, opened her mouth in a blood-curdling cry. The storm outside with its thunder and lightning that illuminated the room every now and then did not aid to ease the atmosphere.

“Not a word.” I gasped and hurried back to the window, slipping back into the darkness as I jumped and landed beneath the window only to hear how the door in the room above was opened and a painfully familiar male voice fearfully exclaimed

“Anna, what’s wrong?”

“Simcoe was here, John Graves Simcoe, and his teeth… Fangs like a wild animal’s-“

“Hush, Anna. You’ve had a bad dream. Simcoe isn’t here. He cannot hurt you. Go back to sleep, I’ll stay with you two and pay close attention nobody enters this room, if this calms you.”

He put his arm around her, so much I could hear from my hiding place below the window, kissed her forehead and stayed with her and the child, softly singing lullabies until both were asleep.

A week later, I returned home, unwashed, paler even than usual, distraught and in dirty clothes.

Elizabeth had thrown herself at me, trapping me between herself and the wall, slapped and punched my face repeatedly and shouted accusations at me, how I had dared to leave her for so long without even a note, what I had been thinking, I could have died (which send a pang through my heart, for she needed not worry about this particularity), and in the future I would do well to pull myself together, now that I would be a father in a few months’ time.

Weeping with guilt, shock and joy, I had spread my hand across her still plane belly, trying to detect any signs of our child.

I had been a fool for assuming that between a creature like me and a human being like her, there could never be offspring. When she fell pregnant for the first time, I, had I not been dead for two years by then, would have died (which send a pang through my heart, for she needed not worry about this particularity), and in the future I would do well to pull myself together, now that I would be a father in a few months’ time.

Thankfully, nothing of the sort happened and little Eliza was born healthy and strong, warm, rosy
cheeks and dark blue eyes- alive.

Elated and light-headed, I thought the spell was broken, the nightmare over- my daughter in my arms, and my wife at my side, both tired from the ordeal of birth but otherwise healthy and alive, I was ready to fight the entire world all by myself.

Ten more should follow, of which two died prematurely, not as was officially claimed from illness, but from having inherited their father’s condition.

I should never have allowed myself the liberty of love that had put my wife and my children in grave danger, twenty-four hours of each and every single day.

At the time, I tried to drown my doubts and nagging conscience in work, became a politician with a brief career in parliament and later went on to become Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada, where I, among other things, founded the city of Toronto- and all while I was hungry.

When I had arrived at my godfather’s house after my first kill, I decided not to draw blood anymore. I could not starve, even if I refused to feed. I would be uncomfortable, but I was used to manage pain. Nobody in the house and elsewhere should come to harm at my hand. In the end, I lived twenty-four years abstinent of human blood, making do with small animals to quench my thirst, which led to symptoms of aging almost like in humans. I played the part of an aged man well, even when underneath my skin sagging from malnourishment, I had stopped aging at thirty.

My life seemed in order until in 1806 I was appointed to a new post in India and killed two sailors on board the ship that was supposed to take me there, away from my family, my home. It was an impulse, the greed of more than two decades coming undone with homesickness for my wife and children and frustration. I had been watched by several eye witnesses who claimed I was a cannibal and I was shipped back to England by the ship’s captain to face murder charges in court.

Wanting to spare my wife and children the humiliation, I feigned a severe illness and staged my first death shortly after arriving in Exeter, the city I now live in once more, and the trial and allegations against me were silently dropped, probably because I could no longer be interrogated and to allow my wife and children to grieve in peace.

Dead to those I loved and who loved me, I still could not bear to leave them. I would walk around Wolford, dressed up as a pedlar or as a traveling gentleman with his hat pulled far down in his face and watched my children at a distance, watched the youngest grow up even if they could not see me. A few times, I ventured into dangerous territory when I picked up a glove Harriet had dropped after service and gave it back to her or chased a few impertinent village boys away who were taunting Henry.

It hurt, worse than any physical pain I have gone through.

My children, especially the younger ones, did never recognise me when I ventured close to them, for as I started feeding on human blood again, my physique had returned to the looks of the twenty-nine-year-old who had died on board of a vessel evacuating injured British officers from Yorktown.

My eldest son died in in 1812, Eliza in 1850, and by the late 1860s, my entire family was dead. I wonder where they are, whether they are happy and looking down from above and keeping watch over me, as little children are told loved ones who have died do.
In this moment, I heard a disconcerting noise in the corridor that called me back to the present. Footsteps. How- Who?

“Hello? Mr Simcoe?” A female voice somewhat insecurely called only seconds before the bathroom door was torn open and Miss Williams stood in the room, Diana at her heels.

My first instinctive reaction was directed against the empty, yet still stained carafe and glass, which I, seemingly clumsy, knocked over before the intruder could study the red liquid residue too closely.

Sitting bolt upright in the tub and trying to cover myself beneath the slowly fading foam, I caught Miss Williams, whose cheeks had taken the colour of last night’s tomato sauce, stifle a laugh.

“Now this is awkward. I’m sorry, the door was open and we said eleven, but you weren’t anywhere downstairs, so I was concerned, the door being open and everything and came to look for you.”

It did not escape me her gaze lingered on my person a few seconds too long before she looked away and handed me a towel, her head demonstratively turned in the opposite direction. As she did so, I could not help but notice the cat, whose insolent stare still rested on me and implied she enjoyed her humble servant’s humiliation to no end. Vile traitor. Had I not let her in at five in the morning, when she had staged a tantrum that would have wakened the entire street had I ignored her, I would not have opened the door this morning in the first place- and forgotten to close it properly. It was all her fault.

“At least you now know you need not be concerned”, I managed to say, my voice higher than I would have liked to admit, rising from the tub and covering my modesty best as the white piece of terry cloth allowed.

Her head lowered to the floor, she left the room and announced she would wait downstairs.

I returned to my guest a few minutes later dressed in the only pair of ironed pyjama trousers I could find in my haste, a white t-shirt I usually only wear beneath a shirt and my best dressing gown to help Miss Williams move her things into the rusty sky-blue Ford Fiesta she had borrowed from her associate.

Alas, one of the boxes did not support the weight of its contents and scattered a small mountain of books across the living room floor.

“**Forever Young: Nicholas Flamel and the Concept of Eternal Youth, The Philosopher’s Stone in Popular Culture 1750-2010, The Philosophy Behind the Philosopher’s Stone and The Flamel Myth?**” I enquired curiously while collecting said publications from the floor. “I did not know Professor Cholmondeley thought so fondly of the Middle Ages.”

“These are for a project within a collaborative international research programme focussing on the history of science and its connection to the development of ideals within Western society”, she doubtlessly parroted some shiny brochure her employer had told to repeat in the event of someone asking.

“If you don’t mind me saying, the history of an almost mythological beauty product from the Dark Ages sounds like a somewhat outlandish research topic for our expert in cross-cultural exchange in
“Well, I don’t get paid to tell him what he can or can’t do. And, if we’re honest, who doesn’t want to be forever young?” She winked. “Perhaps his research will uncover the one true recipe.”

She was trying to make merry, but I only knew all too well what being young, at least from the outside, for over 200 years felt like.

“Do you think there is merit in living to an unnatural age?”

She was thinking, I could tell. After a while, she answered:

“Perhaps. I think it depends on the person.”

“And if you were a historian for all this time, would that be worth it?”

“You know I’m biased. As a student of history myself, I’d say yes. Don’t you ever think about how it would have been if you could have met the people you write about in your works?”

“Who hasn’t?” I smiled, forcing the corners of my mouth not to fall down again.

“And who knows, if Professor Cholmondeley’s research is successful, maybe I’m going to write books about you in a couple of hundred years’ time”, she laughed, expecting me to feel flattered.

“Maybe”, I affirmed, trying to mimic an air of affability, “Only good things, I hope.”

“Well, that remains to be seen, doesn’t it? Goodbye, and thank you again!”

And she was gone. My eyes followed the car until it reached the corner and disappeared between the other buildings.

My history has already been written. The hero to a small group of patriotic Canadians and to the rest of the world the brutal TV villain everyone on social media wants to see killed in a gruesome fashion to make up for all the brutalities he committed against all the good-hearted heroes.

My history may already be written- but I can still write history, while they can’t, not any more. Which leaves me at an advantage.

Chapter End Notes

The chapter title was taken from the old English folk song "The Unquiet Grave".

From all I read, historically Simcoe was fairly popular, sportive and did well in school in his youth, which I tried to work into the story by making him a vivacious teen (prior to the attack, that is) in the story.

Of course, the idea that Voodoo is all about practicing black magic is wrong and the "miracle healer" in the story grossly misappropriates a religion from another cultural area.

Blistering, bloodletting, restraining, cold baths and emetics were all practised methods
of therapy for mental illnesses in the 18th century.

Bedlam: London's Bethlehem Royal Hospital was founded in 1247 and was the place where all those deemed unfit for society (usually "mad" or otherwise classified as mentally ill in the terminology of the day) were sent. Up until the late 18th century, conditions there were catastrophic and until 1770 (two years after Simcoe's ordeal in his mother's house) it was possible to access the premises against payment to view the patients, who would often be urged and encouraged "to put on a show" for the visitors, who often also interacted in unspeakable ways with the patients. As for the nauseating medical practises of the day, I've talked about them already.

"And there is no way ever to apologise, repent or make amends, no release and no redemption. The hunger never ends": I borrowed the lyrics as well as a few other little things from the English version of "Die Unstillbare Gier"/"Endless Appetite" from Tanz der Vampire (Dance of the Vampires).

I hope you liked this chapter, even if it was a lot darker then the first. As always, comments, critique, suggestions etc. are warmly welcomed!
Intermezzo: Abraham's Guest

Chapter Summary

A celebrated author receives a mysterious guest on an even more mysterious mission...

Chapter Notes

Usually, I post the little intermezzos with the main chapters. This however got a little more lengthy than the last, which is why I am going to post it on its own.

In addition to this, I thought it would make for a nice little stand-alone within the main narrative because it is a little different from what you have read so far.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Excerpt from the diary of Bram Stoker.

London, Monday, January 17th 1898.

I received a visitor today. It is likely that I shall never forget the curious conversation we shared for it surpassed everything I have heard before, which includes the Transylvanian folk tales I have studied before writing Dracula.

Speaking of the Count, I fear I must come to the conclusion that my novel has been taken too seriously by some members of the public in its depictions of the supernatural, which I until this morning had never considered, probably because to myself it was always as clear as the waters of a mountain spring that what is commonly called the supernatural is a fabrication of the human mind.

I will try and reproduce this conversation as best as I can from memory to conserve it for future reading for at the moment, I am still somewhat agitated and suspect I cannot ponder on the events of the morning unbiased; perhaps tomorrow or in a few days I will be able to make more sense of it than I do now:

In the morning, at ten, shortly after Florence left to visit a relation, a black coach stopped in front of our house and a woman descended; she walked to the door, telling the butler she wished to speak with me.

She spoke in a baronial manner, her voice harsh and demanding, asking (or rather commanding) entry, claiming she was an admirer of my latest work- whatever authority she thought this gave her I do not know.

I heard the ruckus she caused echoing through the house and went downstairs to see what was the
matter and found the butler trying to send her away, which she did not accept. She demanded to speak to the master of the house and claimed she had come in a matter of utmost importance. When asked what this matter was, she did not wish to disclose it and informed the poor man that her message was addressed to me and me only and had to be handled with circumspection and discretion.

Intrigued in a manner I fail to describe adequately, and mindful of the bad weather that would continue to drench the lady even more in the morning’s incessant London rain if she were not let in, I showed her inside.

The lady was a vision in black; her opulent dress, extravagant hat with several layers of veils and gloves were black without exception.

I ushered her into my study, where we settled on opposite sides of my desk.

I rang for the maidservant to bring some coffee for my guest and myself, as well as some dainties, of which only I took advantage every now and then; my guest contented herself with coffee.

“So you are the famous Bram Stoker?”, she had asked, her voice more pleasant and vivacious than her lugubrious attire and her commanding tone earlier would have suggested.

“Yes”, I answered her out of habit, “Do you want my autograph?”

“No”, she answered dismissively and to my greatest surprise; had she not claimed she enjoyed my work earlier?

When I asked her how I could be of service to her, she posed a question regarding the source materials for my latest novel.

“Tell me, where did you take your inspiration from? There must have been old stories, myths, legends?”

Despite the odd nature of our conversation and the fact that she kept the veil in place, only ever lifting it slightly up to her nose when she took a sip from her cup, I found myself delighted to have been given the opportunity to talk about my interests with a likeminded person and went to great lengths and detail to describe to her my consultations with Ármin Vámbéry and my research into the field of Eastern European folklore. She listened, nodding politely and interspersing my effectuations on a few occasions with an “ah, yes” or an “how interesting”.

“How very interesting. But do you know anything about vampires native to these shores?”

I was surprised to hear she wanted to know more about this particularity; in comparison to the vampire-crazes that ravaged Eastern and Continental Europe in the course of the last century, England and indeed the British Isles in general had seen these days come and go without virtually any sightings of the un-dead.

“There must be reports of sightings”, she continued, “I have heard of the existence of a scientific publication written in the last fifteen to twenty years of the last century by some Scottish scholar whose name has slipped my mind-”

She paused and looked at me with an expectance I only came to perceive in the aftermath of our conversation. No doubt, my knowledge had been tested like a schoolboy’s.

The reason why her clever trick had initially escaped me was that I had tried to make out the lines of her face beneath the veil, is it not always the case that the things hidden from us intrigue us the
most? Two bright, hazel eyes gleamed at me, set into features of the rarest kind.

My guest was one of those few women, of whom I have not met many, whose features appear to be ageless and who are thus presumed to be flatteringly older when a mere girl longing for the recognition of a grown woman and judged younger in equal measure when at an age where being deemed older is no longer flattering. She could be of any age between fifteen and fifty.

“Hewlett”, I answered her, “Edmund Hewlett, the renowned astronomer and Scottish folklorist.”

“A folklorist?” she repeated increduously, to which I replied, “yes, or how else does one call a man who collects the myths and legends of the old days to preserve them?”

Her answer to my question struck me as beyond curious; I was beginning to think my guest knew more than she was giving away and tested me.

“I beg to differ, Mr Stoker. I would call him a scholar of the bravest kind, a brave pioneer in his field of research. Did he not write, his widely published and until this day acclaimed astronomical works aside, a treatise on vampires which you, the luckier of us two, have held in your hands before writing your novel?”

“Indeed I did”, I affirmed, “but the manuscript, which has never been published, is being kept well from the prying eyes of the public by his descendants who do not wish their name to be tainted with the accusation of superstition and pseudo-witchcraft and affairs such as these. They consider their forefather a codger and an eccentric, to say the least. I have only been allowed access to it through the careful mediation of a mutual friend.”

She seemed displeased with my answer.

“Then you have made a copy of the document, I hope?”

Of course I had not; the Hewletts, eager to preserve their standing and untarnished name, had not even allowed me to take notes on a separate sheet of paper during our viewing session.

“No; the family demanded discretion. You must understand, their good name-“

“I see. From all I hear, Edward Hewlett is quite keen on a knighthood for his many services to the Empire as diplomat in Washington and Paris, but I digress; do you recall anything in particular?”

I did; apparently, and I suspect this to be the cause of the family’s almost damnatio memoriae of their ancestor, originating in the fact that Hewlett’s wife, an American (another point the family tried to eradicate from their genealogy through silence, especially in the wake of the American Civil War, in order to further the promising career of the most formidable Edward Hewlett) had once sighted such a creature without having known the vile spectre that had entered her chamber, much like my Count enters Miss Lucy’s room, though not in the guise of a bat or wolf, was indeed a vampire.

She had cried out in surprise, finding a stranger in her bedroom at night shortly after giving birth to her first child and had called for her husband.

To him she had described a man who fitted the description of someone both of them had once known save for the uncommon characteristics of his fangs and his superhuman athleticism that showed when said acquaintance of days gone by, a former suitor of Mrs Hewlett if I recall correctly, had jumped from her bedroom window and into the garden below without injury when he had to fear her cries would summon her husband to the scene.

Hewlett had then theorised said man was a vampire based on his wife’s observations and cloaked
his theory in arguments crafted through enumerating and elaborating on the Continental European sightings of vampires approximately half a century earlier and learned words, arguing vampires do exist, living among humankind, disguised by their treacherous flesh that looks so much like our own.

A logical mind forbids believing in Hewlett’s theory and the vampire his wife had seen.

It was he who classified the alleged intruder as a vampire based on his wife’s observations. For a start, Hewlett had not been there when the vampire, man or hallucination of a weary and pain-stricken woman had entered the room and only rushed to the scene when he heard his wife cry out in hysterics and their visitor long gone.

There had been, according to Hewlett, signs of wet boot prints on the windowsill, but with the window opened and a lively thunderstorm ravaging the land, it was obvious where said watery traces likely came from.

The picture Edmund Hewlett had tried to paint did not sell his point convincingly. He had never seen the vampire and could not proof his theory of the existence of vampires with any substantial evidence other than a few old French and German pamphlets of days gone by. No wonder no reputable publisher had wanted to print this insult to science and scholarship for wider circulation.

“No, it did not reveal anything I had not yet heard from Professor Vámbéry yet”, I answered her.

“And the vampire”, she inquired next, “does Hewlett’s tractate give a description of him?”

It did not, for the author argued, the vampire’s wrath were likely to strike him if his identity were revealed in this document. Again, my guest’s disappointment was visible and audible.

“Then I thank you for your time Mr Stoker. Here”- rising from her chair, she handed me her card.

Her name, according to the rectangular piece of gold-rimmed paper, was Henrietta Spinckes, residing at one of the most expensive and extravagant addresses London offers to guests.

“If you may permit me a question, Miss Spinckes, why does Edmund Hewlett interest you?”

After her thorough interrogation, I felt entitled to at least one question myself.

“Mrs Spinckes”, my guest corrected me, “and Hewlett does not interest me in the slightest. It is his vampire that I am after.”

She made it sound as if she truly believed in these old wives’ tales and fifty pages of narrow handwriting produced by a self-trained scholar who had perhaps clouded his enlightened mind with a drink or two before taking to pen and paper.

“You have my card. If you or your friend, Professor Vámbéry, happen to come across him or find conclusive information as to his whereabouts, I am prepared to reward you generously.”

Mrs Spinckes drew an envelope from her handbag and handed it to me. In it, I later found the description of the vampire she was trying to track down. Reading her description, I came to the conclusion that she was perhaps searching for the dashing hero of a work from an altogether different genre, not an un-dead creature risen from the grave to kill and spread its curse.

“Madam, I am an author, not Sherlock Holmes of 221B Baker Street and besides, I must caution you not to take my novel by the word- it is a story, not a piece of solid fact.”
“I know. The truth lies beyond even what you can imagine.”

She produced a a miniature pistol and equally small, yet deathly bullets from her bag, which she placed on the table in front of me.

“Silver-coated”, Mrs Spinckes explained. With a quick move, she pulled a pin from her hat that, the ornamental purpose aside, proved to be a pointed weapon, which she held in her hands to show me, before using it to pin the veil that had become somewhat lopsided after she had pulled the pin from her hat, back in its original position.

“Are you telling me you believe in all this?”, I asked incredulously. “The existence of real vampires? Blood-thirsty creatures terrorising innocent people at night?”

Her reply struck me.

“I do. And have met one in person.”

“Allow me to remain sceptical”, was my diplomatic reply, though I would have wished politeness would allow recommending a doctor to her.

“I started in your very position, Mr Stoker. I myself was an ardent disbeliever until one day the truth happened to find me and revealed the existence of vampires to my disbelieving eyes. Since this very day, I have researched them- to such an extent my own children considered me somewhat eccentric, yet so far, my research has proven to be right and affirms me in my objective.”

“I shall remain a sceptic, Mrs Spinckes, until I have seen proof of the existence of such a creature.”

“Don’t call him that”, she admonished me, “Most people tend to forget a vampire was human once. They are like us in many respects, they think, they have emotions- and were it not for their cold skin and tell-tale teeth, one would hardly be able to tell them apart from us.”

Noticing an error in her logic, I tried to take her up on her latest argument:

“You are saying vampires are like humans to you; then why hunt them?”

I gestured towards the little pistol and balls on the table.

“I do not hunt”, she explained, “not to kill. These balls here work just as well on importunate specimens of our kind with the one advantage that they would, if necessary, protect me from the bloodlust of a dangerous vampire as well.”

She smiled, collecting her belongings off the table and putting them back into her purse.

“Good day, Mr Stoker. I thank you for your help. In case you happen to find anything I may consider to be of interest to my search, you know where to find me.”

I showed her outside and watched as she drove off in a hired hansom cab.

When later that day I told Florence about Mrs Spinckes, she almost burst into laughter and told me not to take it too seriously- likely I had been pranked by a friend and “my” as she called her, Mrs Spinckes was an actress hired to play a trick on me.

“The Woman in Black”, she snorted, not even lifting her eyes off the magazine she was reading, “Sounds like a title for your next story, my dear.”
Yes, it does; and much I would like to believe in a prank by one of my friends, I cannot. Something about Mrs Spinckes was too real to be an act, her search too desperate, her interest too genuine.

And how had she known I had had access to the Hewlett papers?

So many questions remained unanswered. Only much too late it came to me I should have asked her why she was looking for a particular vampire who she affirmed to be identical with the one found in Hewlett’s papers.

Even though I am not a believer in the existence of the supernatural, I cannot help but feel sympathy for Mrs Spinckes in that one of course always politely wishes someone else's mission to succeed, however unlikely it is going to be.

As long as her strange past-time does not harm anyone and her silver bullets do not come to use, why should she not indulge in her fantasies?

Later.

Having pondered on the matter for the remainder of the day, I realise we are quite similar, Mrs Spinckes and I, in that we both imagine things and indulge in them, except for the difference that she drags her mind-play into the streets of London while I confine it to the page.

I have her calling card. Whether I will or will not pay her a visit or invite her for supper to pose my many remaining and additonal new questions to her I do not know yet. Somehow, she and her undertaking intrigue me- yet an odd feeling in my stomach tells me that I should not.

She hides more behind her veil than her face- the mourning colour of her clothes, her secretive air and demeanour all point to an even greater mystery than a morbid fascination with the un-dead.

Would I were Sherlock Holmes- the great detective, or so I have come to think, might be the only person to make sense of Mrs Spinckes and her unconventional hobby.

But he is a fictional creation, just like my Count Dracula, and thus, this particular mystery may remain unsolved forever.

Chapter End Notes

Abraham "Bram" Stoker (1847-1912) needs no introduction. His 1897 novel "Dracula" is probably the most famous and most widely adapted piece of vampire-fiction. The title of this chapter is a play on his posthumously released story "Dracula's Guest".

Ármin Vámbéry (1832-1913), a turkologist, renowned traveller and professor at the Royal University of Pest (today a part of Budapest), was acquainted with Bram Stoker, whom he doubtlessly inspired in his writings.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "Sherlock Holmes" stories and novels were already celebrated and beloved in the 1890s.

"The Woman in Black" (1983) is a novella by Susan Hill and has been adapted for
stage and screen several times. The horror story was, for instance, made into a movie in 2012. Florence, Bram Stoker's wife does of course not know this.

Thanks for reading!
Death and the Maiden

Chapter Notes

Happy Halloween everybody! Hopefully, you'll enjoy this little (read: way too long) chapter I managed to finish just in time for tomorrow.

Since this is the Halloween-chapter expect drama, danger, death, and, if you can bring yourself to read to the end, a battle-scene of sorts with only two protagonists.

I'm not on Tumblr, but recently it has come to my attention some of you have shared and/or recommended my story and I'd like to take this opportunity to say thank you to all who did. Your support means a lot to me and keeps this story going!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was a fine day to go riding. The weather not too warm or too cold; a perfect day in autumn. The sun was not shining too brightly but hid, for the main part of the day, behind soft clouds.

She had ordered the man in charge of the stables to saddle a horse for her and one for himself, to keep her company, and bring the pony carriage as well, for she intended to go on a long and exhausting ride and did not know if she would be able to keep in the saddle all day long, wherefore the carriage should wait ready to receive her intentionally over-exerted and tired, ill-used body on the way back.

In her youth, she would never have worried about such a thing, she was a woman of no particular height, but what she lacked in inches she made up for in willpower and strength.

Lately however, she felt somewhat fatigued and not half as spring-fresh and lively as she had in days gone by, which she attributed to the particular time of year approaching.

Two years ago, she had sustained a wound to her heart and soul that was ripped open again every year on the same day.

The year before, she had shut herself in and refused to see anyone, not even the children, the young ones pleading for entry with teary voices and the elder ones trying to reason with her.

Since silence and solitude had not done any particular good, she had decided to do things differently this year. Distraction was what she needed.

They set out early in the morning after only a light breakfast of some buttered bread and a glass of milk (she did not have any particular appetite).

Her horse, a proud charger of considerable height that had not always been hers and had only lately been accustomed to carrying a lady, ran like the wind and for a few brief moments, she was no more the aged mother she had become, but a young girl again. Oh if only she had known then...

For a second, all of her woes vanished, outrun and overtaken by the horse's thunderous hoof beat.

Behind her, she could hear the second, considerably smaller horse trying to keep up with her under audible strain.
“Come on, John, catch me!” she exclaimed with delight, urging her horse to speed up even more, utterly lost in the moment.

“Madam, I am not sure the mare-“

To her initial surprise, it was John Bailey, her man in charge of the stables who answered her in his broad accent that indicated his native connection to the county.

“Quite right”, she answered, her voice once more all stony composure, “take me back. I think I want to return in the carriage, I am tired.”

Slowly, they allowed the exhausted horses to trot back to the main road leading from St. Cyres to the house where the light pony carriage, especially built for days like this one, was supposed to wait.

To both their surprise, the carriage was gone.

Bailey dismounted, frowning, and heaved himself back into the saddle again.

“These tracks lead back to the house”, he commented.

“So I see. Have you any idea what could have happened?”

“No”, Bailey replied, “if you don’t mind me saying, I’m just as curious as you are.”

Following the tracks, they came across a piece of wood unmistakeably belonging to the carriage halfway to the house. For the rest of the way, the field through which the pony must have galloped and destroyed the carriage by dragging it through terrain not suited for such a vehicle, was littered with debris.

Once back at the stables, they found the pony with some sorry remains of the carriage still attached to the animal, waiting in the stable yard.

“Came right at us, frenzied, the poor thing, something must’ve frightened it”, one of the men who had been there to calm the pony explained the lady of the house upon her return.

Her forehead creased in contemplation.

“I want to know what happened. Bailey, you will go to St. Cyres this afternoon and make enquiries. Who has seen something, heard something? Ask everyone you meet along the way.”

Nodding, Bailey went about his duties. She knew she had selected the right man for the job, a trusted employee of many years.

In the evening, when he returned (she had sent everyone else away to talk to Bailey in private in her husband’s study), he reported that some people swore to have heard a shot being fired close by. One of them, an elderly farmer, wanted to have seen a man skulking through the woods, tall, dressed in dark clothing and his hat arranged in such a fashion it had covered most of his face.

He had frowned and wondered who the stranger might be, but had contented himself with the thought that someone on his way to somewhere else had stopped to relieve himself on his journey and had sought for some privacy to rid his bladder of its contents a little more privately hidden from direct view from the road.

News of a stranger was the last thing she and indeed the county needed. There were enough stories
of ghostly apparitions or highwaymen already.

Why had the man shot? Had it been his intent to frighten the pony and cause the wretched animal to break free and run away? How would that be of any benefit to anyone? Did he know to whom the carriage belonged and if so, had he been waiting for her? Had she been the target and not the pony? Was her home still safe and even more importantly, her children?

A tall man dressed in black.

It was such a common sight to be sure, but the first image her mind related to this description was very personal and far less common. The first time she had seen Him...

She remembered the footprint. A tall man who had disappeared into the shadows of the night a few months earlier.

She could no longer deny something was going on. A strange game was afoot and she did not comprehend the rules yet. No matter. She would learn them and she would beat whatever game was being played with her, or rather at her expense.

As she had always found there was no problem that could not be solved without a bit of reading, she retired to the stately library that had only been rebuilt and modernised a few years ago but was already stuffed from floor to ceiling with books.

There was a volume for and on everything, except, apparently, the rather particular thing she wanted to read up on, which did not surprise her- she herself had never contemplated such a thing before. She would have to make further enquiries and be prepared to go where she before had not dared to venture, both in her mind and in physical reality that might hold great dangers.

Miss Williams and I had, thanks to the water main debacle, been re-located to a stuffy, dusty former storage room on the same floor. The broken photocopying apparatus that had lived with the sole company of incessantly breeding so-called dust bunnies in this dark corner of the university since the nineties, had been relocated to another room where it could continue being useless under someone else’s care and two small tables and two chairs pushed in to accommodate us for the time being.

This confined space did of course not permit me to keep my most treasured volumes at arm’s reach, so I had to make do with a selection of the same works as paperback versions and some supplementary, 21st-century-printed works I was not hesitant to keep in our crepuscular prison, where any book was easy prey for dust and dirt.

My small collection of books aside, I kept nothing except some paper and stationery in this room, taking only my laptop to work, which I could take home with me in the evening. I did not trust the lock or the room itself.

Miss Williams’ desk was infinitely more crammed than mine, which I assumed must stem from her employer’s newfound energy to publish after his return from Princeton.
Perhaps, I thought, I ought to speak to Marcus about her. She spent more and more time in this unhealthy environment, our one-windowed cell that reminded me uncomfortably of the Black Hole of Calcutta, an infamous incident I had read about as a boy and that had left a lasting impression on me. So large in fact, I built my new identity on it, the one I adopted upon entering the military and claimed I had been there, witnessing my father, in this narrative not a naval captain but a surgeon, suffocate with sixty others in a cell unfit to hold five.

The story, in all its gruesome details, has taken the place of my childhood and echoes so well the horrors of my own ordeal I sometimes find it too vivid to be a mere fabrication of my own mind, too believable to dismiss it as the lie I know it to be. The story has, especially during my days in the late 18th century, taken on a life of its own.

I don’t like confined spaces, which makes me glad vampires do not sleep in coffins. Whoever spread this particular myth must have been out of his mind- who would favour a narrow wooden box over the softness and size of a bed filled with several sets of cushions and blankets?

Whenever I more or less willingly entered our office, I would remark upon trifles indicating Miss Williams had been there- an empty coffee mug sitting forgotten on her desk, a stack of papers that had migrated from the left side of the table to the right, some books slightly re-arranged, the wrapper of a chocolate bar or similar snack in the bin or the lingering scent of her perfume greeting me when I unlocked the door in the morning.

I too found myself more often in my office than not. Even if the circumstances displeased me, knowing that at home too many distractions (one of them with large, glowing eyes and an appetite for the finest cuts available at the fishmonger’s) would keep me from finishing my publication on Arnold, which I intended to submit to a call for papers for a conference in Marseille the coming year.

The scent of perfume in the air distracted me, but I called myself to order fairly quickly in these moments; in most cases, it suffices to think of my past, of those who could not escape my appetite.

Perhaps, in this respect, and this respect only, Hewlett was right. Having become a vampire, I had been and am forced to think thrice about my actions, especially when they involve feeding- a scandal is so easily unleashed, as I had to learn in the past.

The last of my inadvertent kills happened in 1997, in the Black Forest and had forced me to disappear from Europe for three years to wait for the dust of the investigation to settle. For a brief moment, I too had been a suspect but had been able to disappear before my presence for an interview at the local police station was formally requested.

I have no explanation why I did it. Ironically, I had known of my appetite that night and retreated to the forest to find myself a deer or a fox to saturate my thirst for the time being when I smelled the presence of a human being close by and my senses took hold of me.

And so, I waited for her to pass the rootage of a fallen tree behind which I was hiding, ambushed her and pulled her to the ground to fixate her in a position I could access her neck easily, but she resisted with astonishing force and I grew impatient, which caused me to rip her throat open rather than carefully position my teeth before opening her carotid artery with precision.

The blood flowed freely from the dying woman’s neck, who continued to stir beneath me for several minutes before the fire of life within her was eternally extinguished and I feasted on her like the beast I am. Not a droplet of blood I let go to waste and when I was done, the only blood left were a few stains on both our clothes and a small pool in the moss beneath her body.
As has always been, I cannot look at my victims out of guilt and shame and yet force myself to do so, to punish myself for my deeds by engraving their memory like a photograph onto my mind, knowing it will remain there well-preserved for eternity.

She had been my most gruesome kill. Slowly realising what I had done after the initial inebriation of having fed wore off, I tried to wash the remainders of her blood off in in a small brook close by. If it was the gaily purling waters of the stream or my tears that were responsible for cleaning my face of any evidence I cannot tell for certain.

Yet again I had proven to myself that I was a monster, a creature of the night nothing akin to a human being. I was a predator equipped with human speech and a deceivingly human appearance; apart from that, I considered myself no better than an animal.

On this day, I vowed to myself to take up feeding on blood donations rather than feeding on humans directly.

It worked, and I managed to uphold my promise to myself for almost seventeen years, although I must confess I have often fantasised about the deliciousness of a person’s neck when I saw them; imagined, as some of them stood close to me on public transport or stared at me from their desk in one of my classes, how the warmth of their bodies would feel close to mine, the cracking noise only audible to a vampire of supple, tender skin breaking under the pressure of teeth, the first drop of blood and the ecstatic pleasure of filling one’s self with the delicious liquid.

That is all I granted to myself, despicable fantasies, while I tried to busy my mind with the only real objective I could fathom having in this world and that fuelled my latest publication: revenge.

Ever since I laid down the bayonet and musket at the end of the American War, my armoury no longer contains the tools of the trade I was apprenticed to at age eighteen; nowadays, words have become my weapon.

My profession allows me to use words in a way almost as dangerous as the serrated blade of my bayonet, which I managed to purchase when in the 1920s, an impoverished ancestor of mine sold most memorabilia of my days in America, among them the colours of the original Queen’s Rangers and the sabre worn by me at some of the major battles over yonder to the highest bidder.

It now resides in my desk at home, together with a packet of letters I could rescue that day, loose snippets of my and my wife’s correspondence that had been bundled without a care and stretched over a period from the early 1780s to the late 1790s.

But among the much cherished memories of the Old Days, there are some that still vex me to this day. People who have done great wrong to me and that I will and cannot forgive.

Hewlett was one of them, Arnold another. Hewlett, who sent me on this never-ending road to Calvary I had tried to kill as an act of retribution shortly after my return to English shores and failed, almost killing his wife and new born child instead, a mistake I could never have forgiven myself, for Anna, whom I have loved with an ardent desire when she was a mere tavern-wench in Setauket and wife to a patriot traitor, and the babe were not to blame.

I grew more careful after that, partly due to the fact that my first attempt at obtaining revenge had almost backfired very badly and the circumstance that I had started courting Elizabeth, for whom I tried to be what I was not and never will be- a man of reason when in truth, I am a creature of blood.

For her and our children I let slip my desire to settle my scores and as the eighteenth faded into the
nineteenth century and I was forced to stage my own demise, all hopes to ever best those who
should have been brought to account decades ago were extinguished just like the candles burning
at the stone-filled coffin that lay in state at Wolford Chapel for a few days for the neighbours and
tenants to pay their last respects to General Simcoe, who died at merely 54 years of age, leaving a
grieving wife and nine children behind.

After years of coming to terms with my “death” and watching the goings-on at Wolford from afar
in different disguises (for some time, I had even been employed in the stables in the 1840s, but was
thrown out onto the street when Henry had found me one evening in the upstairs corridor of the
house, thinking I had come to rob his elderly mother, my wife, of her jewels while she was asleep
when in truth, I had only come to see if I could not catch a glimpse of her. Henry had been too
young at my death to remember me and if he did, he remembered me as the outwardly aged man I
had become from abstaining from feeding on human blood. My twenty-nine-year-old countenance
he could not know and if he ever remarked upon any resemblance between the gardener and his
late father, my son’s education and ability of rational thought forbade him even consider the
possibility of any connection.), I moved away for the first time in the late nineteenth century and
decided, after an extensive tour of continental Europe, to return to the United States.

On the one hand I was curious to see what had become of the former colonies, on the other, much
like most other Europeans crossing the Atlantic Ocean in crammed coffin-like ships, I was in
search for a new beginning, a new identity.

I shed my name like a serpent does her hide and was documented in Ellis Island as William
Newman.

For that was what I was— a new man. Or at least that is what I told everyone, that I was a man.

I left New York as soon as I set foot on its streets for the first time and went to Boston, where I
lived modestly from the revenue I earned as tutor to the upper crust ladies who, many of them
eyeing the honours, styles and titles of a penniless British nobleman that would be pretty
accessories to their inherited family wealth, were quite eager to learn the intricacies of British
society protocol or families of a rather undesirable at the time Irish extraction newly come to
wealth who were eager to shed the stereotype assigned to the rhoticity of their “r”s and
unshapeliness of their vowels by feigning British ancestry.

One young gentleman I trained in proper etiquette, a former dockworker who had made a fortune in
business, was one Patrick Joseph Kennedy, whom I forgot quickly after our lessons ended, but who
was quite abruptly coming to the fore of my mind again when in 1961, a gentleman by the same
surname became president of the United States and turned out to be the grandson of my pupil.

Thus I passed several years, trying to pretend to a way of life as close to human as I could. It was
easy in the 1890s to drink blood- with the murder spree of H. H. Holmes sweeping across the
northern United States and southern Canada, every body was expected to be the work of some sort
of copycat killer trying to create a reputation for themselves and I lived in relative security. I had
by the time tried to give up on killing my victims, but had not yet fully succeeded in stopping
myself before I had extracted too much blood from the person’s body, but was, to my own relief,
making progress.

In 1912, I left Boston after having grown exceedingly tired of it. The former colonies were no
better than England, society, apart from their accent, largely the same and I had enough to prepare
young women whom I would much rather have feasted on than taught to curtsey for their
introduction to London’s social circles.

Longing for more intellectual past times, I moved southward again to New York and, partly out of
nostalgia for my fighting days and partly out of spite (had I not triumphed over them by still existing while their bodies rotted in the cold clay beneath my feet?) moved to Long Island.

At the time, nothing had felt better than smiling at Woodhull’s tombstone. I had prevailed, he had perished, as had Tallmadge, Brewster and even the great Washington himself.

But as I remembered the cost of my victory, the taste in my mouth turned sour and my thoughts maudlin and vengeful once more.

Fantasising how gratifying it would be to kill Woodhull was of no use; he was dead already, as were all the others I had once held a grudge against.

As I sat down one evening in my new homestead (a house previously owned by the Townsend-family) and read a few pages of Xenophon’s *Anabasis*, an idea struck me as a lightning bolt:

More than one hundred and thirty years after the war, where were they?

I was not talking about the locations of their graves. Where were they in history? On the one hand, I could simply let them slip into the abyss of history, let them be forgot and times move on, but that would have left the possibility for future scholars to discover them one day when I would no longer wield the power over their memory.

And so, my first venture into the discipline of history begun.

For thirty years I collected information, letters, anything I could find which was at the time a very slow and unrewarding task; but by 1925, I had collected sufficient information to conclude that it had been Brewster who shot me at Blandford and that Anna, the woman I once loved, had been worse than her patriot husband and an accomplice of my special friend Samuel Culper. Even so long after her death (she died in her seventies within weeks of her husband’s death and rumour had it soon after she had died of a broken heart, unable to live without her Oyster Major), it hurt to find out, though whether it was because I was ashamed of myself for having courted a rebel spy and not noticed anything or because I was truly upset about Anna Hewlett’s betrayal, I could not tell.

One piece of information I would have given everything to find out about however was who had shot me at Whitehall and disfigured my ear.

Watching *TURN*, it has been suggested that Mary Woodhull was the one who took aim at me that day, but I cannot quite imagine someone as petite and delicate as Mrs Woodhull operating a firearm and shooting an officer. Besides, she was too refined to stoop so low as to resort to dastardly violence.

From a dramatic perspective however, the plotline is well-developed, I have to give the show’s creators that much.

My perhaps biggest coup, using the name of an aged Long Island local history enthusiast called Morton Pennypacker, my diligent research revealed the identity of Culper Jr. to the world. Who would have thought of Robert Townsend, whose house I inhabited now, to be a spy?

After this revelation, my interest in history grew considerably and I started making plans for the future. I left Pennypacker, whom I had used as my puppet for years and started to study history when World War Two broke out and I, having successfully avoided the first one, meandered through Asia for a few decades before returning to post-war Britain for a brief stint with the Foreign Office serving as a diplomat in several African countries before I sensed the chance to pursue a career as a historian in the late 1980s and applied to Oxford, who took me in (thanks to a
generous donation from the Simcoe Memorial Fund, which I had only dreamed of a day before my application before transferring a pretty sum of money from one of my private bank accounts to the university) and studied diligently, obtaining a BA, MA and lastly a doctorate, which allowed me finally to publish my opinions on those I have long wanted to bring to account by shaping their memory in the minds of the public.

Or, apparently, to sit in a stuffy office in Exeter and listen, bored, into the conversations of my fellow colleagues.

My sensitive sense of hearing allows me to tune into different conversations in different offices at will, it is no different from changing the radio station or zapping through the channels on TV.

“…more and more of the university’s budget goes to the natural sciences, it’s a shame the humanities are left to…”

“…have you seen Francesca of late? I must say, she looked bad the last time I saw her. I told her to see someone, but she declined. With her excessive teaching schedule, I would not be surprised if it’s Burn Out…”

“…and then the garage called my insurance and they said they wouldn’t…”

“…I need twenty copies of this and…”

It bored me. They bored me. Waiting for a meeting with the chair for Early Modern History’s other underlings, I was unable to concentrate on my work on Arnold.

I was looking forward to the next day already, for on this day, I would appear in my class in the apparel of a Queen’s Ranger.

In all honesty, I do enjoy dressing in the replica of my uniform (the original is far too brittle with age and too dear to me to be worn any longer) and hope my students may find some enjoyment in it as well.

Over the years I have found that these young people seem to find it fascinating to be close to history rather than only reading about it in books, which is why I frequently organise field trips, if possible, and appear in class in full officer’s dress.

After all, shaping their conception of history is only adding to the success of my overall scheme.

When I rose the next morning from the sleep-like state vampires use to recover their strength after a long day’s work, I took my uniform from the transparent plastic bag I kept it in to preserve it from dust and moths and laid my clothing meticulously out on the bed.

It was an act of almost sanctity, the routine of dressing in my old accoutrements; a relic of days long gone, of bad, and of good days; bad with regards to the things I had done wearing the same green coat in order to live out my secret nature that I only later learned was not human and good when I think about the sense of purpose I felt I had in these days and of course my Eliza, who always stated she liked the Rangers’ green coat better on me than the lieutenant-governor’s scarlet one.

I had to believe her, she was the artist and stated that the forest green of my garment and the flaming colour of my hair formed a pleasant contrast that complimented my features, which I have always considered inferior to most other men’s in their defects, but which she never ceased to caress and praise.
As I could and cannot inspect my countenance in a looking glass, she became the eyes through which I viewed myself and who almost made me forget about my visual shortcomings that had always stood out to me in the days before my transformation.

When I had freed my body of my 21st century nightclothes and allowed the morning air to caress my skin with its cold kisses that so painfully reminded me of the absence of the person whose kisses I would have preferred to the iciness of a morning in late January, I felt freed of time altogether; had it not been for the occasional sound of a car passing by on the street outside and the sight of my smartphone on the nightstand, I would readily have believed I had returned to my native 18th century.

I pulled the white stockings above my knees and fastened them there in the same fashion as I had done more than two hundred years ago; next followed the shirt and breeches before tying my necktie and buttoning the waistcoat up.

Of course, after such a long time I had fallen somewhat out of practice and needed two or three attempts to bind the necktie to my satisfaction, but other than that, nothing had changed.

Instead of the regular black elastic hair tie (which is in fact much more practical), I restricted my hair with a piece of black ribbon once more which I tied, as it had been the fashion of the day, into a neat bow.

Lastly, I added my sash and coat, straightened the colonel’s epaulette and donned a pair of polished black boots. Even though I could not inspect my reflexion in a mirror, I knew Eliza would have been contented with the sight of me.

And although the uniform was not as comfortable as the three-piece suits I have developed a liking to (how most men of this age argue they are impractical is beyond my understanding), I would not have wanted to change into the more comfortable suit and tie.

Closing my eyes, I could see a head of dark hair, her face hidden behind an easel on which she had placed some paper and was sketching. The top of her forehead was visible; small wrinkles indicated that she was no longer the girl of nineteen I had first met; no, she was so much more than that. She was my Elizabeth, my wife.

“Sit still, John. How am I to sketch you if you move all the time?”

In the midst of one Canadian winter, when a storm had ravaged the land and the temperatures had been so cold that going outside could not be considered for an entire week, my darling Eliza had dressed me in my uniform and sat me onto a chair close to the fire.

The green of my uniform reminded her of the landscapes she loved to paint, she had informed me, and since landscapes were given the present situation out of the question, I would have to be her green fields and icy mountain streams.

A hand, smudged with pencil-dust, moved from behind the easel to my face and adjusted the position of my head by gently tilting it back to the position I was supposed to hold myself in. And while she did that, the touch of her busy fingertips brought my cheeks to burn with the cold fire of those devoid of human blood but not devoid of love.

Sitting down on the bed, for one moment I could almost feel the heat of the fire and hear Elizabeth inhale and exhale slowly, pensively behind her easel.

The truth was I was unable to hold my head in the way she had told me to (which I could have done
with ease; a trained soldier, keeping posture had been part and parcel of my life for a long time) because I kept watching her. Her concentrated frown, critical of her own artwork, that made the dear face even dearer to me, the almost military, no, surgical precision with which she struck pencil-blows against the sketching-paper- for a moment, she was with me, even if the details of this memory have left me. I cannot tell the colour of her dress on that day, nor describe in what particular way her forehead wrinkled- all this has been lost to me over time, and yet, the memory felt so fresh as if she had only left the room for a short while to check on the children, my imagination adding in details where they were needed, just like Elizabeth had added watercolours to her sketches.

For this brief moment, I was another man, a man I had once been but who had died in 1806 and died forever, without resurrection.

On my way to class, I realised how the drivers of other cars gave me strange looks at traffic lights and how some students and staff stopped in the corridors as I passed them by on my way to my office, from whence I needed to retrieve a book I wanted to show to my class. I must say, all this was to my satisfaction. The feeling of being looked at with a certain air of surprise that also conveyed respect reminded me of days gone by.

As I was about to search my kit bag for my keys, the door to my office opened and Miss Williams emerged and stopped abruptly in front of me after having uttered her standard greeting.

She was smiling brightly, as almost always, and carried a tablet computer, pens and a notebook under her arm, having likely rid herself of her coat and bag before going to class.

Her red tie-neck blouse hung loosely and limply around her neck, which would have looked careless on most other people but seemed to add, together with her still somewhat damp, freely flowing wavy hair that revealed she had left her flat in the morning without the opportunity to blow-dry, a certain air of effortless ease to her attire that would otherwise have looked a little too formal for a student at ten o’clock in the morning.

Much as I had looked at her, Miss Williams inspected my attire from head to toe.

“You look splendid, Mr Simcoe.”

She took her eyes off me and directed her gaze away to the corridor over my shoulder. A soft blush crept to her cheeks, which I in all honesty did not remark upon without a certain feeling of the oddest contentedness.

“Colonel, I must be on my way, and I am sure so must you- your troops are likely already waiting for inspection.”

Her mouth widened into a smile and she curtsied, her attempt at sounding like a Jane Austen heroine escaped from her novel underlined by the elegant movement which she executed with utmost grace.

Instinctively, as had been taught to me from infancy onwards, I bowed, hoping to mirror her elegance in my gesture of reverence towards her.

“If you permit me the question”, Miss Williams, presently bearing a striking resemblance to one Eliza Bennet, who was, given the widespread popularity and frequent filmic adaption of Jane Austen’s most famous novel likely the source for her act, started, “I know this sounds stupid, but could you help me with this? It won’t take long. Seeing as you are obviously a natural,” she gestured to my own neck and the immaculately-bound necktie holding the collar of my shirt in
Petrified almost, I looked at her. Miss Williams did not know what she had just said to me.

To a vampire, being given permission to touch or come near a living person’s neck is the ultimate mark of confidence that says “My trust in you is indefinite; I trust you not to hurt me, even though I am your natural prey.”

To evoke a more widely understandable example to illustrate this, it is as if the chickens invite the fox to the henhouse, expecting their guest to be civil and share their feast of crumbs and corn while surrounded with his favourite treat but not allowed to touch any of it.

Miss Williams could of course not know, I excused her behaviour, she could not know what I was and had only considered to ask me for my cravat-binding skills.

How should she know about the customs and rituals of vampires in an age when nobody believed in their existence anymore, a world in which even I once had had to learn most of what is perceived as common etiquette among my kind through experience?

There was no ulterior motive to her question, not like I have observed them at times in other women, some of whom I have had the more or less joyous task to teach, whose interest in gaining my interest had lead some of the bolder specimens to resort to rather transparent and frankly tediously well-known tricks to gain my attention at all costs.

She was none of them and in her indefinitely engaging way had only asked me to help her. Likely she had not seen any wrong in it at all, for she had asked me considering my person a professional in the art of cravat-binding. It was not about me, it was about my skill, and yet there is no more ultimate way of expressing one’s trust in a creature like me, no more definite bond of understanding and friendship to be offered that would tie creature and human together like the loose ends of her necktie.

An air of solemnity shrouds this act. The meaning of this ritual goes beyond the understanding of any living creature. To a vampire, it means the world.

We stood somewhat apart, as far as common propriety demands of two strangers of different sexes, yet close enough for me to reach for the tails of her necktie sown to the blouse or alternatively make an attempt on her neck instead.

The smell of her lavender-scented shampoo I had first recognised in my living room and that had almost driven me to the point of no return teased my nostrils, as did her perfume and the scent underneath the layers of flowers, the primal, exciting smell of living flesh.

With trembling fingers, I reached for the two long pieces of fabric forming the tie which she held out to me.

It would be so easy. I could have her, right here, right now, drink only a little bit of her blood that promised such ecstatic joys to me as it taunted me with the sound of her heartbeat and the sight of veins and arteries shimmering through the skin of her hands and neck.

I could feel how my teeth, aching to be used, slid from their inconspicuous pockets in my jaw.

All I needed to do was drag her swiftly into our shared office, where we would be hidden from view, pull her close and bury my teeth in the softness of her skin. I would be gentle and do my best not to hurt her. Just a few drops. No more than she would lose during a regular blood donation. And blood donations were not life-threatening. Just a taste. When I was done, I would sit her down
carefully on the floor, disinfect and dress the wound I had created and hold her hand in comfort and explain to her what I was and that it had to be done. She would understand, would she not?

No, I must not permit my senses to gain governance over my conscience, I scolded myself and brought my right hand closer to the base of her neck, as if to prove her and myself I was no bloodthirsty creature, where the bow would be tied.

The heat of her body almost robbed me of reason, persuaded me with false promises to allow myself to touch the animate marble pillar of her neck, just one inadvertent brush to see what it would be like, but my mind waged fierce war against my nature. The image of the dead harbour girl, the broken little black-haired, lifeless doll I had created and the smiling woman in the forest, her throat ripped apart in an act of impatient esurience, floated before my mind’s eye as a reminder of what I was capable of when blinded by bloodlust.

I must not murder.

Left hand. Right hand. I concentrated on my work and finished a shapely bow in much less time than my mind’s voyage into the dark abyss of my soul had made me believe.

“Thank you, yours looks much prettier than mine”, she beamed, looking down her front.

“Have a great time with your class”, this rare embodiment of morning-friendliness chirped before hurrying down the corridor in the opposite direction from me.

My class went tolerably; the drowsy party I was assigned to teach turned somewhat livelier when I greeted them in a military fashion and announced we would talk about the Queen’s Rangers and their military operations today.

I had also brought my bayonet, which strictly speaking violated the university’s policy on weapons, but I was not deterred by such trifles, My sheer existence violates the laws of nature, which made the infringement of some rule or law or other seem insignificant to me.

Happy to see that at least some of my more willing students had anticipated my sartorial efforts and contributed to class in a meaningful way, I retired to my office once more, where I worked on my Arnold-publication until a call by the chair to come to his office sometime in the afternoon immediately robbed me of my concentration and forced me to leave my desk.

At my return an hour later (apparently all my commander, as I secretly call Prof Gateshead, wanted to see for himself after having heard tales from some of my students and had inflicted a bout of conversation on me after having assured himself by summoning me I had actually “turned up” in full uniform), Miss Williams was there, too.

She seemed to be on a short break, for her tablet resided on her desk and played a video, while she absent-mindedly brought pieces of dry chocolate-flavoured cereals from a Tupperware box to her mouth.

Curious, I attuned my ears to the programme she enjoyed; human headphones are easy to listen in to.

Nachdem Aktenzeichen XY… ungelöst im August 1997 schon einmal über den Fall berichtet hat, tun wir es an dieser Stelle noch einmal.“

From the corner of my eye, I could see some grainy footage of the original 1997 broadcast flicker across the screen before the scene cut to a shot of the forest in which I had killed a woman two decades ago and then to a man who, if I understood the German correctly, had been at the scene as a young man who had just started working for the criminal investigation unit.

Taking a closer look, I recognised him: his hair was no longer of a mousy brown and his face bore the lines of age and two decades of police work rather than the innocent round-eyed horror I had years ago observed in his features, but the young man who had been unable to finish his scrambled eggs was still recognisable.

No longer willing to watch, I announced myself to the true-crime aficionado by coughing lowly, at which she turned, pulling the headphones off her head and closing the browser. The bow around her neck was, as I noticed, still in place.

“Good evening, Colonel. How was your class?”

“Well enough”, I replied, unwilling to talk about my charges, and started to pack my belongings to go home.

“Can I offer you a ride home? It is growing dark, and seeing as it is five already, I think Prof Cholmondeley will not miss your presence here,” I asked her.

Sometimes I want to laugh at this cruel trick of nature that I am a vampire who is wary of the dark. Not for me per say, for I can no longer die after having already been attacked in the darkness and turned into a vampire, but for those around me. As I had to learn in this very night, my fears were well-funded.

She agreed and stuffed her belongings into her big handbag.

We talked pleasantly at her initiation and I almost forgot about the Black Forest.

At the lift, I had to persuade her to wait for me downstairs, telling her I had forgotten my phone charger in the office and would join her in no time.

In truth, I waited behind a corner and when two minutes had crept by on my watch, took the staircase. Lifts pose a threat to me thanks to being plastered with mirrors, which can easily unmask a six foot three vampire for what he really is. While I do have a reflexion in water, man-made mirrors and glass surfaces do not show my image, which forces me to avoid places like lifts or the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles at all costs.

When finally I arrived to meet Miss Williams, who had been passing the time staring at her phone, she looked up at the sound of my footsteps and gave me a smile, as if she was happy to see me.

And she likely was, for I was the reason she would not have to wait in the cold and darkness for a bus and then walk home alone, but still, her kind countenance proverbially warmed my heart to a certain degree.

“Aren’t you cold? I remember one of the actors from TURN say in an interview that it was quite cold shooting scenes in winter outside in nothing more but their uniforms.”

“I do not mind the weather”, I replied and tried to fabricate a little story why the wintry cold meant nothing to me, when I suddenly noticed Miss Williams, who had walked by my side, was no longer
next to me.

Turning around I found her standing five feet behind me, immobile as Lot’s wife.

Immediately the senses of the warrior and those of the vampire awakened within me and scanned the area. In the end, all I would have had to do to find out what had put Miss Williams in such a state of terror was to follow the direction her eyes indicated the horrifying sight lay to see a human figure lying on the ground, only their feet visible while the rest of the body was hidden behind a parked car.

“Wait here”, I ordered and hastened to the figure on the ground.

Francesca Montebello lay on the frost-covered ground, the front of her coat torn open with such ferocity some of the buttons had been ripped off and her pullover, which bore traces of blood, destroyed in order to expose her neck.

Blood dripped from two puncture marks onto the ground.

I was not the only vampire in Exeter.

No longer did I feel comfortable letting Miss Williams wait alone out of my sight and called her to my side. She was under threat, too, should the other vampire return to finish their meal.

“Oh my God”, was all she could say, when she saw Francesca’s upper body and violated neck and probably drew the right conclusions from having watched a vampire-movie or two in her lifetime.

“Help me. We need to put her into my car-“

“Are you not going to call an ambulance?”, she exclaimed agitatedly, her phone already in her hand.

“Shh, quiet. No. I will explain everything to you, but you must trust me now. Do you trust me?”

My eyes fixated hers. I was aware of the dangerous and intimidating gleam they must ooze.

“Yes”, she lied reluctantly, but I could not discuss her dishonesty with her in this very moment and thus pretended I believed her and instructed her to be my sentry post and alert me if anyone else was coming our way.

Luckily, we were alone and I managed to put my unconscious colleague on the backseat of my car, lying across all three seats.

Miss Williams sat in the passenger seat, breathing heavily and eyeing me with an air of suspicion.

From the corner of my eye, I could see her right hand tremble. For a moment, I considered taking her hand, but did not; it was not proper and even less so under the present circumstances and besides, I needed my hands for driving.

Francesca reeked of a strange vampire, but this was not what concerned me the most with regards to her welfare: my sensitive nose could not even detect a hint of disinfectant on her, which urged me to drive faster to reach home more quickly, where I could administer the proper care to her.

I parked the car close to the door and thanks to Miss Williams’ help, managed to carry the unconscious woman inside without a neighbour as witness.

I carried her into my bedroom and laid her on the bed.
“Will she be all right?”, Miss Williams, who had followed me, asked carefully.

“I don’t know. We shall have to wait. Would you please rid her of her clothes while I go and fetch a first aid kit?”

At this, her eyes widened and this time, they looked even more horrified than when she had found Francesca’s body in the first place.

“Her torn garments. The coat, the pullover. You can- I mean you are a woman whereas I- you can dress her in this”, I said, and hastily pulled a dark blue pullover from a drawer before I disappeared to the bathroom where I kept a first aid kit.

When I returned, Miss Williams had done as I had asked her. I found the young woman sitting on the bed next to my unconscious co-worker, feeling her pulse.

“Are you sure we should not call-“

“Under no circumstances.”

She was right, Francesca was weak and uncharacteristically pale, which was even more accentuated by her curly blonde hair and the colour of the pullover she was dressed in now, a combination that made her look like a reclining renaissance Madonna.

I disinfected and dressed the bite. This night would decide whether she had been infected or not or if the blood loss had been too great for her body to cope with- with a little luck, we had saved her but if not- I did not dare to think about it.

“We presently cannot do anything else for her. We must let her sleep.”

Gently, I ushered Miss Williams downstairs and offered her a cup of tea to ease the first shock.

With the cup in her hand and seated once more on my living room sofa, she said without looking at me:

“Now tell me what is going on.”

I could not tell her.

But I had said I would.

“I-“ I began, when the ringtone of my mobile phone disrupted the uneasy silence of the house.

Thinking I had been granted a few more moments to devise an answer that would not make me look like a lunatic in the eyes of a mortal woman who had just helped to save a vampire’s victim, I rose to receive the call. I was astonished to hear David on the other end of the line.

“John?”

“David,” I sighed, somewhat unhappy about the timing of his call. Whatever he could want could not be as important as the business I presently was engaged in.

“Are you still at work and if so, have you seen Francesca somewhere?”

His tone was grave, uncharacteristically serious even.

“Why?”, I asked, acting confused in hopes to extract more information from him.
“She should have met her boyfriend at three, but she didn’t turn up. No text, no call, nothing. That’s not exactly ‘like her’, if you know what I mean. He’s worried. Have you seen her?”

The Coopers, David and his wife, were friendly with Francesca and her boyfriend and met every now and then over a cocktail or takeaway food or however humans in the 21st century liked to do. Thus, it was no wonder the boyfriend had called David.

“No.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

“John?”

“What is it?”

“Something’s wrong, I can tell.”

“Come to my house, immediately. Don’t ask any questions, do as I say.”

“You know where she is, don’t you?”

“Maybe.”

“John, please tell me you didn’t-“

I hung up. If I was about to reveal my true nature and identity to one mortal, a second one could not do much more harm and besides, we would need him to fabricate a story about Francesca’s whereabouts to mislead everyone else searching for her. Although I did not fully trust him, he would probably help once he understood what was happening.

For the moment, it was best if David operated under the belief I might have done something very inhumane and punishable with a life sentence to Francesca to speed up his coming.

“David Cooper is coming here. They are already searching for her”, I informed Miss Williams.

“What is going on here? Tell me.”

I sat down on the sofa next to her in order to be able to look her in the eyes.

“I will. We are waiting for Cooper. Don’t be afraid.”

My words sounded hollow even to me and there was nothing else left to do for me than to smile bitterly.

She nodded slowly, visibly upset. This time, I could not hold myself back any longer and tentatively reached for her hand.

My own hand was still slightly warm thanks to having served her tea; I would not upset her. Not yet. She would know soon enough. Gently, I pressed hers.

To my surprise, she did not pull away, but raised her head. Her eyes were a study of hurt and fear—how ironic it was the monster she ought to be afraid of that aimed to console her.

“Thank you”, she breathed and I felt the muscles of her hand relax under my touch.
A few minutes later, the doorbell announced David’s coming to us. It was only then that I noticed I had not let go of her hand for a full five minutes- and she had not objected.

He looked exhausted, one shoelace undone, his hair flying in every direction, even his beard looked more untidy than usual (if that was even possible) as he pushed his smaller and more rotund body past me, as if he doubted I would let him inside willingly.

“Where is she?” He demanded to know.

“Upstairs.”

“Lord, what have you done this time? I mean-“ he broke off.

I knew what he wanted to say. Psy-Coe-path. I was the psychopath, the dangerous one, the one colleague in the office best avoided, the eccentric hermit who might just reveal himself as the serial killer everybody secretly suspected him to be at any given opportunity.

“I did not hurt her.”

David did not even wait until I had finished. He raced upstairs and showed himself into my bedroom, which he found at the second attempt by simply opening doors at random, where Francesca continued to lie lifelessly in a state of unconsciousness.

He stopped by her bed and looked down on her.

“She isn’t… dead, is she?” he whispered, not wanting to wake her up in case she was only asleep.

“No”, I answered him truthfully but corrected myself in my thoughts to “not yet”.

With every minute she was unconscious, her chances of survival sank considerably.

“And her neck, the bandage”, David wanted to know, “what happened to her?”

Wordlessly, I lifted Francesca’s head somewhat in order to be able to undo the gauze bandage to reveal the two puncture marks to him. Lifting the pad from the two small, yet visible wounds, I took the opportunity to disinfect them once more and change the pad underneath the bandages, because the bleeding had not stopped entirely yet, which indicated Francesca’s body was showing a rather extreme reaction to the anticoagulatory component of vampire saliva. This was not a good sign. With regards to other parts of the human body, a compression bandage might have helped, but if I wanted to choke her, there were easier and less painful ways than to tie a bandage tightly around her neck.

Perhaps the wounds should have been stitched rather than bandaged, but I was no medical professional and given that they could not help her with regards to a possible infection, sending for an ambulance was out of the question.

Throughout all this, showing David and examining and re-dressing the bite, I did not look at him once. I could not, for I was dreading his reaction. When I eventually did, his forehead creased and he said “this is not what it looks like, is it? Because that’s not real.”

“Come. We cannot help her now.”

Back downstairs with Miss Williams, I instructed both of them to sit down on the sofa, facing me. Diana had found her way into the house as well while David and I had been upstairs and sat in
Miss Williams’ lap, which seemed to console her greatly. For once, my nuisance of a companion was doing some good in exchange for her prestigious upkeep.

“There is something I need to tell you. But first, you must swear unto all you hold dear not to speak of our conversation to anybody.”

They exchanged a quick glance and then nodded hesitantly in unison.

“I am not the man you think you have come to know. My name is John Graves Simcoe, General in the British Army, first Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada and commander of the Queen’s Rangers during the war in America.”

With a quick movement of the hand, I gestured towards the uniform I was ironically wearing on this very day.

“I was born in 1752 and staged my own death in 1806. I never died. I cannot die. I am a vampire and it was one of my kind who attacked Francesca.”

“You’re a vampire and your own ancestor you love to talk about so much? Don’t be daft John, this is not the time for your funny little games. Are you high?”, David snarled in a tone I would never have thought him capable of. At other times, I would have felt the urgent need to find myself a book heavy enough to throw at him that could inflict precarious injuries when thrown at the right angle and with calculated speed, but on this day, I felt nothing but numbness inside me. He was right to doubt me. I had not believed in vampires until the day I became one for good.

“I am. I can prove it.”

Slowly, I unbuttoned my waistcoat, leaving only my thin shirt to clothe the front of my upper body. It was an improper thing to do, but necessary. I had heard there are tricks to fake not having a pulse, wherefore I did not offer them my wrist but the place where once my heartbeat had resided, a heartbeat that was not the conscious imitation of life to deceive my wife into thinking I was human, but the genuine source of life within me. I approached David.

“Tell me about my heartbeat.”

His fingertips gingerly brushed my chest. His brows furrowed and his mouth opened and closed several times before he could put his thoughts into order and answer me.

“But- no, there isn’t- this is impossible-“

“Let me.”

Miss Williams stood up and approached me. I did not move, frightful to scare her and David after my revelation when her fingers, like the petals of a flower coming into bloom, unfurled on my chest until her hand pressed flatly against my skin, where it lingered for a short while.

“No. No heartbeat.”

Her hand withdrew and I found myself missing the feeling of a living pulse and heartbeat faintly resounding in the hollow crypt of my bosom, but brushed this self-centred thought aside. They were not fully convinced yet, David in particular, I could tell.

“Do you have a mirror about you?”

Rummaging in her handbag, Miss Williams produced a small folding mirror. I took it from her
hands and moved behind the sofa, to allow both me and David a glimpse into the reflecting object. He inhaled sharply when in the place where I should have been visible, all he could see was the wall behind us. He shrunk back from me best as he could, still seated on the sofa.

Evidently he started to believe me.

“And the teeth?” he asked with a half-defeated, half-curious tone to his voice.

*The teeth.* Of course.

I closed my eyes to avoid their curious glances as I pulled my upper lip up and revealed the shame of my existence to them. Even fully un clothed I could not have felt more vulnerable than in this moment. I was a caged animal at the zoo, a curiosity from a Victorian fair, my skin melting under the scrutinising glances of two humans who had never before knowingly encountered a vampire.

At last, it was David who regained the ability to speak first:

“Stay away from me, you did that to Francesca, didn’t you?”

“We must stay calm, all of us. You aren’t helping”, Miss Williams tried to intervene, David however was furious and afraid at the same time, a combination that renders a human being capable of almost anything.

“He is *dead* and he is *here*. He is fucking dead, and yet he is here. And now, that monster has lured us into his house because we are the next ones he is going to drink dry.”

David’s voice had grown shrill.

“He will not”, Miss William tried to persuade him and then, talking to me, asked “you won’t, will you? Assuming that the popular beliefs about vampires are true. *Promise me.*”

“I promise.”

“See? He promises not to hurt us.”

“Jesus, are you that naïve? He’s a *beast*. He’s done *that* to Francesca. You can’t possibly defend him!”

“I am not defending him, I am trying to understand what is going on. Suppose he is right, what are we going to do with that knowledge, and aren’t we better off living in peace with *people* like him than fighting them? As far as I am concerned, I’m not keen on getting myself killed by upsetting one of his kind just *because*-“

“I would never hurt Francesca. She was always kind to me.”

The childish simplicity of my words broke the fight between the two humans who turned to me once more, about whom they had talked as if I were a pet or a piece of furniture, not a human-like presence in the room.

“I believe you.”

Miss Williams stood up a second time and demonstratively positioned herself close to me as if to prove my harmlessness to David, for, as every film about vampires ever has taught its viewers, a vampire must always feed on a young woman silly enough to ignore all warnings and venture too close to him.
I did not stir.

“What about Dr Montebello? Her chances-”

The voice in which she had uttered her question already conveyed she expected to hear the worst.

“Not good, I am afraid.”

As opposed to David, Miss Williams instantly knew what I meant.

In the same moment, a groan coming from upstairs alerted all three of us. Francesca had woken. As she saw us standing at her unfamiliar bedside, her eyes slowly moved from one to the other. It was hard to tell if she recognised us at all.

“John”, she said finally, her voice weak and brittle, “it’s happened.”

“What has happened?” David wanted to know but I understood instantly. Francesca however had exited the realms of consciousness as swiftly as she had entered them and dwelt once more in a dream-state between life and death.

There was a sizeable red stain on the cushion. The bite would still not even begin to close naturally and she had lost more blood, so much even it had seeped through the bandaging and into the bedding.

For an hour, none of us moved as we watched over the blonde woman in the bed, Francesca, the life and spirit of the entire faculty, witty and brilliant in both her research and as a person, die.

I had no illusions, at the rapid pace her condition was deteriorating, she would die. At least we could make her comfortable to our best abilities and ensure she would not be alone when the end came.

“She’s growing weaker”, David, who had regained some of his composure, observed.

It was Miss Williams who was brave enough to utter the words neither David nor I wanted to force across our lips.

“She is dying.”

“She is”, I affirmed quietly.

“Is there nothing we can do to save her? For God’s sake, call an ambulance-“

“Do you think they have ever treated something like this before?”

“No”, David conceded.

“Then… Make her one of yours. Go on, do it.”

How quickly his opinion about vampires had changed.

“Do not say anything you don’t mean.”

“I mean it. If this is her- her only chance-“

“I fear I must warn you my existence is not half as simple as you think it is. I must feed, preferably without killing my prey. I do not age and while I look like a human being, I must constantly
conceal that I am not. Ask yourself if this is a burden you would wish upon someone you care about.”

“She could technically still die, as a vampire, couldn’t she?”

“She could. If you think burning alive and in full possession of your senses or having your body pierced with a silver blade or ball is an enviable fate.”

“What about her?” Miss Williams interjected. “Does Dr Montebello not have a say in all this?”

“It is not likely she will wake up anymore or be in the condition to make a decision of such far-reaching and life-changing consequences if she does.”

“So it is down to us three”, she reasoned.

“Her boyfriend- her career- she could still have that, couldn’t she?”, David interjected.

“Yes, if she has been instructed properly. But you must know all of that will die and wither, while she persists.”

“Would you instruct her and, more importantly, do you know how to create a new vampire?”

There are several ways to make someone a vampire. The slow path of infection I had been condemned to take and the swifter path of being bled dry and having a vampire’s blood inserted into one’s body are only two of them.

In theory, I knew how to proceed in order to create a vampire. But never before had I attempted to do it myself.

“I would.”

In fifteen years’ time at the very latest, her friends and family would be suspicious of her not aging. They would ask questions. She would have to die, just like I did.

---And yet I knew of vampires who were happy, espoused to one of their own kind and/or firmly rooted in the community of the dead I tend to shun and moving from town to town, country to country, whenever their human neighbours grow suspicious, who had reconciled in full with their existence, left their human lives behind and found eternal happiness in the most literal sense of the phrase.

Who was I to deny her the chance of happiness, and who was I to dictate that only a human existence could be a happy one only because I had never fully come to terms with my shadowy existence?

Just as a vampire could lead a happy existence, a human could lead an unhappy life. If I were to try and give Francesca eternity, it would be up to her what she made of it, just as she had done with her life.

“I will do it.”

“Have you done it before?” David’s question was legitimate.

“I have not.”
David made a face somewhere between disappointment and horror.

“The bottom line of all this is, she will die anyway, regardless if we decide to interfere with death or not. Let him try. Perhaps she will rise.”

David wanted to say something in response to Miss Williams’ conclusion, but before he could speak what was on his mind, I ended the debate of ethics and philosophy. Time was running out.

“If you want me to do it, I must start now, before she dies naturally. Go and leave the house, you, David, find a way to keep the search for her away from this house, I cannot recommend this sight to any of you, it may be upsetting.”

“I will not leave”, Miss Williams exclaimed agitatedly. “For God’s sake I’m-“ at which she broke of and quickly finished the sentence in a much lower, oddly demure tone, “I am not afraid.”

What could I do? I was in no mood to quarrel, nor did I have the time.

“You will wait downstairs then”, I ordered, “and follow my every order until this is done.”

She nodded solemnly and took David downstairs with her. I could hear them talk for another few minutes but did not allow myself to listen into their conversation because by then, Francesca’s breath had grown particularly shallow. It would not be long now.

Carefully, I removed the bandages.

There was her neck, so pale and so delicate, offering itself to me.

Before I set to work, I heaved her up a little bit and extricated the cushion from underneath her head, rolled it into a vaguely cylindrical shape, and pushed it under her neck, leaving her head to dangle somewhat unpleasantly. This position however provided me with a good position to access her blood vessels.

The other vampire’s bite had been executed with immaculate precision and I could do nothing else but re-use the other predator’s wounds, which left a foul taste in my mouth.

As my teeth found their way beneath her skin, I had to force myself to continue, force myself to drink. There was nothing in the world I would have loved more than to stop this madness, to stop drinking her blood, but I knew I must not and continued, gulping down mouthful after mouthful as a drowning man does sea water.

It was then I realised for the first time drinking blood is not drinking blood- there is a significant difference between enjoying the taste of a stranger and biting someone one has developed a certain fondness of; the latter is not done light-heartedly and does not taste well at all, for the blood is tainted with affection and second thoughts.

And then her heart stopped. I knew I had to infuse her body with my stale, purplish blood somehow but did not know how to proceed for lack of surgical equipment. I would have to improvise and hope for the best. Hopefully, indigestion would suffice.

Across the room, I spied an empty wine glass. I hastened to get it and pulled my bayonet from its sheath that still hung at my side. Next, I rid myself of my coat and pushed the sleeve of my shirt up to reveal the pale skin of my left forearm. A scar, thin and silvery greeted me; the scar of my first feeding on my own body. Biting my lip and knowing full well that vampires are not exempt from feeling pain, I drew the bayonet along its silvery path, held my arm vertically up and the glass underneath the wound, where a persistent flow quickly filled a fourth of it.
Disregarding the stains I left behind on clothes, carpet and bedding, I wrapped my arm around Francesca’s limp body and pulled her up into a half-sitting position, which eased instilling the contents of the glass into her somewhat, leaving eerie dark traces behind on her lips.

For several minutes, nothing happened and I feared something had gone terribly wrong when suddenly, Francesca lifted her upper body, released a sound as if she was attempting to draw in breath and fell back into the cushions, comatose as before.

Remembering what Hewlett had done when I transitioned, which was in this moment, the different path of my transformation aside, the only real information I could act upon, I rolled a scarf into a tight oblong parcel which I inserted in her mouth. I would not want her to hurt herself.

Seeing as she lay completely still, I allowed myself to leave the room for a moment (not without locking the door, of course, one could never know) and went to the bathroom. Nausea overcame me with Francesca’s blood weighing heavily on my stomach and my conscience. Had I done the right thing?

I undid my necktie and knelt down in front of the toilet (a regular feature in every house these days but one that I, being a vampire, never had much use for before) and steadied myself with my left hand by grabbing the seat as I mercilessly jammed two fingers of my right hand into my mouth in order to release the faucial reflex.

In the following five minutes, all of Francesca’s blood left my body under much unpleasant retching and coughing interspersed with a few desperate sobs. What had I got myself into, and most importantly Francesca? Had I done the wrong thing and condemned her to never-ending darkness, just like my faceless creator had me?

When I was done, I flushed and rinsed my mouth with clean, transparent tap water that turned rose-coloured with strands of crimson in it as it exited my mouth and disappeared in the drain. The taste of Francesca’s blood and the strange vampire did not go entirely away.

Perhaps it was time to poison my gustatory sense and mind with alcohol. As there is always some in the house in the rare case I do receive and entertain human visitors and one bottle of sherry that I keep for my own enjoyment and that I take a glass from every now and then, it should be easy. Vampires tolerate even less alcohol than humans, it would be so easy, easier even when I was sixteen-

I could not drink myself into merciful oblivion, I had to take care of Francesca, whom I could by no means leave in the hands of a frightened young woman with no experience with vampires.

-How was Miss Williams doing?

I descended the staircase to check on her after having assured myself Francesca did not require my presence.

“Any news? How is she?”

A dark head looked up to me from the sofa, her face calm, but her restless fingers, busy still (or again?) stroking Diana’s fur with sharp, nervous movements gave her agitated state away.

“I cannot say for certain. At this point it is hard to tell.”

My voice trailed off.

She had turned the TV on to calm her nerves as it seemed, the audio muted.
“You look terrible.”

I could not look her in the eyes and concentrated on the screen instead, watching as someone assembled ingredients in a bowl, mixed them and poured the contents in a mould before I reluctantly allowed myself to look to Miss Williams.

The same could be said of her, her lips a thin, slightly downturned line, her hands trembling slightly, her quick eyes following my every movement as if she didn’t trust me once I exited her field of vision.

“Dead bodies do not tend to look like the fresh flower of life” I retorted wryly.

“That’s not what I meant. You do not look well.” And then she continued, “Colonel, General- what do I call you correctly?”

“General would be acceptable. Though I do not think it bears any meaning in connection to my person in this day. You may just as well address me as you have done before.”

“So it’s true. You are.“

“I am.”

“And-” she hesitated, “have you ever thought of feeding on any of us? On Dr Cooper or me, I mean?”

“I have. It is in my nature to-“

“No more”, she cut me off. “I’ll speak plain, General: need I be afraid of you?”

“No”, I answered her quickly, my voice higher than I would have liked, “I could not harm you.”

“And how is that adding up? Just half a minute ago you said-“

“We have a pact, you and I. When you let me tie your bow this morning, you unwittingly invoked an ancient vampire rite. When a mortal allows a vampire to come close to their neck at their invitation without the implication of feeding, the vampire is bound by promise never to hurt that person.”

“And what happens if the vampire does anyway?”

“Their honour –“

“Nothing, then. These are empty words, we both know it. Honour, valour, chivalry. What a pack of nonsense.”

She gestured dismissively.

“Then how am I to know I am safe here, with you?”

Her question was genuine and not meant to hurt me, and yet it did.

She rose, which displeased the sleeping Diana who was swiftly relocated to the floor greatly, in order to emphasise the seriousness of her question by minimising the height difference between us. She still had to crane her neck to look into my face, but the effect she aimed at was clear.

Defiant, challenging even, hazel eyes scorched mine with their unblinking gaze.
I was not hungry. The aftertaste of Francesca’s blood still on my tongue, feeding was the last thing I craved and yet, a jolt in my abdomen caused me to lean forward, allowed my instincts to govern me as I reached around Miss Williams with determination and drew her close while my other hand guided her face upwards for her lips to meet mine, where they clashed, ice and fire, in a titanic battle.

She waged cruel war against my tongue, threatened the battlements of my sanity when hers came to trace the outline of my cuspids, teasing, waiting for me to respond to this open mockery of my nature, to see how far she could go, and only let go of me momentarily to draw breath, a particularity of kissing not relevant to me before our lips united once more.

She was not afraid of me. Not now, no more. Had she ever been? I could not tell. The next thing I remember is lowering myself downwards, onto the generously-sized sofa, Miss Williams beneath me, my hands undoing the bow I had tied in the morning.

Breaking away from her lips, I planted a soft, reverential kiss where her neck joined her torso and then a second one on the especially tender, sensitive patch of skin below her ear, which prompted her to inhale sharply, as if she suspected I would do what I had promised I would not, her whole body tensing when my mouth came to rest there momentarily, but relaxing equally quickly when I returned to minister to her lips once more. The spell was broken.

Curious hands crept beneath the thin fabric of my shirt and roamed across my back and chest, at which I felt invited to do the same. She looked up at me, positively intrigued.

“You are so cold.”

It was no complaint, it sounded more like utmost curiosity at the still incomprehensible fact of life, or rather death, that I existed.

To be certain the coldness of my skin against hers did not distress her in any way, I withdrew my hands.

“No, please-“

She took my hand and guided it back to her body, from whence it had come and sighed contentedly as my hands grew bolder, venturing lower with every stroke.

She was losing herself in my embrace, as much as I lost myself in hers; there was no need for alcohol to cloud my senses, Miss Williams saw to that quite expertly without requiring me to drink liquids designed for human consumption only.

Suddenly, Miss Williams’ body grew still beneath me. Her eyes that before had hidden behind closed eyelids now searched for mine and found them.

“There is something I need to tell you”, she began, but in the same moment, a gruesome, blood-curdling cry from upstairs wakened us from impassioned half-ignorance and reality began to manifest around us once more.

Francesca.

How could I have allowed myself to-

Miss Williams-

I would have to swallow my feelings of guilt and save them for later.
Quickly, both Miss Williams and I readjusted our clothes to the best of our abilities and hastened upstairs, unprepared for what we were about to find.

Chapter End Notes

The chapter got its name from the motif in Renaissance art.

Some Simcoe-memorabilia were auctioned off by his descendants in the 1920s, among them the colours of the Rangers.

Simcoe's profession in America is inspired by the "Downton Abbey" character Cora Crawley, Countess of Grantham, an American heiress who was sent to England to marry into the British aristocracy as a young woman. At one point in the series she recalls how she was unprepared for her introduction into polite British society and felt odd and left out at first. This is how I had the idea one might, to ease the transfer, hire a British person familiar with these social circles to teach young ladies like Cora before they cross the Atlantic.

Patrick Joseph Kennedy (1858-1929) was the paternal grandfather of JFK.

Simcoe claims he never found out who shot his ear off, but he doesn't think the TV series he despises with all his heart is right. He is wrong. It was Mary. Historical! Simcoe didn't lose an ear in the war, by the way.

Morton Pennypacker (1872-1956) is the amateur historian who discovered Robert Townsend was the man hiding behind the alias "Culper Jr.".

The fact that Simcoe bought the Townsend-house is a small nod to history. Historical! Simcoe was quartered there when he was stationed on Long Island and it was in this house he met and fell in love with Sally Townsend, Robert's sister.

"Aktenzeichen XY... ungelöst" (the BBC's recently axed "Crimewatch" is based on the original German format) presents real unsolved cases to a TV audience. The cases are presented through dramatic recreations of the events, sometimes evidence is shown as well. The viewers are encouraged to call the show's number in case they have any information and some cases have actually been solved this way.

The TV broadcast, very roughly and inelegantly translated, says: "...sadly not all cases can be solved, like that of the British tourist Isabella Williams, who was reported missing in 1997 in Reichenbach, a district of Gengenbach in the Black Forest and later found murdered. Twenty years after the crime took place, the husband of the deceased, who now lives in the US, tries to revive the investigation. 'Aktenzeichen XY... ungelöst' has covered the case in 1997 and will do so again a second time today."

Next up: everything unravels even more...
An (attempted) revolution in the British Empire takes us to the year 1916...

Dublin, Saturday, April 29th 1916.

“Cease fire!” Michael called to his troops. Constance, his second-in-command, stood next to him, her face grave.

Pearse had, on behalf of the entire Provisional Government of the Irish Republic, surrendered the General Post Office unconditionally to the British. The news had just reached them via messenger. The capitulation had been signed yesterday, the messenger had informed them, but due to the heavy fighting across the city it had been hard to get through to the Southside.

It was over.

They had known their cause was lost early on, after MacNeill’s colossal betrayal and the German arm’s deal gone awry it had become clear the rising would not be as big as they’d have liked.

But they had fought for what they believed was right, and they had lasted from Easter Monday until Saturday- which was no insignificant thing.

Constance was sure that despite their failure, they had shown the British what the Irish were made of. Proudly, she re-arranged her uniform as best as she could and called out to her aide who had just re-entered from the rooftop of the building, panting and her eyes widened in fear.

“Constance, we-“

“No more, Kat. We surrender. Pearse gave the GPO to the British yesterday.”

Kat, her friend, aide and comrade, looked at her in horror.

“God help us.”

“And Ireland”, Michael added gloomily.

The remaining men and women inside the Royal College of Surgeons were gathered and marched out onto St. Stephen’s Green where the British were already waiting for them. Kat walked first, her handkerchief that was more red than white from having been tied around her arm when a British bullet had grazed her on Wednesday while on duty on the rooftop overseeing their troops shooting at the oppressive army below tied to the handle of a broom as their makeshift flag of surrender.

Ireland would remain unfree, there never had been earnest British intentions to grant Ireland Home Rule and they wouldn’t give it to the Irish now that they had failed in the endeavour of freeing their country from John Bull’s tyranny for good.
Eight hundred years of cold oppression— you’d think more Irish would have flocked to the cause. At least they had held out and shown London that Ireland, though in chains, was fighting to assert her natural right to nationhood.

She felt as if she was watching the scene from far away; their weapons were taken from them, their troops surrounded and marched off.

What would happen next? She would die, as would Connolly, Pearse and the rest. Those bastards in Westminster would make sure to make an example of them, show the public how Britain, even at war, was capable of dealing with a bunch of ragtag insurrectionists.

Constance had no illusions; they’d shoot the leaders of Easter Week, and as Lieutenant in the Irish Citizen Army and Michael’s second, she would be no exception. Not that it bothered her. She was prepared to give her life for her country. For a moment, she thought of her daughter, her husband and stepson. They’d have to do without her. And perhaps one day, they would understand why she had been prepared to give up her life for her country. They would have to.

A woman’s voice ripped her from her thoughts.

“Have a little care, will you?”

It was Kat, who extricated her injured arm from the grip of a soldier trying to push her back in line. Kat was weary, not having slept for several days; food and water supplies had been scarce. It was no wonder her friend had almost lost her footing when she had stumbled over a piece of debris on the ground. Like most participants, Kat had not been a soldier accustomed to combat before the rising.

She was a delicate thing, fine-boned, but surprisingly tenacious underneath the soft, pale skin of a woman raised to live a comfortable life spent sitting in drawing rooms and drinking tea all day.

“Have you not been taught basic manners in your home, you uncivilised idiot?”

Kat may have been weary, but, much as her name indicated, she was still in possession of her sharp teeth and claws and prepared to strike, even in the hopelessness of their situation.

Michael looked at Constance, begging her to shut her friend up, it had been her after all who had brought Kat along.

They’d met at Slade School in London years ago, studying art. Both members of the NUWSS, their paths had crossed during classes and at meetings and rallies and they had occasionally talked to each other, without any greater interest in furthering their acquaintance.

Somehow, they had met again a few years later not far from here at the Shelbourne Hotel and Kat had come over to her table, an “I believe we have met” on her lips. She had answered yes, had it been in London?, and they had started to talk, finding they shared a number of views and opinions. In fact, it had been Constance who had enlisted Kat for the cause. She hadn’t pressured her friend to join, it had been her decision entirely, but when Constance’s involvement with the ICA and CnamB had increased, Kat had approached her and asked to join. What her motive was, though, she could only guess.

Frankly, Constance didn’t know much about Kat, other than her name (which had, if she remembered correctly, been a different one in their Slade-days, where she had only known her by her surname, “Spinckes”– had she married in the meantime? Or maybe divorced even? They never talked about family. Perhaps it was the cause. Knowing death would be a constant reality for them...
in the time leading up to Easter week, they had not burdened themselves with talk of their families and sentimental recollections of favourite memories. Getting too close, too attached to one another in wartime, especially now that the war had, for a week come to Ireland, was unwise, though Constance was sure she had mentioned Casimir and the children once or twice in passing at least during their five years of thorough acquaintance and eventual friendship.) that she was a skilled artist and that they shared a good deal of their political views but if she would have had to guess, she would never have believed Kat would join them in Dublin.

There were lots of Anglo-Irish, such as herself, among their ranks, most of them spearheads of the failed revolution, but Kat was not one of them.

All she knew about her family was that Kat had been an only child. There was no talk of any other family and she had never asked her friend- on the rare occasions they had talked about personal matters, not politics, she had been very evasive and never said much. Kat seemed to be wealthy in her own right though, at least wealthy enough to pay for a life in London with occasional visits to Ireland. She was always well-dressed, usually in rich, dark colours that complimented her chocolate-coloured hair and eyes that oscillated between the green of the meadows in Sligo and the glow of flames in the fireplace, depending on the lighting.

William would love her. Perhaps that was the reason why Constance had never introduced the two, however if she had, he would write binders worth of poetry about her eyes, her body, that seemed much too small and fragile to carry out duties at the front line but obviously housed the strength of two of her size and her bravery and likely liken her to an ancient goddess or queen from Ireland’s past.

She was no conventional beauty, yet her face was free of the lines that had begun to settle on Constance’s in the years after they first met and her grace and poise equalled those of the ladies at court. Oftentimes Constance had pondered on her friend’s secretive air and wondered if she might be the illegitimate child of a member of the royal family or an influential politician whose existence had to be kept secret for fear of starting a scandal. It all made sense to her; Kat was some duke’s, duchesses or politician’s daughter who could not be acknowledged publicly nor be seen in society, which accounted for the money she obviously owned, possibly in generous monthly allowances designed to keep her mouth shut, given her frequent visits to Ireland and her fashionable attire and who had now turned on those responsible for her half-shadowy existence by supporting the cause in Ireland and thus undermining their authority.

“Of course, your ladyship”, their commander taunted bitterly, “we’ll show you to your new accommodation in Kilmainham Palace straight away.”

Some of the soldiers gave a low laugh, the majority however remained silent, the fighting and the sights of lives lost or irreparably damaged still fresh on their minds. With the war raging in France, none of them had thought they’d fight an enemy hiding in trenches in St Stephen’s Green in the heart of the Empire.

They were rounded up on the green in front of Rotunda Hospital, where the other commanders and their units who had been closer to or in the GPO were already waiting. They’d spent the night there out in the open and under constant ill-treatment of their jailors.

Weary faces greeted them. Some showed defiance, others fear, not knowing what would happen to them once this was over.

Ordered to stand in rows, two British officers took the newcomers’ names.

“Name?”
“Seamus O’Hara.”

“Age?”

“Fifteen.”

“Run along, lad.”

The women and the young ones were let off, Constance noticed. It was generous of them, given that a girl or a fifteen-year-old could shoot a Tommy just like a thirty-year-old man could.

They wouldn’t let her off to be sure.

“Name?”

The officer had reached Kat. Constance was next in line.

She showed no fear, as so many others had done, men and boys who had bowed their heads and muttered unintelligibly when their turn had come. Kat on the other hand held her head high and looked the officer directly in the eye with a defiance that seemed to unsettle the man.

“Katherine Stamford.”

Her voice was clear and heavy with a certain almost aristocratic ennui as if she were introducing herself to a rather boring dancing partner at a ball. She would have fit in much better at an English society ball, Constance mused, dressed in her favourite evening dress of a stunning crimson hue than standing here in her dirtied, bloodied uniform with her hair dishevelled and having gone without a bath for a week.

She did not quite fit in despite the uniform, despite her energy and keenness for the cause. Something about her puzzled Constance.

Even Kat’s voice signalled everyone who heard it that she was no Irishwoman by either birth or upbringing.

Both she and Pearse, whose parentage had united the blood of the Saxons and the Celts in their veins, had been raised to be members of Ireland’s upper echelons of society and their voices sounded accordingly- their schooling had included elocution lessons to get the children to blend in with their English peers- or English peers in general, yet no matter how thorough their training, a slight lilt, a melodic hint of their Celtic blood had manifested on their tongues nevertheless.

Kat’s English by contrast was pristine and untainted by any regional colouring. She sounded like one would imagine the well-bred daughter or wife of someone important to sound like- the exact opposite of a wild rebel getting her hands dirty in active combat.

Just as the officer wanted to ask her for her age, as he had done with everyone before her, her composure seemed to crumble and she pointed at a young man in a British uniform.

“Turn around-“ she ordered, her voice oddly agitated and instinctively, after years of drill, the man turned without questioning the source of the command.

He was tall, of no remarkable looks and clean-shaven. His eyes were almost black, his nose straight, and where the hair showed beneath his slightly lopsided cap, strands of brownish-red hair showed.
“No”, Kat said sadly, dropping her eyes to the floor, her voice considerably softer than before, “I am sorry, sir. I am afraid I got carried away- you reminded me of someone dear to me, that is all.”

Obviously unsure what to do, the man gave her a nod and went his way.

The situation was odd indeed. The English rebel lady calling out to a soldier, the enemy?

Had she any relations here in Dublin? So many men and women fighting for Ireland had pro-British family. Was Kat one of them?

Had the soldier reminded her of a cousin or brother she had thought, feared, expected or dreaded to meet?

The officer taking their names studied her from head to toe, as if he was unsure what to do with her.

“Walk off.”

For one moment, Kat stood petrified.

“Go for God’s sake”, Constance hissed in an agitated whisper low enough so their captors wouldn’t hear. “We’ll have enough martyrs without you. No need to be silly. Leave, lie low for a while. The cause’s going to need people when this is over, too. The revolution never ends.”

She nudged Kat into motion with her elbow who stumbled uncharacteristically without elegance from the line. Her friend was weaker than she had thought. Hopefully, she would be able to convalesce somewhere soon.

“Goodbye, Con. I admire your bravery. Non sibi sed patriae”, her friend said reverentially instead of a more traditional farewell.

“I know. Now go.”

In truth, she had no idea why her friend kept repeating this particular Latin phrase over and over other than perhaps she thought infusing one’s speech with Latin phrases sounded impressive, but its meaning was clear. Not for one’s self, but for one’s country.

Their eyes met one last time, knowing Con would be arrested while Kat was free to go.

“That’s enough chatting!”

The officer barked and reluctantly and Kat moved towards the gate, towards freedom.

Later, locked up in a grey-walled cell with a lot of time to think on her hands, Constance wondered why they had let Kat off.

It was likely her face, she looked much younger than she was and her hazel eyes, despite their fierceness, could give the perfect impression of Innocence Personified, even if her mouth lashed out in all directions like a cat-o’-nine-tails.

Hopefully, Kat would disappear abroad as soon as she could, perhaps to the British mainland where she would blend in and could lie low and live off her money until Ireland’s call would summon her back one day or to America, where the Irish were not particularly welcome from all she had heard, but there were societies and people sympathetic to the cause who would likely embrace a rich lady prepared to support their mission with money with open arms.
There would be a loss of life to come, blood would flow. The revolution was far from over - the inevitable that was about to happen was only an episode in history, time would pass and her country rise again, as it had done so many times before and with a little luck and the determination of the men and women who would lead it, their revolution would be successful.

Maybe in a few years, when grass would overgrow her grave and those of her co-conspirators, as the officer in charge of overseeing the downtrodden mass of defeated nationalists had called them, people like Kat and the others that had been let go would be needed as the architects of the next attempt of freeing Éire from her chains.

She turned for a last time to see her friend disappear between the houses.

To her own surprise, Constance didn’t die. Court-martialed and convicted, yes, but not shot by firing squad like her male compatriots and leader of what slowly became to be known as the “Easter Rising”.


Locked up in Kilmainham Gaol and later in Aylesbury Prison in England, she often thought of the fallen, sometimes of her family and on some occasions of Kat.

In November, a letter from Eva reached her.


My dear Con,

I hope you are well, as well as your circumstances allow. I am sorry, I cannot bring myself to write more pleasant things to you to cheer you up or raise your spirits.

Sister mine, something terrible has happened.

On November 3rd, the passenger ship Connemara sank off Greenore in Co. Louth on her way to Holyhead at eight o’clock in the evening, having collided with a cargo ship.

Among the 90 dead is someone you have often told me about. Her body remains unaccounted for, yet her purse was found washed ashore not far from where the ship sank.

In it were documents, surprisingly well-preserved despite having been exposed to the sea water, a cheque book signed Fiona Coneely and a letter she had obviously wanted to and forgotten to post to someone in London, signed Katherine Stamford in the exactly same hand. She must have been traveling under a false name, it was concluded, and through enquiries, her ties to the events of Easter week were uncovered and exposed, which caused quite a stir in the press.

It is assumed that she is dead, lost at sea.

You have my deepest condolences, sister, and those of all here who pray for you, your welfare and your release. I will write to you again soon, when I can hope to bring you news of happier things.
Con inhaled deeply. Silly, silly Kat. Why had she only tried to flee now and more importantly, what business did she have in Ireland after Easter? Had she been planning something?

What a cruel trick of fate Kat had survived holding her post on top of the College of Surgeons, bullets whizzing past her head and one even grazing her only to die in a terrible accident and drown in the Irish sea.

Saddened by the sudden and unexpected loss, Constance held back a tear.

What cruel irony of fate, she, who had expected to die, lived, while Kat, who should have lived, had died a sudden and needless death. If only she had done what Constance had told her.

So she had been wrong. For Kat, the revolution was over.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked the brief excursion to the past.

While the year 1916 is usually associated with WW I, the Easter Rising in Ireland is less well known. In this chapter, I make several allusions to people and places important to the historical events that I can't list in full here because it would exceed the character limit. Broadly speaking, most things in these chapter, from the locations of the Rising like the General Post Office, the Royal College of Surgeons or St Stephen's Green park to its outcome, to the ferry tragedy on November 3rd 1916, are historically accurate.

Constance Markievicz, her sister Eva Gore-Booth, Michael Mallin, under whom Constance Markievicz fought in the St Stephen's Green command, Eoin MacNeill, James Connolly etc. are historical figures who were all active in the Easter Rising or in its immediate surroundings.

MacNeill called out to his Irish Volunteers not to partake in the Rising and there was indeed an arm's deal with Germany, the details of which would be too lengthy to describe here, but which is well worth reading up on if you are interested in secret operations.

The man only referred to as "William" is W. B. Yeats, famous author and childhood friend of Constance and Eva, whose difficult relationship with women is well-known.

"Kilmainham Palace": the officer means to joke about taking Kat to Kilmainham Gaol, the prison most rebels were first imprisoned for the time being.

"Non sibi sed patriae"- the motto of, among other institutions and families, the US Navy.

Abbreviations:
ICA - Irish Citizen Army
CnamB - Cumman na mBan, women's paramilitary organisation
NUWSS - National Union of Women's Sufferage Societies
Chapter Summary

A (verbal) dressing down, Simcoe in a dressing gown and a new vampire in town.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Scotland was not as she had expected. The children thought she was visiting an ailing relation in Northamptonshire, but that was only something she had told them in order to keep them from asking any questions.

It was wet, it was windy and she half-expected the witches from Hamlet to lurk by the roadside and warn her of coming dangers on the road or prophesise her endeavour would be ill-fated.

The carriage rocked back and forth, left and right most uncomfortably and the wind and rain, some of which managed to creep into the carriage through small crevices here and there, did their best to make the journey even more intolerable.

She tried to sleep, but couldn’t. And when she did it was only to dream of this very Scottish landscape, dreary and threatening in the dark, which she wandered alone, lost, calling out a name that had died on her lips many years ago. She had never spoken his name since that terrible day almost five years ago.

At last, the carriage stopped. The windows of the tiny house (it was not too small, but compared to her own home, it was) were alight, so someone must be home.

She descended and hurried to the house, telling the driver to find himself a dryer place to stay, perhaps at the village inn a mile behind them and come for her in two hours.

Her knock at the door was answered by a middle-aged woman of Irish extraction, judging by her accent, who frowned at the visitor who looked most unlike a passing wanderer, but admitted her to the drawing room when she asked to be shown to the owners of this place.

“I am sorry, my husband and my son are not here, they’re tending to a sick foal”, a woman’s voice greeted her.

“We don’t often receive visitors, especially not in this weather. What brings you here?”

It was her, undoubtedly her.

The accent that had despite her time in Scotland apparently not faded, marked her clearly as American.

A part of her wanted to dislike her deeply already, another, more reasonable one told her to remain patient. Events of days gone by that had had nothing to do with her should not concern or taint her mission now.

“I was passing through this village on my way to Edinburgh”, she lied quickly, “I changed
coaches in Dumfries and was surprised by such bad weather a few miles behind the town. My driver and the horses are in the village; he is a local man and insisted not to bring me to the village inn, for he considers it an inappropriate dwelling for a woman. Trusting his judgement, he told me this house would be hospitable to a woman in need.”

The lies, long fabricated and practiced on her journey, flowed easily from her mouth.

“Of course”, the American smiled, tucking a strand of grey hair that had once been dark back underneath her cap. She was somewhat older than herself, perhaps the age of her husband, but she looked as stunning as any young woman with her big, dark eyes and the soft wrinkles that only accentuated the ageing beauty’s features to their advantage. Never before had she seen a woman so beautiful in age.

“Anna Hewlett”, she introduced herself.

“Philomena Cooke”, the other woman said lightly, remembering the name of some insufferable creature she had once had the misfortune to be introduced to.

“You aren’t Scottish”, she said to Mrs Hewlett, trying to strike up a conversation.

“No, I’m from Long Island. I came here with my husband, who was a major in the army at the time of the war-”

“How romantic! But let me ask, is your husband the Major Edmund Hewlett? The famous astronomer?”

Of course he was, but she had to play innocent and dumb for a while.

“Yes. Have you read his publications?”

“Indeed, I have! Your husband is a personal hero and a most progressive scientist! I fancy he shall have his knighthood soon if his discoveries continue to come at such a fast pace.”

Anna Hewlett smiled and poured her guest a cup of tea from a tray the housekeeper had brought in.

“Oh, but I also heard your husband writes other things. About darker topics.”

“I do not know what you mean.”

Suddenly, Anna Hewlett’s voice had grown stone-cold and defensive. She decided to lay siege to Mrs Hewlett’s defences through charm and flattery.

“Mrs Hewlett, I beg you, it is well known in certain circles your husband has written a book about vampires. Is it true he has seen one?”

Mrs Hewlett only looked at her uneasily. She likely wanted her to leave the house again as soon as possible.

“I don’t think so. Vampires don’t exist.”

She had not hunted this ominous book and travelled the long way from the south-east to the north to be sent away with no better information than this.

“But is it not romantic to think they exist?” With satisfaction she observed how slipping into the persona of “Philomena Cheer” came surprisingly natural to her the longer she did it.
“To think, there are some dwelling among us who have been there to see the reign of Elizabeth I, or witnessed the Great Fire in 1666? Who are eternally young and beautiful? It does seem quite a thrilling thought to me.”

“Well… Seeing as you know about the book… I’ve told Edmund time and time again… I’ll go and fetch him, if he can leave the foal…”

"What a pack of nonsense! Don’t trouble your husband”, she chirped, and meant the exact opposite.

Anna Hewlett left the room, calling for the maid or housekeeper to fetch her pelisse. Moments later, the door fell shut and she was alone.

Where was the housekeeper? Was the woman anywhere near? If she was quick enough- She had seen the door of the study standing invitingly open, an act of servantly negligence she would use now.

There was no telling how many more were still in the house, servants, members of the family, she’d have to risk it, be quick and back in the drawing room before Hewlett or his wife returned.

Fortune favours the bold, she told herself, who had never conducted a secret mission like this before, and silently entered the study after reassuring herself nobody was watching.

She rummaged in the desk, only to prick her fingers on the sharp metal edges of some outlandish-looking tools used in astronomy and found nothing of interest among the stashes of paper, either. Nought but bills, invitations and a scientist’s correspondence.

Beneath a map of the northern hemisphere, she found a note, written in the same neat hand that seemed to belong to the esteemed astronomer and secret vampire-scholar Edmund Hewlett.


Mr. N. F. 13 Grenville Terrace, London

Expert in matters concerning-

Footsteps approached. She had been too inattentive. Quickly, she slipped the paper into her bosom and looked around. She could finish reading it later.

They would find her, and what would they say or do then?

Wait.

The window. She was not a young woman anymore, far from it, but she had always been agile. She tore the window open, leaving her hat and coat behind, climbed onto the windowsill with the help of a nearby chair and jumped into the rainy night.

“Edmund!” she could hear a cry from the distance, but she knew she was too far away for them to see her running through the pouring rain. If she continued at this pace, she could reach the village within the hour and before her driver would set off to the house.

Panting, she ignored the stitches in her side and battled on against the wind and rain.

She could only hope her little find, still dry where she kept it, was worth all this trouble.
I tore the door to my bedroom open.

Francesca knelt on the bed, wailing and howling like a frightened animal. Her hands were buried in her hair that was a far cry from the glossy curls so many secretly envied her for, dull and brittle like straw, it stuck out in all direction from her head.

She was pale, very pale, which I took as a partial success, if it could be called one, for she was most definitively a vampire now.

A newly transitioned one though, inexperienced, in pain and not knowing yet what had happened to her.

The scarf I had used to prevent her from hurting herself while teething lay in pieces on the bed, bloodied and soaked with saliva.

“Francesca, please, stop”, I tried to talk to her upon seeing she was tearing bushels of hair from her own head, but she seemed not to hear me and continued.

The most dangerous thing about her was the fact that she was likely not aware of her new strength yet that surpassed that of a human being, which would enable her to do a lot of involuntary damage should it come to an outburst, to herself, to me and to Miss Williams.

Miss Williams remained standing at the door, unsure what to do. Her decision not to come closer to Francesca had been instinctively right: who could tell how a hungry Francesca would react to a warm-blooded being?

I could never have forgiven myself had something happened to Miss Williams.

She observed from a distance as I tried to reason with Francesca, appeal to the mind embedded in her raging body but reason was for the moment trumped by force and she battled against me with her hands, feet and even mouth when she, either out of her newly awakening urges or the will to inflict pain on me almost managed to bite my hand.

I had forgotten how strong new vampires could be, or other vampires in general. Throughout the centuries, I have not exactly sought for their company and only on very few occasions have I come into a situation in which my physical force was measured against that of a fellow vampire.

“I’m here, you’re not alone”, I tried to tell her as I made an attempt to restrict her arms with my hands in order to keep her from hurting herself, which she had already done; the scratch marks of her fingernails, somewhat resembling what happened if one chose to antagonise Diana, had turned her forearms into a mass of pale white and red.

“No, no, you mustn’t hurt yourself. It will all be over soon”, I tried to comfort her, but it was no use.

Her eyes stared blankly into the distance, as if I were not made of dead flesh but air. Presently, she dwelt in her own world, in which neither I nor Miss Williams existed.
“Can I do something? Help somehow?” Miss Williams asked in a low, possibly somewhat horrified voice.

This was too much for Francesca. She seemed to have taken notice of Miss Williams’ warm blood and threw her body against mine like a battering ram, trying to struggle free to get to the young woman standing in the doorway, hissing, and saliva bloody with the new wounds her cuspids had torn dripping from the corners of her mouth.

She was violent, as violent probably as I had been during my partial transition at sixteen. Despite the fact that her immediate full transition should have meant her ordeal would proceed more swiftly and less of the exercise in torture I endured over the course of thirteen years, her cries of pain rang in my head with the sound of my own voice.

I should never have attempted making her a vampire. What if something had gone wrong and I had created this wretched, miserable human-like shell devoid of mind and reason, condemned to spend eternity in this state, forever shackled to the mercy of a kindred vampire prepared to care for her and keep her away from causing harm or being harmed? I would do it, it was I who had created her and I would not neglect my obligation.

But what if harm would come to me, if I were to be extinguished, either by unfortunate circumstances or on purpose?

I had survived the late nineteenth century- when vampires, werewolves and other creatures of the dark which humans classify as products of their dull imagination, which could never produce anything remotely as terrifying as a vampire in Francesca’s current state, and a series of gruesome deaths in London’s shadowy back alleys sparked the hunt for supernatural creatures.

Throughout my existence, both as a human and a vampire, there had been cases of humans hunting for creatures. Just before I transitioned, France revelled in the gory fascination of *La Bête du Gévaudan*, the Beast of Gévaudan, a wolf-like creature many considered to be a werewolf. Officially, nobody would openly admit it was a werewolf, but according rumours and pamphlets were spread and, as far as my knowledge goes based on what my twelve-year-old self eagerly devoured from cheap magazines or the retellings thereof by friends, lynchings had been carried out against suspected members of the affected communities for the slightest of reasons and killed in the most brutal manner.

In the autumn of 1888, eighty-two years after my supposed death, the Whitechapel Murders gained international news coverage and sparked fear throughout London, even the empire.

The brutality of these murders was unprecedented, at least unprecedented with regards to the relatively fast news coverage and gradual alphabetisation that had slowly begun to ring the death knell of the old world I had known and could still somewhat recognise, and caused the interest among those believing in the existence of malevolent half-human things lurking in the darkness to pack their guns and silver bullets, crosses and garlic (quite frankly, garlic does not only repel vampires but fellow human beings also; which makes it a quite effective weapon against any possible attacker, regardless whether they’re warm or corpse-cold) and hunt for the likes of me all over the world.

Vampires and werewolves went into hiding and I considered myself lucky to have relocated to the United States, where people devoured the news from Britain with the same fascination as they had *A Study in Scarlet*, considering the murders an exciting past-time to follow in the newspapers, crimes most dark and shocking, happening in a country they imagined to be ridden with ghosts, spirits and everything gothic imaginable.
Not all did, however and so, I had at one point found myself with a silver blade held to my neck by a neighbour in one of the houses I resided in during my time in Boston.

Ridiculously enough, the only reason why he had come to think I might be a vampire was that I was British, which the sing-song twang of my voice gives away freely to everyone who hears it, extremely pale (which is ridiculous also; for even in life, I have never been particularly susceptible to the tanning-effects of sunlight, which is no miracle given my hair colour; on the contrary, like a vampire, I was more often scorched by direct exposure to sunlight than kissed by it like others) and had only recently moved in (though I had by that time been living in the US for decades), which suggested, to him at least, that I was not only the Whitechapel-killer who had fled from British law enforcement to America but also a vampire, thanks to my physical attributes.

Had I not felt the silver through the fabric of my collar, I would have laughed. Surely, I was not “Jack the Ripper”, nor a vampire, who would believe such arrant nonsense?

Yes, I was British, from England even and yes I was pale and yes I had recently moved in. But if these were his only motives to murder me, the court in which my murder would be discussed would show no mercy to him.

Bewildered by my reaction, he had dropped the blade (I instantly wrestled it from his hands and confiscated the item, which was thankfully possible because the handle was covered in tortoiseshell). Pity, he told me, he had had the blade made especially in case a vampire would attack him and asked rather demurely if I would consider giving it back to him.

No, I replied, I would most definitively not, for fear of the harm he would cause the next person whom he suspected to be non-human, and had instead, out of sheer pity, invited him inside to share a glass of wine with me.

I moved out soon after, last I heard the conspiracy-theorist was put into an asylum by relatives who apparently much like me had to suffer from his persistent obsession of being hunted by, and in turn hunting, vampires, witches, zombies, werewolves and whatnot.

One deranged man, living alone in the flat below me and likely suffering from mental episodes rooted in decades of alcohol abuse, which I to my shame only found out about after I had offered him wine and he instead insisted on a glass of water, could have ended me then and there. On this day, I understood how precarious my existence truly was. I kept his dagger as a warning, and, if it should ever come to that, as a weapon I could use should I ever have to defend myself.

Today, it amuses me how all the “symptoms” my neighbour had used to diagnose me no longer spark fear of a murderous vampire, but rather lead to the exact opposite: male red-haired celebrities, preferably with an old-worldly sense of dress and an impeccable English accent are perceived as attractive and their pallor is jokingly attributed to the fact that, as everyone knows, the sun never breaks through the clouds in England.

And even if someone were to find out I was a vampire, at least one of the female sex and belonging to the generation that has suffered through the annoyingly misleading and saccharine tales of chivalrous teenage-vampire extraordinaire Edward Cullen and his mortal Swan(-necked) Bella, they would likely rather throw themselves at me and ask me if I too sparkle in the sunlight.

Which I absolutely do not and no self-respecting vampire not covered in sparkly body lotion does.

What would Miss Williams have thought of me, if not Francesca’s tragic fate had torn the façade of the gentleman-scholar off my face and I would have had the time to reveal my true self to her, and to David, perhaps, at a chosen and prepared moment?
Would I have? Most likely, not. But if it had had to be done under different circumstances, I would have much preferred to keep my mask on for longer without having to be forced to show them the brutal killer I am and know I can be outright.

With another vampire waging a physical onslaught against me, Miss Williams was no longer safe in my company (if she ever had been).

“Go. While you still can.”

“No. I said I wouldn’t leave you.”

“Your stubbornness is of no use and I will not have three vampires in this house when this day is done only because of your insistence to remain here.”

“I will stay.”

She understood my words, she understood the risks and still, she would not move. Was this spectacle feeding a morbid curiosity I would never have thought her capable of?

“Your arrogance will not save you from death. If you want to preserve your mortal life, go.”

“Your arrogance will not save yourself from yourself.”

Before I could ask what she meant by this and express how hurt I felt at her unjustly rude retort given the current situation we found ourselves in, Francesca kicked me in the abdomen.

I had not seen this move coming and could do nothing to prevent it; crouching, I let go of her arms and Francesca managed to get up from the bed, standing insecurely on her feet like a new-born foal before her eyes, hungry, found Miss Williams.

The second I realised what she was having in mind, or rather what her new instincts demanded her to do, I did my best to disregard the pain in my abdomen and wrestled her back onto bed.

“Calm yourself, it will be all right”, I repeated like a mantra, but to no avail.

I could not continue like this for the rest of the night.

“If you want to help me, go and fetch ropes, cable ties, whatever you can find in the cellar.”

She nodded gravely and went away without a word.

The previous owner of the house had been a handyman for the entire neighbourhood and, at his passing, left many supplies behind which his children, who had sold the house, did not bother picking up to dispose of them in the proper fashion and had left behind for me to deal with.

This time, and this time only I was, although I can neither say happy nor glad, relieved his sundry supplies came in handy.

Ten minutes later, Miss Williams returned with enough rope of such a quality that is used to tie young trees to the poles that hold them upright.

“Here-“ arms outstretched, she drew somewhat closer than the last time, though still keeping at a distance from the bed, where Francesca begun to growl hungrily at the sound of the human’s voice.

“You need not watch.”
“I know what you’re doing.”

“It... it is not a sight I would want you to witness.”

“I can take care of myself and I understand why.”

“It’s for her own safety. And ours. It’s for her own good”, I echoed the words that had been spoken so long ago by people long dead when I had been lain out on a bed and the same had been done to me.

Of course, I had no intention to torture Francesca for weeks or months; until this day I cannot even estimate the duration of my own ordeal and I vowed I would release her as soon as she returned to a conscious state of mind and her body had adjusted somewhat to her new, sharpened senses.

From all I had heard from other vampires, this could be anything between one and forty-eight hours.

I had no idea where on the spectrum Francesca would fall, given that she had reacted unfavourably to vampire blood before.

Tying her down was not easy to do, and I do not speak of her body writhing and her limbs flailing, once a part of her mind, deeply buried within her, understood what was happening.

It hurt me deeply to see her struggle, her arms and legs secured with ropes and more than once I needed to summon all my willpower to continue and block out the sounds of my own cries, the voice of my mother and the feeling of the doctor’s strong, meaty fingers around my wrists and ankles.

As opposed to what had been done to me, I had bound her legs together, tightly as a mermaid’s tail, but still loose enough not to cut in her flesh and secured her arms at her sides, remembering the terrible numbness and needle-prick like pain that had been inflicted on me by tying me up in the shape of St Andrew’s cross.

All she could do now was glare at me as doubtlessly I had done at my captors as well, hissing like a cat, fangs bare when I came to put a blanket over her in an ridiculously helpless attempt to make her more comfortable.

I turned away from her, leaving her to herself in hopes it would calm her to be alone in the dark, as it had done me.

My own transition was the only thing I could draw experience from; I was doing all I could and yet wondered if I was doing everything wrong.

Silently, I closed the door, locked it, and brushed Miss Williams’ arm to tell her silently, as to not upset Francesca even more, to follow me downstairs.

I led her to my office, where I drew the dagger of my former Boston neighbour from a secret compartment hidden in the antique desk and put it in her hands.

“For your use”, I explained.

“It is made of silver. Make use of it, if you are under threat, you must promise me to do that.”

With disbelief, she drew the weapon from its sheath, her eyes widening before her brows furrowed.
“Are you giving it to me now because of Dr Montebello?” She asked carefully.

“Yes, in part. You must use it against any vampire or werewolf, if you happen to meet one, who threatens you, your well-being or anybody else you consider worthy of saving from a terrible fate.”

“Even against you?”

Her voice had grown softer with concern, I noticed.

“Even against me”, I replied slowly, evading her eyes.

In my mind, I watched from a third-person perspective how my eyes widened in shock as the dagger lodged itself between my ribs and straight into my heart at Miss Williams’ hand.

_I may have signed my actual death warrant_, I thought, and did not know whether to feel upset about it or not. Had I not wished for peaceful, eternal sleep for so long and would not Miss Williams doing it be better than die at the hand of someone else I didn’t-

“How could I use this against you? You haven’t done anything to me.”

“Not yet. Did I not tell you I contemplated to bite you on several occasions? How sweet destroying you would taste, how exquisite it would feel to break your skin with my teeth in a pretend-kiss in our office, where nobody would hear your pleas for mercy-“

I spared her no detail and embellished my tale even further with base lust and cruelty. She had to know what brute forces of unnatural darkness she was facing now that she had learned about their existence and more than brushed with them. If I could repel her now, push her far enough away and thus move her out of danger, I would do everything it might take to keep her safe, even if that meant hurting her with words. And yet, a part of me, selfish and honourless, did not want her to leave.

“But you swore you wouldn’t-“

She swallowed hard, digesting the words I had hurled at her.

“And you pointed out quite correctly that a promise means nothing.”

“If this is so, you cannot ask me to promise I will use this blade against you, or at all, that is.”

She had caught the error in my logic. While I was still contemplating my next move after having manoeuvred myself into difficult terrain, she continued:

“And what happened between us, or almost happened”, she blushed, “does that mean nothing? You could have fed on me and you didn’t.”

“It means something”, I conceded. “It means I managed to restrain myself for a few minutes.”

“You managed for longer than that. I cannot say I am not alarmed. I am. I am upset. About your nature. I didn’t know vampires existed up until today. Not about you. You have never been anything less than polite and friendly to me. You need to come to terms with who you are, and what you are. There is a difference, I think. Once you understand that-“

“Do not try to reform me. Do you think you are the first trying to make me a ‘better man’? I have wandered this earth for over two hundred and fifty years, you are hardly the first and will hardly be the last.”
The defiance and determination on her features shocked me.

“Perhaps I am.”

I could feel a bitter smirk travel to my lips and knew that once I opened my mouth, my voice would come out higher even than usual.

“Please, don’t tell me you’re one of these young ladies having a poster of Edward Cullen hanging over their bed years after the popular craze has died down and who obsessively fantasise about having their own devoted immortal to pet? Have you considered being bedded by me for the sole thrill of the novelty experience or was it on the whims of a feeble romantic mind impressed by the handsome media caricatures humans call vampires? I am not handsome, I do not tend to rescue damsels in distress and I most certainly do not sparkle.”

Miss Williams suppressed a mirthless laugh.

“Are you mocking me? First of all, you didn’t almost ‘bed’ me. I was in on this, too. Don’t make me a helpless little puppet that doesn’t know her own mind. Secondly, I didn’t even watch *Twilight*, though you apparently did, and I didn’t read the books, either. And thirdly, you are a coward, and if I am the only one who ever told you this, so be it. A coward who selfishly indulges in the miserable darkness you have built up around yourself, like a wall. I don’t know what you’ve been through, but you’re far too easily dismissing everything as being because you are a vampire. The vampire in you makes you hungry for blood, but it’s John Graves Simcoe who makes the decision to bite.”

“You wrong me, madam.”

“Oh, so formal now? I don’t wrong you, I *compliment* you, General. But on this field, you can’t win.”

I could no longer hold myself back, rage flooded my senses and the world before my eyes began to focus on Miss Williams.

“The thing is, you didn’t bite me because you didn’t want to, for whatever reasons. Maybe because you were having enough fun together with me as it was, maybe because you’re secretly a hopeless romantic who watches all these vampire films on telly that make you afraid you are walking and talking mess of un-dead clichés, or maybe you actually are a decent person who cares about others deep inside. Who knows? All I know is you can’t just-“

“I am a monster. Never forget that.”

I did not know what else to say or how to warn her any better; was it not commonplace knowledge that monsters are best not provoked?

“You are a warrior, not a monster, hell, did we not watch that episode together?” She snorted, a hint of bone-dry humour in her voice.

“But there is no heart beating inside me that wants the same thing you do.”

“For someone who hates the show you have an excellent memory of individual scenes. And you definitively want *to love, and to be loved*. The heart as the centre of love is only a stupid concept anyway.”

She was very rude and I felt that I ought to be offended and show her to the door, and yet, I was curious what Miss Williams had to say.
“How would you know?”

“If you wouldn’t care about people, you wouldn’t have been there for Francesca like this. You cared for her when she was dying and you will be the one who initiates her into her new existence, and you decided to do that willingly. You cared about Dr Cooper caring about what happens to Dr Montebello. You cared about the fact that I would be on my way home alone in the dark. You cared about David Cooper when you realised he is a better person than you thought. Heck, you trusted him with whatever happens upstairs in this very moment, and you trusted me with it as well. And you definitively want to be loved. Everyone does. Besides, are you not aware some of your poetry has made it to the 21st century? I can only recall the valentine to Anna Strong, America’s first ever. If that doesn’t prove—”

Quite oddly, her knowledge of the existence of said poem was of greater interest to me than the other things she had said.

“Do you know it?”

“Of course I do. Read it in full.”

She smiled, still coldly and affected by my words, but she smiled. It was not the reaction I would have predicted and I was not sure if I should ask her opinion on it or tell her not to dig about in my past private life which, given most people consider me a dead man, which technically I am, is not easily done, for people, especially historians revel in telling tales of the dead that can no longer defend themselves. And I was part of this machine, I came to notice. Did I not talk ill about Arnold, Woodhull and the others I felt deserved to be posthumously punished for their misdeeds in life?

“So you think of me as a man, not a monster?”

I didn’t know which answer I would want to hear, and yet was curious to hear her verdict.

“Clearly a man. A man responsible for his actions like anybody else. You are here, of as sound mind and body as someone past his 200th birthday gets, I guess, you have a job, a pet, you seem to do fairly well academically— all you need to pay attention to is your diet. You are creating a monster of yourself, in yourself. You even want to be one, because that conveniently covers and excuses all your personal shortcomings. Come on, prove me right, if you dare. Bite me.”

She grinned provocatively and snatched a black hair tie from her wrist, which she slung around the cascade of brown hair falling over her shoulders to lay bare her neck.

Whatever I would decide to do now, I could not win. She had me cornered and she would make her point.

Inch by inch, she moved closer to me, her eyes, unsettlingly unblinking, locked with mine.

“Come on. I told you to. You can’t blame yourself on this one if you do bite me.”

She drew another step closer.

“Still nothing? You see, you will lose this wager if you don’t bite me soon. And that would prove me right about you, you do care. And you don’t like losing.”

Another step. She stood so close to me now, her chest almost brushed mine. She tilted her head, presenting bluish-green, blood-throbbing veins to me.

“Come on, get it over with. I expect at least it will be quick. You’ll make your point if you do, I
might believe you are a savage beast then and agree with you.”

She still looked and smelt delicious, there was no doubt about that, yet I did no longer intend to feed on her. Some delicacies, as I had to learn as a child, begging for sweets my mother would not give to me, were not meant to be tasted.

She had won, in a way and still, I begrudged her her victory. Seeing as all propriety between us had been dropped earlier in the evening, I proceeded with a sudden little idea that had sprung to my mind.

Slowly, I lowered myself to her level, broke eye contact with her, tilted my head as I always do when I feed on live humans and adjusted her head with my hand to achieve the most optimal positioning of both victim and vampire. It had to look realistic.

Her heartbeat accelerated, I could tell, and I could smell her fear also. She was not as certain about me as she had pretended to be, after all. She had been bluffing; her show of courage however was extraordinary, Miss Williams did not even move, no statue could have stood more perfectly still.

Very slowly, lengthening the moment of suspense, I let my lips wander to the same spot beneath her ear where I had kissed her in the living room, that vulnerable, exciting piece of flesh I would not long ago have given everything for to be allowed to taste.

A sharp intake of breath, though suppressed, told me she was indeed not sure what I would do, if she had misjudged me in the grossest manner.

But all I did was plant another kiss there, gentle, without even the sign of my teeth, indulging in the taste of her skin on my lips that would be all I would ever have from her, the luxurious smell of her perfume coupled with the exciting scent of her person, her exquisitely rare blood type and the simple delight of human warmth.

“You absolute-“

A small fist found my chest and hit it with fervour.

“Yes?”

“But I did prove you wrong.” Her triumphant smile, once she realised I had purposefully misled her, faded and returned to business.

“You are no monster. You’ve got to live with that now, I guess.”

“Live? If you mean-“

“Oh, don’t be so pedantic about the terms. You’re here, you share this world with others, so you live, sort of. Live it.”

She smiled warmly.

I was no monster. It was hard for me to realise or to even accept. Perhaps I owed her an explanation.

“You do know I have been branded a monster by most that have come to know me ever since I started to transition”, I began and then briefly relayed to her an abridged version of my ordeal and my time as a vampire.

I wanted her to understand, I found.
When I had finished, she sat down on the edge of my desk, as if she had to recuperate from the tale I had told her, and said

“It must have been terrible, what you had to do with Francesca.”

“It was”, I affirmed in astonishment that she had picked up on this small detail. “Suddenly I was who I never wanted to be, I have become who I despise. I know it has been necessary and prudent to do, she was harming herself and me and yet, I resent myself for putting her through the same ordeal I had to face.”

“You are not like them.”

A face such as hers, soft with the innocence of one who truly believes in their words, soothed my soul somewhat.

I excused myself to check on Francesca once more- she was asleep- and returned from my room with fresh bedlinen and nightclothes (ironed, of course. I am no savage beast at least in this respect.).

“Since you will stay here, tonight”, I said, and pointed the direction of the visitor’s bedroom out to her.

“And where will you sleep, seeing as your bed is presently occupied? Or do vampires not sleep?”

“They don’t need to, not as regularly as humans, but I find that not leading a solely nightly existence and a regular sleeping schedule are beneficial to my job. -In the living room.”

“Is not the bed- she pointed to the king-size bed I had purchased thinking that a guest bedroom was a thing one ought to have in a respectable household, even if it was never to be used, “big enough for two?”

Our eyes met, and she read from them just like from a book.

“Nothing needs to happen. I’m not trying to make ‘lewd advances’ or whatever they called it back in the day. The bed is big enough for two people.”

I found myself nodding dumbly and procuring a second set of bedclothes.

“Why don’t you make the bed while I shall make dinner?”, I suggested.

We were playing a travesty of normalcy, pretending to be ordinary people in an ordinary household, not a vampire hiding another vampire in his bedroom with the aid of two co-workers of whom one was a young mortal woman of culinary interest and the other a bearded, ever-pleasant general annoyance with a good heart deep beneath the unkempt beard and lumberjack-shirts.

If we were characters in a comedy, either in a novel, on stage or on screen, one would laugh at us and feel pleasantly entertained.

All I had in the kitchen were a few remainders of food in the deep-freeze department, things I had bought when a few months ago, I had, for the semblance of sacred normalcy’s sake, forced myself to host a party of fellow researchers in order to celebrate the publication of a volume of collected essays on the British perspective on the American Revolution, to which we all were contributors.

It was not much; what was left over were some frozen peas and two slices of equally intolerably looking frost-covered ham as well as a bottle of ketchup I found on a shelf together with a packet
of pasta. One could of course have ordered a meal, as I had done before- but with Francesca upstairs, I did not want anyone else to find out about her, in case she should make herself known by shouting or wailing. A police investigation was the last thing we needed.

I, half-unable to warm even my own meal to my satisfaction, struggled greatly, but in the end felt proud to present her with some moderately burnt peas, only slightly overcooked noodles and chewy ham drowned in ketchup.

I decked my place at the kitchen table, which I had never used before, always entertaining guests in the separate dining room, with only a wine glass.

Warmed in a bain-marie, my own dinner was much more easily prepared. She would sit at the same table with me and see me drink.

On the one hand, there was nothing alarming about someone drinking liquid from a glass; on the other, knowing this liquid was human blood, though voluntarily donated, might be somewhat unsettling.

Presented with her plate, Miss Williams took the first bite and said to me, noticing the expectant expression on my face:

“That’s blood, right?”

Her voice lacked any obvious emotion except restrained curiosity. Apparently, she wanted to approach this topic as neutrally as was possible to her.

“Where do you get it from?”

“Blood donations. Sometimes fresh, sometimes I get those bags close to their expiration date from hospitals.”

“Isn’t that illegal?”

“It is, but so is probably assuming a new identity every few years and forging documents accordingly, so I would not say I am much intimidated by the law’s stance on unused and supposedly expired blood bags. If I had donated blood, I would want to know it has actually been used, not left to rot to be eventually thrown away. At least I do something with it.”

The intimacy of my feeding ritual became suddenly very clear to me; never had anyone been allowed to watch before. Miss Williams kept her eyes on me, watching with interest as I emptied the decanter glass after glass. Never did a word of judgement escape her mouth and never did she make foolish jibes about it, either. Despite her curiosity, she tried to be as easy about it as if I sat opposite her at the table drinking canned beer or a glass of water.

We returned once more to look after Francesca and found her still in a sleep-like state, relieved, I re-adjusted the cushion she rested upon a little more comfortably and bade her good night. Perhaps deep inside, she would hear me.
I dressed and washed for bed in the bathroom, dreading slightly the night to come. What if I was a monster after all? What if I would attack her in her sleep? What if, more trivially, she wanted to continue our close acquaintance from the earlier part of the evening?

In the guest room, Miss Williams was already waiting beneath the covers and dressed for the night in my much too big night-attire.

At the sight of me, she looked away, nightclothes still being considered something intimate, personal, in the 21st century, and rolled to the extreme edge of the bed with a “Good night, General.”

-No more, and no less ceremony on her part to end a day neither she nor I could put in words.

Rest did not come easy to her that night and her constant twisting and turning in turn kept me awake as well. I had pretended to have fallen into my nightly state of sleep-like numbness instantly on the outmost edge of the bed in order to provide her with the greatest amount of propriety our less than ideal sleeping arrangement allowed but in truth listened, staring into the darkness, as her body shifted, trying to find an agreeable position, but failed.

Eventually, she had fallen asleep, even then, however, her rest was uneasy.

She made use of the length and breadth of the bed, something I would not have considered possible given her frame was so much smaller and more delicate than mine, and a king-size bed such as the one in my visitor’s bedroom had until then always easily accommodated me.

“No, no-“ she started to whisper agitatedly and I turned around to her, not knowing what to do.

“They’re shooting… Run… We must run… Go… Leave me behind… Go…”

Should I wake her up and cause her embarrassment for having listened to her dream, which was without a doubt troubling her greatly or should I let her sleep and endure the purgatory of her own subconscious?

It was she who took this decision from me: still asleep, she rolled over to the tiny sliver of mattress I had granted unto myself and stopped moving abruptly when her body came to meet mine. As if puzzled why suddenly a barrier restricted her movements, she lay still until she seemed not only to accept, but embrace this new reality and she ventured even closer to me, adjusting her body to fit to mine, until she had positioned herself snugly against me.

Her back against my chest, she continued to talk in her sleep.

“I can’t… No… They’re shooting… I’m… Too slow…”

And then, she began to sob softly.

My arm wrapped around her and I held her close, hoping she could feel she was not alone, even if her dream made her believe so.

I had always suspected body heat was an integral part of human show of affection (did not the sheer closeness to a warm body send me into a state of agitation as well?), but I hoped even if I could not offer her that, the feeling of another body she could steady her own against would be enough.

“It is all right. You are safe”, I whispered through the curtain of long, dark hair that had fallen in her face and silently remarked on the irony of the sentence given we had had this exact discussion
in the evening and the fact that upstairs, locked in my bedroom, a new vampire, uninstructed and probably as frightened as Miss Williams herself once she would awake again, lay in a state of death-like unconsciousness from which she could rise any time.

To my surprise, it worked. Her breathing steadied and her limbs stopped to stir.

No longer tensed, her muscles relaxed and allowed her body to melt into mine. I could not recoil any further, for I had reached the definite edge of the bed, nor did I want to.

Gently, I pushed tendrils of hair from her face and stroked her shoulder until I was certain she had reached the haven of deep sleep safely.

Unexpectedly, the strain both physical and psychological of the past day overpowered me before I could even think of what had just happened. I closed my eyes, feeling her heartbeat resound within my chest, slow and regular, soothing me profoundly. I pulled my blanket (she had tossed hers off the other side of the bed long ago) over both of us and rested my weary head, conscious of the fact her exposed, slightly arched neck was mere inches away from me and that if I wanted, I could-

With contentment I realised how this thought, in this very night had no appeal to me. I did not want to hurt her.

What was happening to me?

It had been a long time ago I had last felt so completely and utterly human, like the man I could have been had not fate played a cruel trick on me and that I had tried to be for Elizabeth.

Elizabeth, what would she say, seeing me like this, lying in bed with another woman? Truly, throughout the centuries, there had been other women, quick tosses and tumbles, mostly to saturate my carnal urges in a shamefully quick fashion in exchange for coin, and those who hadn’t been payed to endure my company had never lasted long by my side, either because I sent them away, fearing for their safety around me and the feeling I was still a married man or because they became aware of the fact I was not “normal” and tried to change me, which they found they couldn’t and left me fairly quickly.

Guilt tainted the crystal beauty of the moment before I fell asleep, my mind engaged in apologising to my wife in the fashion of a prayer to the saint, no, goddess in heaven she had become to me.

Even in my dreams, the conflict continued on in the shape of illicit fantasies, vapurous fabrications of the mind in which I was joined by a dark-haired woman in an unfamiliar bed, but whenever I looked into her face, I found it changed while she urged me to go on, whispering into my ear what terrible and unspeakable things she wanted me to do to her, ever with the same unfamiliar voice coming from familiar faces, Lady Lola’s, Miss William’s, and that of the woman whose portrait I carry, printed out in the format of a passport photo, in my briefcase, while trying to coax a reaction from me with her deft and wily hands.

“Don’t you enjoy it? Don’t you like me?” the woman pouted with a demonic grin on Miss Williams’ face that was not hers and laid back against the cushions of the bed offering her shapely and unclothed body to me.

“I’m yours, John. Come and claim your prize”, this time, Eliza’s portrait smirked at me, grabbing my arm with surprising speed and strength and pulling me down on top of her.

Rather than to comply, I resisted and felt a physical sickness rise within me.

“No”, I breathed, trying to stop her, but she was quicker and took me by surprise, rising, and
pinning me down with all her might on the other end of the bed, a hateful wrath distorting the features that no longer clearly belonged to either of the three women I thought I had seen.

This was no longer the seductress. I turned my face away from her, pressing my eyes shut as her hot breath that reeked of decay covered my neck and face in sticky, cold sweat and the smell of sickness I was only too familiar with.

I noticed I was burning up from inside, like a fire in a coal mine and could not move, my arms and legs were tied up and nobody came to help me, however much I called for help and mercy.

When I opened them again, she was no longer there and the bed beneath me gone. The light of windows high above me stung in my eyes and I concluded I must be in some sort of building. As I looked up, the outline of a figure stood on the balustrade of what seemed to be some sort of balcony or walkway and instantly, I realised where I was and pain flooded my body. I tried to move, but couldn’t; tried to speak, but my tongue was numb to producing any other sound than groans of horrendous pain that shook my body like the impact of a cannon ball.

I wanted to open my mouth, to breathe, but couldn’t, I would choke, and then, there was an apple in my mouth and I unable to breathe. Desperation took hold of me, and while I still could not move and help myself, a horrid realisation crept over me:

I would die.

“Wake up! Wake up, please!”

My eyes darted open. I had been taken by my shoulders and shaken, I realised, and quite vigorously so; the hands that had done this to me still held my flesh in a vice-like grip. Miss Williams hovered over me, dressed in one of my lapelled pyjama-tops, her face full of concern.

“Are you all right? You talked in your sleep and-“

“The same could be said of you.”

“How do you… Did I talk in my sleep? Yes, I had a bad dream, but nowhere nearly as bad as yours, it seems. I know my dream, I’ve had it many times before. It doesn’t scare me anymore as soon as I wake up. Can I help you? Do you need anything?”

She was right to care about my welfare; no one else would be able to control Francesca if I were indisposed and could not attend to her.

“No, thank you”, I answered, somewhat embarrassed she had seen me in such a state, and was about to turn away from her when I noticed she was shaking all over, shivering with emotional agitation in almost the same way as I did.

“There is no need for that”, I tried to console her, albeit somewhat clumsily, knowing the previous evening and this night had thrown her soul into greater turmoil than could possibly be borne by one person alone.

She cast her eyes downwards, briefly closed them and inhaled deeply before she answered me:

“You know… When I woke up, I- I lay-“

Her cheeks blushed; I could see and feel it through the velvet blackness of the darkness.

“I know.”
It… It helped me, to be honest with you. You know, to know you’re not alone. Even when you’re not awake, you feel that, I guess.”

I turned away from her.

Although the darkness prevented any human being, even one with perfect vision, to see more than the rough outline of things, I did not want her to see my eyes. The fact that tears don’t have any biological importance to me does not mean I cannot shed them for other reasons.

Embarrassed, I fixed my stare onto the alarm clock. It was around three in the morning and I watched as the digits changed from minute to minute when a sudden warmth around my torso and my back called me back to attention.

Miss Williams held me close, which seemed somewhat odd to me, me being the gentleman and she the lady in this highly indecent scenario, and should not I have held her, if at all?

Nevertheless, her consolation, the small, warm body making an effort to melt an iceberg of six foot three, moved me and made me feel oddly at home.

Again I, somewhat uncertain what to do and bashful given the oddity of reversed roles, pretended to have fallen asleep instantly when in truth I lay wide awake, my eyes screwed shut with pure willpower.

After several minutes, when she was certain I had left the realms of consciousness for the kinder tides of a new, less savage dreamland, she began to stroke my hair, slowly, before moving on to the side of my face not buried in a cushion gingerly and yet with a soft precision that accomplished her objective: Allowing myself to savour her touch, I drifted off, not to resurface to the harsh world around me until much later in the morning.

This time indeed, my dreams were kinder to me, though I cannot remember half of what I dreamt. I remember walking through a wood by a stream in solidarity when a voice called for me; as I turned, I spied a young woman, laughing, her head tilted back, and she ran from me, as if trying to engage me in a game of tag; apple blossoms and petals fell from her hair as she ran, faster than I ever could until she vanished in the brightness of the morning light. I believe the dream must have ended there, for what followed I cannot recall.

Sunlight molested my eyelids and called me to order, to rise and face the day.

Underneath the same blanket I occupied, another body stirred, slowly coming to waking life again, a living body, so warm and so wondrously comforting.

“Elizabeth” I, drunk with the immediate aftereffects of deep rest half asked, half declared, confused and thinking time had never moved on and all my existence was a wild dream that had exceeded the boundaries of my imagination, what a bad dream, and now, I would awake in my bedroom at Wolford Lodge, my Eliza by my side, finding I was still General Simcoe.

“Hm?” a reply echoed from the drowsy lips of my inadvertent bedfellow, her eyes, as I was to find out, still as closed as mine.

“I love you so much.”

The raw, unpolished truth of my words took me by surprise and sent a shiver down my spine.

“What…” a stifled yawn and a few shifting movements later, my companion sat up in bed, bolt upright, prompting me to open my eyes and stare at her in confusion.
The alarm clock reminded me it was the 18th of January 2017, 9:20 AM. No, no dream. I was in Exeter, in the house I had bought for myself when I started working as at the university’s history department there. This was the guest bedroom.

And the woman next to me not Elizabeth, but Miss Williams.

“What did you just say?” she blinked against the sliver of sunlight forcing its way into the room through a small gap between the curtains and looked at me.

“What did you just say?” she blinked against the sliver of sunlight forcing its way into the room through a small gap between the curtains and looked at me.

“Nothing”, I lied, embarrassed and ashamed of myself and rose quickly.

Miss Williams shrunk back beneath the covers, rubbing her arms. How could I have forgotten? I barely heated more than my more sensitive body considered agreeable; after two centuries of leading the existence of a bachelor, or rather widower, vampire, I had forgotten humans required what felt to me like the heat of several furnaces not to feel cold.

As opposed to Miss Williams I felt warm, warmer than usual and agreeably so; but with a sudden pang in my unmoving heart I realised why.

I did not have to bite her and drink her blood to be a vampire. Over the course of the night, I had drained her of her warmth, soaked it up like a dry sponge, leaving her cold and freezing in the morning. She should not have to feel like a corpse.

A sudden sadness came over me with the realisation she was wrong about me in that aspect.

Being a vampire, I could do nothing about the body heat problem that would solve it permanently. On the other hand, perhaps this was not as impractical as I had first thought. Elizabeth and I had managed somehow and I recall summers in which my Eliza praised the coolness of my body in opposition to the heat outside that would otherwise have robbed her of her sleep.

Everything has its pros and cons, as they say these days.

There was another way to warm her body through exercise, an animalistic part of my mind reminded me, and that would allow us to continue where we had left off the previous night in a more comfortable environment.

No; my conscience dictated sternly, for had I not mere seconds ago called her by the name of another woman, someone who reposes in cold clay for eternity since the year 1850?

I could ne’er desecrate Eliza’s memory thus and neither could I besmirch Miss Williams’ honour in such a fashion, to treat her as the graven image of my beloved Eliza, to have her with the sole intention of worshipping not her body but the memory of my poor, dead true-love’s buried beneath Wolford Chapel.

Yes, I was a man. A man of the basest intentions and instincts.

I tossed her my best dressing gown and draped myself in my second best; then, I disappeared to the kitchen to make tea for her, to warm her from the inside and turned the heating up.

She smiled at me as I brought her the steaming cup of black tea (without milk, for I do naturally not shop for dairy products) to her bedside and watched as she took the first sip.

“I shall call David Cooper soon to enquire about the state of his diversion. We must know if the family of Dr Montebello has already talked to the police. I do not have classes today and am seldom seen on university premises on Thursdays and have alibis for the entire day of yesterday
from the morning until the evening. Now we have to devise how you will proceed, should they
investigate her workplace.”

She put the cup down on the nightstand and pensively played with a lock of her hair between
thumb and index finger.

“I have an afternoon class today and on Thursdays, Prof Cholmondeley usually takes lunch with a
colleague from Archaeology and then head straight for a board meeting of some journal he is a co-
editor of. Doesn’t need me to be there. As for yesterday, I’ve been at university all day, just like
you.”

“What of the co-inhabitants of your flat?” I asked.

“Oh, well… I’ve told them not to wait for me. Texted one of them to tell her I was seeing someone
and that I wouldn’t spend the night at home. It’s not that untrue, is it?”

“And in the case you were interrogated, who would you call upon to provide you with an alibi?”

“I don’t know… I have been hasty making up a story, I guess… I have friends who would help me,
if I asked them to. I think we can both agree nobody should find out about anything that happened
in this house yesterday, regarding both Dr Montebello and you and me.”

She was right.

“We will manage”, I tried to say and allowed my hand to brush her shoulder in a show of
compassionate reassurance.

“And I shall arrange for Cooper to take you home. With that rogue killer on the loose, I should not
like to know you are walking around all by yourself. If you go out, stay in groups of at least two,
the more, the better. Vampires don’t attack packs and for God’s sake, take the dagger with you.”

Nodding, she indicated she would heed my advice but added instantly

“I’ll stay. I’ll call Gemma, that’s my flatmate and tell her to pack a bag for me and that I’ll come
and pick up with Dr Cooper. My story will be that I received a call a family member, say my
grandmother, has fallen very ill and I want to visit her, because the doctors said she might not have
long anymore.”

“If you insist-“

I was tired fighting her iron will any longer. Should she stay if she wanted to.

“We should look after Francesca”, I said instead.

The way her head lifted and her eyes sparkled disbelievingly told me she had picked up on my
sudden change of pronoun use.

After all, she had helped me through the night and somehow, the words she had spoken to me still
did not leave me and had me pondering in the back of my head.

“Francesca?” I asked in a low voice, not expecting an answer.

“John?” A feeble whisper came back from the twilit room.

I rushed to the bedside and found Francesca lying still, blinking slowly to adjust the new,
sharpened state of her eyes to her surroundings.
Immediately, I loosened her ties. Her ordeal was over. She did not look like there was much energy to fight me left in her, anyway. From now on her body would need some time to get used to what she had become and heal, the wounds on her arms (and on mine) already closing slowly.

“It hurts… Everything hurts…” she complained.

“And I’m hungry…”

The slivers of her pupils visible to me beneath her half-closed eyelids dilated as they came to rest on Miss Williams.

“No, you must not even think that. I will give you something. It will be but a moment”, I promised her and asked Miss Williams to go to the kitchen and unfreeze a blood bag in hot water and bring it to me in a carafe, as usual, and a glass too. Naturally I could and would have done it myself, but I did not wish to leave Miss Williams alone with Francesca before I had informed and instructed the latter sufficiently regarding her new existence.

My trusted aide returned, putting on a brave face that belied the emotions welling up underneath. She was doubtlessly somewhat uneasy about what she had just done and I could not blame her for finding it odd and maybe even alarming.

“I just don’t like the smell”, she commented, biting her lower lip as she watched me pour a small quantity of blood into the glass and set it behind me on the windowsill.

Next, I sat down on the bed and pulled Francesca up against me for better support. Her head lolled languidly, wherefore I steadied her against my shoulder.

As if she had read my thoughts, Miss Williams passed me the glass and observed as I held it to Francesca’s lips and tipped it so the liquid would run into her mouth.

In a matter of seconds, she had emptied it, leaving traces of crimson on her pale lips.

“More”, she demanded.

Miss Williams assisted me in pouring another glass, filled to the brim this time, and handed it to me. Francesca drank greedily, causing some blood to colour the immediate area around her mouth in red, but seemed otherwise contented. When there was no more blood left in the carafe, I cleaned her up with my handkerchief.

Saturated and a little stronger than before, I carefully placed her back onto the bed, supported into a half-sitting position by several cushions, and watched as her right hand, slowly and very weak, came to palpate her maxilla with clumsy, unprecise movements.

“It hurts… there”, she complained feebly, pressing an index finger over the slightly swollen place where I knew her right cuspid had come to blossom only the night before, “and there”, she repeated the gesture on the left side of her face.

“Don’t be afraid. It is all right. This is normal.”

“Does that mean I’m…”

Her voice was too weak, but the expression in her eyes that still fought what little light fell into the room, was strong and told me she knew already, by means of what instinct or supernatural premonition I could not tell.
“You are a vampire, Francesca.”

She sighed, voicing her submission to fate in the most universally understood manner, as if she had seen it coming, and let her hand sink onto the blanket.

“I made you. You were weak, after having been bitten by another vampire. Can you forgive me?”

A slow nod of the head, barely visible, told me that she did.

“And can you tell us who bit you in the first place? Can you describe your attacker?”

I could hardly say ‘who did this to you’ since it had been I who had converted her death from being laid to rest in a grave into an eternal existence.

“My phone”, she breathed, and raised her hand somewhat to point to her handbag, which lay abandoned in the far corner of the room.

Miss Williams brought the bag to Francesca’s bedside (no longer hungry she had nothing to fear from her) and held the bag so that Francesca could easily look for her phone in it without having to move too much.

Francesca put the black and silver device in Miss Williams’ hand and pressed the button that made the lock screen appear.

“1-4-0-1” she dictated and Miss Williams typed.

The phone unlocked and revealed a background image that made me shudder with horror despite the newly increased heating and the fact that the cold does not bother me.

It was a picture of Francesca in a red cocktail dress, smiling and standing next to a tall man in a suit and tie who had put an arm around her waist, probably taken at a family occasion or an evening out.

I knew this man too well.

“Ben… Ben…”

Francesca tried to tell me his name, but was too weak. She had talked too much already and was overexerted. It was not necessary anyway.

“Who is he?”

Miss Williams stared at the picture, petrified, while slowly realising I was acquainted to the gentleman, if I could call him that.

“Someone who should have died long ago.”

Chapter End Notes

So, knowing what a few of you like, I have encorporated

- a mathematical riddle for tvsn
- a distinctive pun on a W. B. Yeats poem for Maryassassina and
elements from a hilarious exchange with Sarah_von_Krolock about Simcoe's TV habits, popular vampire movies and sparkling vampires.

Hope you liked it ;)

As you may have noticed, I have quite excessively quoted from "TURN", especially season 2, episode 6.

La Bête du Gévaudan (the Beast of Gévaudan) was a scary creature, often described as a wolf or wolf-like, that killed and wounded many people in an area largely congruent with today's departement Lozère (48) between 1764 and 1767. It is largely thought these attacks, which happened in a very rural region in a time when wolves were still fairly common European wildlife, were carried out by one or several wolves or wolf-hybrids. There are other theories of course and I gave the Beast a fictional spin by claiming it may have been a werewolf. As far as I know, werewolves were not suspected to be behind the attacks.

In autumn 1888, Jack the Ripper started to terrorise London. Was it a vampire? Was it a werewolf? Was it something altogether different or one of the human suspects conspiracy theorists, amateur sleuths and researchers have proposed as potential candidates over time? We will likely never know.

"A Study in Scarlet", the first "Sherlock Holmes" novel by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, was released one year earlier, in 1887.

Additional information you definitively don't need or want: Yes, Simcoe watches vampire-films on TV whenever he finds one. On the one hand, he loves to enrage himself over all the mistakes humans make and the misconceptions about vampires they spread, on the other, he might just have a weakness for the romantic drama in them. And yes, he watched all parts of the "Twilight" films. He never read the books because he was too shy to buy them and have them in his house (imagine if someone would see them!). He just loves to surround himself with things he supposedly hates.

"I may have signed my actual death warrant": An actual quote by Irish Secretary of State for Finance (at the time, among a lot of other things) Michael Collins (Mícheál Ó Coileáin), which is a little homage to the last intermezzo.

A delegation representing Ireland was sent to London to negotiate terms for the partial split from direct British rule, the results of which were fixed on paper in a document called the Anglo-Irish Treaty (An Conradh Angla-Éireannach, 1921). Many parts of it were unpopular in Ireland (such as the fact Ireland would remain a, though self-governing, dominion within the British Empire as a Free State) and the treaty led to a brutal civil war.

Lord Birkenhead, Lord Chancellor at the time, remarked after the signing of the treaty that he may have signed his political death warrant (by signing the treaty), to which Collins replied "I may have signed my actual death warrant."

Collins was right; on 22nd of August 1922, during the Civil War, his open motorcar was ambushed at Béal na Bláth in his home county of Cork and he was shot through the head.

In this version of events, Simcoe re-wrote the valentine thrown away by his superior in Pennsylvania in season 2, episode 2 and it becomes the thing we know today, only instead of Sarah "Sally" Townsend, Anna Strong is the addressee.
La Petite Mort(e)

Chapter Summary

Blood, glitter, guilt and a duel. Things get complicated for all involved.

Chapter Notes

So, before I start I would like to mention that it only occurred to me while writing how close this fic ventures to the brilliant "Hide and Seek" modern AU by the equally brilliant tvsn. -only this time, Arnold is not the corpse-gone-missing. But just like "Hide and Seek"'s Arnold, this corpse is not quite as dead as a dead body should be...

Also, dear Tav, the title of today's chapter is a pun!

I can only recommend this wonderful story to you and hope you enjoy the latest chapter!

Warning: in this chapter, an abusive relationship (past psychological and physical abuse) will be described.

And lastly, to all ye who demanded a sparkly vampire, this is all your fault.

See the end of the chapter for more notes


“Quiet, daughter. Indeed, my friend wrote to me.”

“After two years of correspondence, I think you ought to tell us who Monsieur N. F. is. In case he is going to-“

She knew exactly what her daughter wanted to say.

“We have a right to know if he’s the new replacement.”

“I did not teach you to talk like this”, she snapped at the younger woman. Caroline and Anne, the youngest of the siblings and still a child, flinched somewhat, following the dispute between their mother and eldest sister from the other side of the table.

Caroline knew what they were on about. Mother’s pen friend was no secret; only the content of his letters and in frequent intervals, small parcels, was.

On the one hand, she considered Eliza’s question reasonable, on the other, she too disapproved of her sister’s tone.
After all, was not their mother entitled to her share of happiness, too? And if this French gentleman made her happy, why should she refuse him, as long as he possessed an adequate network of connections, a respectable name and a little wealth to add to the family estate?

It had been years. Yes, it still hurt, losing a loved one always did and left a wound in the heart that would take a long time to heal and yet, if Eliza’s suspicions would prove true, she would not blame her mother.

A lifetime could be long, so why spend it alone when there was someone to share it with? If Monsieur N. F. made her happy, why not?

And in one point, Eliza, the eldest of them all, was mistaken: No man could ever replace Papa.

“Benedict Gustavus…” Francesca lifted her hand slightly and lifted an index finger to point at the man next to her in the picture.

Poor, poor Francesca- she had been deceived, as I had deceived my Eliza. Tricked into thinking her beloved was human when in truth, he was a vile creature of the night. Contrary to Arnold, this common cad, I had revered my wife and loved her truly, whereas he had made first Margaret Shippen and then Francesca unhappy and in the two hundred years between them, had likely assaulted many more a respectable woman’s virtue.

Although my pity and compassion for Francesca knew no bounds, I could not help but heave a sigh and give a mirthless laugh when I heard the name under which Arnold operated now.

“’Benedict Gustavus’ is General Benedict Arnold, the greatest traitor in American history and perhaps the most famous turncoat the world has ever known. He supposedly died five years before I did, in 1801. He deceived you.”

Francesca wordlessly rolled to her side, turning her back to Miss Williams and me, sobbing softly. Both of us made an effort to let her know she was not alone, spoke softly to her and held her hand, but there was nothing we could do to ease her pain.

In between the sobs, words escaped her incoherently, shreds of a monologue only she could hear in full in her head. “I don’t want to be dead”, she managed to say at the third attempt, before she closed her eyes again, fully exerted.

She had encountered so much that was not supposed to exist and thus had not existed within her world that had been turned upside down and she had turned with it.

“Leave”, she commanded, and Miss Williams and I obeyed.

“What can we do?”, she asked me, saddened, concerned and distraught- after all, she too had seen and witnessed things most humans can be grateful to never witness.

“Nothing, I think. We shall leave her some time for herself for the moment, it might help her. I am going to call David Cooper now”, I said, hoping we could get away from Francesca for the moment, “you call your friend, have her pack your bag for you. Get dressed. Cooper will bring you to the house, you will fetch your belongings and come back.”
“I can decide and act all by myself, General”, she retorted as if she had taken offense at the idea to be given company for protection.

“With Arnold on the loose, I do not want you to walk around town alone. Cooper might not be a match for Arnold, but vampires hunt solitary prey, they do not attack groups of people. I just want to keep you safe.”

I had spoken in all honesty, which surprised not only me, but Miss Williams as well, for her hand wandered to pick up a strand of her hair which she curled around her index finger, indicating a certain amount of insecurity.

“Thank you. It’s so kind of you to say that.”

What else did she expect? That I would leave her knowingly vulnerable to a vampire whom I had known to be an unsavoury character even in life?

While I was still shocked at the unpleasant revelation that Benedict Arnold, America’s greatest traitor and Britain’s worst general was still among us, I was not surprised he would discard his prey in a car park and use utmost brutality on his victims.

The man whose folly and avarice had cost us Yorktown, of whom I had heard he had no qualms mistreating a defenceless woman (Lady Lola had told me one night, breathless, wearing her usual coquettish, mischievous grin: “you treat your whore better than General Arnold and the likes of him do their wives.” When I had asked what was the matter and how she knew, she shared her gossip with me and said that talk spread easily and people heard things before she had diverted my attention once more to more pleasant activities than talking about my superior, but since this half-sentence dropped by her in praise of me, I have never walked into the Arnold residence without thinking of her words again.) would likely not shrink back from doing these things now.

And Exeter being a town with many students, many of them young women, who knew if the next victim might not already be feeling Arnold’s grip tighten around her throat, his hands leaving bruises that would be irrelevant in a mere matter of minutes when she would be dead?

-But who was I to claim the title of “hero”, or paint myself as the model image of the “good” vampire? I too had killed in the past, the last time twenty years ago. It had been a relapse, an unfortunate collision of events, but I had killed. More than once and tasted the last, the sweetest drop of blood in my mouth, right at the heart’s final defiant, though defeated, flicker before stopping forever.

I cannot deny I had liked it. I did. And I still would, had I not ordered myself not to feed on live humans.

At least, Arnold had not been able to finish his job, had not experienced the divine ecstasy that is released by this last drop of blood in a person’s body. There was, at least for me, some comfort in that, knowing the experience had doubtlessly left him dissatisfied and knowing it had been I who had completed his odious work and instead of throwing away the blood-drained shell of Francesca like David did his empty juice boxes, I had given her an existence, saved her mind, her self from disappearing into whatever paradise or black void awaits the soul after death and kept her here, not alive, but as close as it comes.

David, whom I had called, arrived only ten minutes later. Miss Williams was clad in the attire she had worn the previous day and I had foregone the uniform for the more practical combination of black turtleneck and trousers.
David looked at us, sighing, and came inside at my invitation.

“Before you ask: I called her parents. Her boyfriend I couldn’t get hold of, for some reason.”

“Thank God you didn’t”, Miss Williams interjected, sighing with relief, which left David a tad confused, but before he could ask, I explained everything to him, leaving him shell-shocked. He wanted to say something, express his disbelief and fear, for Arnold was acquainted to his wife and children as well, but he swallowed hard, ingesting his personal worries once more and continued his tale:

“I rung them this morning and told them I had driven to her flat and knocked at the door, which America's greatest traitor-turned-vampire hasn’t done, which is understandable because he only commutes between Exeter and London for Francesca, as far as I know, and that she answered me, saying she had had a terrible headache the night before and that she was still not feeling well and that she would be glad if I could tell them she was all right enough, they needn’t worry and that she would get back to them in person as soon as her migraine was better.”

Breathless almost, he paused.

“That’s not a good story, is it?”

I sighed. “No.”

“But Francesca’s people seem to have taken the bait. I mean, our story is still weird, but in comparison to what’s really going on it almost sounds plausible. We can hardly call them and go--“ (he feigned to be in the middle of a phone call) “The old Francesca can’t come to the phone right now. Why? Oooh, ‘cause she’s dead! But if you’d like to speak to the new one, I’ll pass the phone on to her. Looks the same, just a tad paler perhaps, maybe she’s just testing a new make-up brand and as of now, she also has some new dietary issues- no, she hasn’t become a vegan, far from it. You just shouldn’t invite her to join you in Benidorm sizzling away at the beach or make her a full English breakfast. In other news, she’s apparently moved in at her weird colleague’s place, the one she’s talked about at Christmas, the weirdo with the cat and the bayonet. But other than that, she’s perfectly fine.”

If David wanted to provoke a response to his amateur theatre from me (of which I was certain), he would not get it from me. Instead, I asked him and Miss Williams to join me upstairs to hold council with Francesca, but before, I would prepare another meal for her to strengthen her constitution for the strenuous task to come.

Two human heads nodded gravely before they followed me to the kitchen. I could tell David was most uncomfortable watching me prepare a meal for Francesca.

“Don’t stare at me like that, David, it is rather rude.”

He did not answer right away, his eyes following the blood bag in my hand, so I continued.

“Or would you rather have me feed her live humans?”

The glance he shot me across the room from his vantage point at the kitchen table stung and amused me at the same time.

“I will have to teach her that, you know. Do not fret, you shall not be required as test object. But she will have to know how to feed naturally. For the moment, it is enough to keep her belly full and teach her what can be taught in words, the day however will come when she will sink her teeth into a human neck for the first time.”
Leaving it at that for fear it was already quite a mouthful for him to swallow and digest, I finished my preparations and led our party of three upstairs.

Francesca had stilled, the sobs had subsided, yet it was evident she was not exactly elated to have company.

“What do you want?”, she snarled, eager to keep us away with her roughness, her voice given her physical constitution the only weapon she could make use of.

“I am afraid we need to talk about a few very important things that cannot wait. You must make a call to your family among other things, and it would be wise if we could discuss your boyfriend, much as it hurts.”

Her face revealed no desire to do any of these things, but she relented, whether it was because the nourishment I had brought had a persuasive effect on her or because she accepted that the dead have to get their affairs in order before a mortal takes an interest in them as necessary.

To encourage her, I set the glass to her lips and watched as she drained it of its content in no time, her tongue instinctively cleaning her lips of any ruby remnants when she was done.

David was in a state of discomfort, watching Francesca ingest blood, while Miss Williams watched more composedly than she had the night before.

“If any of you mortals requires a dram, downstairs in the living room cupboard are sherry, rum and whiskey”, I suggested, sensing David’s nerves were as taut as a bowstring the second before the arrow is released.

Both declined and positioned themselves around Francesca, David standing behind me (I had seated myself on a chair in front of the bed) and Miss Williams took position perched on the edge of the bed.

As quickly as possible, I recounted to Francesca the cover-up David had engineered and informed her that this would require her to call her family, assuring them she was merely struck down with influenza and that none of them needed to travel to Exeter and care for her, for she had friends who would stop by daily and look after her. As for her vile seducer (I could not bring the demon-ahem, denomination “boyfriend” over my lips with regard to Arnold) they ought not tell him, officially in order not to make him fret for her, unofficially in order not to give Arnold any clues from which he could figure out what had happened.

Arnold was secondary to us in this moment; first and foremost, Francesca’s disappearance needed to be explained sufficiently before someone could ask too many questions.

Francesca’s bravery struck me; without tears in her voice, she called her parents and, though still very weak, managed to come across as well as possible, pretending to be struck down with nothing but a normal infection. Only when she bade her mother farewell, a salty droplet left the corner of her eye, at which I took her hand in a gesture of comfort, my other hand being engaged holding the phone to her ear, which seemed to help her somewhat.

Next, Miss Williams, whose occupation aside from being a student it was to write emails of this kind to students on behalf of her employer, composed a message to her various classes saying that Dr Montebello was presently ill and, based on Francesca’s instructions, communicated them assignments the recovering vampire made up on the spot.

I offered to forge a sickness certificate, which all parties greatly approved of; as someone who
needs to forge much more important documents such as passport and driver’s licence (I never did any examination; I had learned to drive sometime in the early 20th century and never had any formal instruction), I know where to procure such things.

“So what do we do with Benedict Arnold, we can hardly let him walk free, can we?”, David asked. “What if he kills more people?”

“Firstly, he did not kill Francesca, I did-“

“But she would have died anyway, you said-“

“That is not the point. Whether she would have or not, it was I who killed her. Secondly, if ‘we’ are after Arnold for assaulting Francesca operating under the assumption that he will maim and drain more people of their blood if ‘we’ do not stop him, then you must hunt down every vampire in the country, or better on this planet. We have all killed. I have killed several times, lastly some twenty years ago. There are no ‘good’ vampires. Every single one of my kind poses a threat to you. Do remember that.”

Perhaps I had spoken somewhat too harshly or perhaps he was merely surprised to hear me speak openly about an act so terrible as extinguishing a human life- in any case, his face had become as pale as mine and he was forced to support himself with his hand on the windowsill somewhat.

They didn’t teach the more unpleasant sides of being a vampire in contemporary fiction anymore.

Miss Williams sighed.

“Vilifying yourself again? That has nothing to do with what we have to figure out now. We have a few questions that need answering. One: Is Arnold dangerous? If so, to whom? Secondly, is he still interested in Francesca? He has called Mr Cooper here last night, asking if he has seen her. I would find it surprising if he didn’t want to know what happened to Francesca or rather her body. With her missing (at least as far he knows) she is a risk to him. What if she has survived and now knows he is a vampire? What if she reports him to the police for (sexual) assault? She doesn’t even need to remember he bit her, she can report him for assaulting her and leaving her for dead in the car park. He’ll want to know where she is. And thirdly: Are we all in danger?”

“Let’s start in the beginning”, David took over, “my wife and I know Benedict Gustavus, or Arnold, since he and Francesca have become a serious item half a year ago. He claims to be a stockbroker and spoke of a flat in London once or twice. He and Francesca seemed happy, for all that I could tell, until she started looking pale and tired a while ago. At the time, I thought it was a stressful phase at work or so and I didn’t want to inconvenience her by asking about it, but now I suspect-“

I knew full well what he suspected.

“Did he bite you before?”, I asked softly, still holding her hand.

A whimper escaped her mouth, which I interpreted as a yes.

“Dirty swine”, Miss Williams murmured in reply, who obviously had interpreted the whimper in the same way as I.

“Why did you never say anything? Why didn’t you leave him? Did he blackmail you?”

“Ben… told me what he was after two months… I didn’t believe him until… until he did it for the first time. Then, he asked me if he… could do it again… and again…”
I tried to keep my voice emphatic, calm, but struggled greatly to do so. All I truly wanted to do was find Arnold and make him pay for this odious deed and rip him to shreds with my bare hands.

“And why did you let him do it?”

“I loved him.”

She turned her face away, rolling over to her side and only presenting her back to us in shame for having been so naïve, for having allowed someone to maltreat, no abuse and hurt her, both body and soul in the name of “love”. I was certain she had known for long that her abuser’s actions were wrong, but had not left him either for fear of the consequences (maybe he had even threatened to kill her before, and she could hardly go and search for help, because nobody would believe her if she told them her boyfriend was a vampire who drank her blood, which would undoubtedly have resulted in a mandatory full psychological examination) or plainly because she had been blinded by the feelings she had had for him.

The things one is prepared to do and endure for love are often cruel, horrid and not even romantic in the slightest. I had suffered self-inflicted hunger for twenty-four years for my Eliza and had lied to her about my true self, causing me sleepless nights and an incessant feeling of guilt. Love makes one do terrible things and endure great, purgatorial pain.

Francesca was no exception. I felt sorry for her. Her situation had been aggravated by Arnold being a vampire, a fact that likely held her back from seeking assistance and, if he had not changed much, which I expected, he was an unsavoury character whose violent temper had already tormented Margaret Shippen, his unfortunate wife.

“How often did he bite you?”

Wordlessly she extended her arm, still without facing us, inviting me to roll up her sleeve. Several healed and almost healed bite marks presented themselves to me, leading me to the suspicion her other wrist and probably other parts of her body where blood vessels were only veiled by a thin gossamer-like layer of skin looked similarly.

She shuddered when I traced them with my thumb, trying to discern when these wounds had been made, as if she expected it to happen again at my hand- or rather teeth.

“Please, don’t be afraid. You are safe now.”

“And dead”, she cried, her body crouching into an embryonal position, knees pulled high up to her chest as if her body tried to seek comfort from itself.

“Don’t cry. I promise you, I shall not let him escape unscathed. He will pay. I shall avenge your honour and your life.”

I meant what I said. It no longer mattered to me whether I too deserved to be extinguished for the odious deeds I had done, in this very moment, the only thing that mattered to me was that Arnold had hurt someone I had to admit I cared for. Francesca had always been kind to me, had shown me understanding and offered me her friendship when everyone else had shunned me, been patient with me when no one else seemed to care-

“Did you know I am a vampire?”

“Yes. I figured that out… You are so pale, so cold. You never eat. The coffee… the ham sandwich, remember?”
Indeed, I remembered.

“But you are not Benedict”, she closed, before her mouth grew dry and she coughed several times before I held the glass to her mouth once more and allowed her to drink. Without ceremony, she emptied two more glasses before I regarded her well enough once more to continue our vital talk.

“You are kind.”

Her weary eyes closed. Her words warmed my heart, to speak figuratively, even if I knew she was mistaken about me. I too was despicable in my very own way, blood-stained, the death of innocent souls weighing heavily on my conscience, but never, never had I stooped so low as to bind a defenceless person to me and promise them love in return for their blood.

“I shall not be kind to him, that I promise you. I will gut him with my bayonet and-“

“But that won’t kill him, right?” David interjected.

“No”, I replied truthfully, “but it will hurt very much before I end him.”

Judging from Miss Williams’ alarmed facial expression, the hint of a smile I had felt creeping to my lips at the thought of how satisfying causing Arnold pain would be did not meet her approval.

“This is why I favour a serrated blade. I know the Abyssinian Trick, a man I knew learned it on James Bruce’s expedition to Gondar. Stab the bayonet, twist the blade, and the notches will pull the intestines right out.”

“Your sick fantasies don’t get us anywhere. I suggest we call it a day and let Francesca sleep a little. Anna-“ (I remarked they had apparently agreed on first name terms now) “and I will fetch her belongings and do some shopping. I don’t think Anna enjoys a vintage blood bag of AB positive or whatever your favourite is as much as you do.”

I nodded, rose, and led them downstairs, adding a few items I had ran out of stock of (among them five tins of tuna and some prawns) to their shopping list.

In their absence, I tried to recall all I had ever known about Benedict Arnold. The allegations that he beat his wife, or at least treated her badly, whatever ‘treating someone badly’ entailed. His personal yearning for fame and his greed to accumulate wealth, an endeavour in which he had proven ruthless. He had destroyed powder we could have used well at Yorktown to fill our ships with goods he had planned to sell and fill his coffers.

He was, in essence, just like Brewster, a smuggler disguised as an officer. But while I could muster a warrior’s respect for Brewster, I had none whatsoever for Arnold. Brewster had been the insolent, unrefined paragon of all negative traits I had ever associated with the patriots but had also possessed endurance and a steadfast belief in his mission, his cause. At least Brewster had not changed sides when he had manoeuvred himself into tempestuous waters only to save his own skin, even when I, half-turned and my brain fogged by bloodlust, had tortured him.

Arnold, on the other hand was the exact opposite: he would have given up every single piece of information as soon as I had only shown him my bayonet, deeming himself more important than the cause he supposedly served.

He was a man of the lowest degree, even in life, without convictions and beliefs, whose only goal it was to serve himself to the sweetest cakes and the most money he could get hold of with his greedy, wandering hands.
For over an hour, I tried to proceed scientifically, or at least like a TV detective, trying to piece a picture of Arnold together that would help us deal with him, but failed, for in my mind, the picture of Arnold’s slashed abdomen accompanied by cries of excruciating pain manifested into a vivid fantasy.

I gave up. Walking across the upstairs hallway, I heard my name being called by Francesca. I entered and found her awake.

She asked me if I could be so kind and pull the heavy curtains shut, for the sun had broken through the clouds and vexed her eyes.

When I had obliged her wish, the room was dark, but that didn’t matter to us since we were both in possession of perfect night vision.

Francesca’s eyes found mine.

“I want to talk to you. About Anna Williams.”

“Why?”

“I am weak, but I am not oblivious of what happens around me.”

“I cannot say that I am following you”, I replied cautiously, knowing what was to come next.

“She likes you. And you like her.”

I raised an eyebrow. “I do. I like you, I even don’t despise David. I do not see what reprobate element you find in this.”

“I could smell your scent on her clothes. All I ask is for you to spare her.”

“If you are implying I could do the same to her as Benedict Arnold has done to you, I would never. In fact, whatever he may have told you feeding on one’s human partner is neither common nor accepted. What he did to you cannot be expressed in words. He used you, and I shall avenge you.”

"I would love to send him a fully armed batallion to remind him of my love, General Simcoe."

For one moment, her eyes were a-glimmer again as I had known them in life, sharp and fiery oozing the fighting-spirit I knew she still carried inside her.

"And I would grant you that wish, if I still could. All of them armed with silver balls, of course."

“You talk like a knight from a fairy tale”, she gave me a sad, exhausted smile.

“Believe me, the late 1700s were not a fairy tale.”

My dark reply echoed through the room.

“Neither is today.”

“You are right. But I would never-“

“I know you won’t hurt her, willingly. But what if… it just happens? What if Benedict- She is still so young and above all, mortal. Keep her safe."

“Arnold is no longer your problem. I am his.”
Her cornflower-blue eyes seemed to stare directly into my soul.

“You are reckless.”

“I have heard worse.”

“Promise me you will do everything to keep Anna safe. And David.”

What else could I do but promise her?

“I promise to keep them safe.”

Francesca was not entirely content with my somewhat reluctant answer and had, as far as I could tell, only agreed because I had at least relented to her pleas and granted her this partial victory.

I had tried to leave Miss Williams out of our short exchange, for reasons I could not explain myself. Once, I had fantasised about violating her neck and drinking her blood, but I did no longer maintain this fantasy.

As a man of honour, I could never harm her after having pledged to safeguard her neck’s intactness, to never taste her blood.

She was-

In this very moment, Miss Williams and David returned, much later than I had calculated it would take to stop somewhere to buy some groceries and get the travel bag from her flat.

“We brought a few things for Francesca to make her feel better”, Miss Williams greeted me. I was somewhat offended she had not directly greeted me as was proper and expected by all those having enjoyed childhood supervision in manners, but she seemed too excited to care.

David had to excuse himself; the kindergarten had called him on his way to my house and asked him to pick up his daughter, who seemed sickly.

We said our goodbyes, wishing his daughter a speedy recovery and waved for one last time before closing the door behind us.

Once inside, she dropped the two sizeable plastic bags containing provisions and the sport’s bag with her personal items onto the kitchen table and then headed straight for the master bedroom with a third plastic bag, eager to show her purchases to the one they were intended for.

Francesca was somewhat better than in the morning; she was able to sit up and speak.

As we entered, she looked up from a thin volume of poetry she must have found in the top drawer of my nightstand. Her eyes, I noticed, were still reddened from crying earlier in the morning. I felt sorry for Miss Williams, who would likely not receive the reaction to her surprise she had perhaps anticipated.

“I’m a first time newly-transitioned-vampire-carer, so maybe this is all useless, but maybe there is something you can actually use.”

She shook the contents of the bag onto the bed and I watched on with bewilderment that soon turned into admiration.

“A teething ring”, she held up the yellow doughnut-shaped plastic thing, “babies with new teeth like those, so I thought....”
Next followed a sleeping mask to soothe her eyes, sunscreen of the highest sun protection factor available outside pharmacies (“I was told some vampires’ skin reacts to contact with sunlight”), a pair of dark sunglasses and a lipstick in an alluring shade of red I could just as well picture on Miss Williams.

“Because most of your old ones won’t match your skin tone any longer.”

Francesca held back tears at so much consideration and care and pulled Miss Williams into an embrace that cost her all her willpower, as I could tell, not to bite at the sight of the pretty neck presenting itself to her. But she was successful, her lessons in self-discipline progressed faster within a day than my own had in centuries.

“Oh, I have one more thing”, she grinned devilishly, and handed me the last item on the bed.

“‘Glam-Glow Sparkly Body Lotion’?”

I could tell my inadvertent confusion did amuse her. What did amuse her even more, as I was to find out, was when she told me what purpose she intended this product to serve in my hands.

“Because it’s somewhat disappointing you don’t sparkle naturally.”

Her grin widened. She evidently remembered our heated conversation the day before and enjoyed tormenting me to no end. I tried to remain composed; and yet I could tell from her face that my attempt at making a neutral face did not quite come to fruition as I had hoped.

The glimmer in Miss Williams’ eyes was unmistakeable, but I resisted. I would not grant her another victory.

With cold indifference (I hoped) I looked her in the eyes.

“Thank you, for your considerate present, Miss Williams.”

I could have died then and there from embarrassment, which I deem more destructive to my person than silver, when I heard both women, the living and the dead one, stifle giggles at the sound of my voice, which oh cruel trick of nature, betrays me too often by its sound.

Francesca, who had laughed a little more lowly and restrainedly, caught herself more quickly than Miss Williams.

Turning away from them to shield my face from their view, I took the ungodly bottle to relocate it to the bathroom, where it would be stored, untouched, for eternity, behind towels and soap.

An hour or so later however, when the initial amusement had subsided somewhat, I found my feet take me to the bathroom and my hand reach for the pink bottle. Briefly, I wondered if beauty products worked like poisonous tropical animals, if the colour of their packaging doesn’t simply indicate that one should keep one’s fingers and any other body parts away from them, but against my better judgement, I opened the lid. I was greeted by the overly sweet smell of lab-produced strawberry scent that was sure to make anybody except a teenage girl in hormonal overdrive sick, which was not helped by my sharpened sense of smell at all.

Tentatively, I applied a minuscule amount onto the back of my hand, like I had seen women test cosmetic products in shops. I was almost disappointed it did not have any unpleasant side-effects.

Apparently, my brain decided this did not do to test the properties of this horrid product and my hands wandered to my black turtleneck to remove it.
With odd curiosity, I applied some more onto my right collarbone and shoulder. In no time, the cream had spread across my neck and upper arms.

Curious to see the result, I let some water flow into the bathtub to serve as a natural mirror to me, since my image does not show in man-made ones.

It did of course not achieve the same effect as the CGI-work done on Robert Pattinson, but there was no denying of the fact that the areas covered in pungent synthetic strawberry odour sparkled distinctively.

As I was bent across the tub to inspect my work, scolding myself for being so ridiculous and childish, for not having stopped myself, the sound of laughter caused me to spin around and thus present my shame to- Miss Williams.

“You know this was supposed to be a joke, right?”

One eyebrow raised in mocking amusement, she could barely contain her laughter.

“You should really learn to lock the bathroom door. I’ve walked in on you two times now. But I never would’ve thought-“

A barrage of laughter forced her to stop. Could humans suffocate while laughing too much? Was she in any danger from herself?

“But”, she continued, breathing a little more regularly again and having regained a state resembling composure, “it does look good on you. Let me.”

She snatched the bottle from its place perched on the sink and emptied a generous amount of the pinkish-glittery mass into her hands.

I should have recoiled and told her not to. But I did not.

Instead, I allowed her to touch me, watched with curiosity spurned by the awakening flames of soft-

I should not have let her.

Her fingers touched the bare skin of my upper body and spread the glitter across from side to side in sultry, swirling movements that had me question my sanity.

Under her touch, the unholy glitter-cream embalmed me in warmth that burned to a blazing fire wherever her hands lay; unwillingly, my eyes shut to savour the feeling properly, untainted by the intake of my other senses, her pulse so maddeningly rhythmical beating the drum to serve as substitution for the accelerated heartbeat I would have had in this moment had I been human.

Her small fingers roamed my chest where they entangled in the wiry thicket of hair there, her pressure expertly moderate with only a hint of her fingernails, then her hands migrated to my abdomen, still divinely enticing, especially so when a curious finger came to trace the scar where centuries ago Hewlett had stabbed me: instead of the searing pain I had felt then, I could not imagine any more divine feeling and would almost have thanked Hewlett then and there for having made this wound for the sole purpose of Miss Williams’ caress. Was she still mockingly covering me in glitter for her personal amusement or was she-

“Don’t.”
“Why not?”

She looked up, visibly satisfied with the half-dazed, heavy-lidded expression of soft desire on my face that could not be wiped away by my stern order.

“Because-”

My voice died in my throat. My conversation with Francesca earlier on rang in my ears for a moment, but was cleanly wiped off my mind when my thoughts returned to Miss Williams. I could still not fathom why any mortal woman of Miss Williams’ intelligence and appearance would willingly bestow me with a tender glance or a smile; a woman like her, educated, young, spirited, witty and beauteous could have any man. She could take her pick among young gentlemen her own age, I was certain, and yet she attempted to seduce an aged vampire, whose face has more often been described as unwelcome, unsettling and even ugly than not, and whose character has been judged unsavoury and downright brutal throughout history; who was as scar-ridden as a one-eared stray cat and whose voice and hair colour even would in their own right be enough to repel most men and women?

And yet her hand rested on my chest, waiting for permission to continue.

“We talked about that. You are no monster.”

Why glistened her eyes with sadness as she said this?

The temptress’ right hand rose to my cheek, which she caressed, bringing my face closer to hers.

“We have discussed this at length. Stop it. I don’t see an Arnold-like monster.”

“Then what do you see?”

“A man. Such a handsome, tragic man, who has lost himself long ago. So much sadness-“

Her unoccupied hand slipped into mine, offering her companionship and compassion in the most universally understood way.

“You hate. And you love.”

“Why I do so, you ask? I know not. But I am in torment”

Her kiss came as release to the aforementioned torment in the sweetest fashion. It was no kiss of self-devouring passion, it was an expression of closeness, of feeling, not of the hunger and starvation that is inherent to raw desire, her lips spoke to me of comfort, of hope, of tenderness where I had never dared to find any, of understanding and patience.

For one moment, the world seemed to be a place it had not been for me since two full centuries and eleven years and when I let go to allow her to breathe, a smile softened the corners of her reddened lips.

She looked like an icon, made to be revered by a kind and decent man who could be to her what I never was and have no chance of ever being and what she deserved, and yet, it was I who had been invited to return her kiss and who had coloured her lips in the hue of love.

Miss Williams deserved nightly vigils of passionate, yet tender worship to be held in her name, she deserved her name to sound like a prayer when spoken by a good man, she deserved to have hymns written for her praising her body and soul, she deserved gifts to be laid at her feet and to be
accoutred not only in the world’s costliest fineries, but also in affectionate kisses and caresses.

We are all condemned to our fate; and what fool I called myself in the aftermath of this afternoon to allow her to venture so close to me, or I to her, like ignorant Icarus soaring across the heavens in man-made wings towards the bright, splendorous sun, or Phaeton, whose arrogance to steer the sun-chariot across the sky did not only come at the cost of his own life and brought grief to his father, but also almost thrust the world into eternal darkness.

I called myself by their names, expectant to hear myself retort to these allegations; yet I could find no counter-argument for they were correct.

And yet, against my better judgement and knowledge, I invited her into my glittering embrace, as if to be sure she was real and with me and helped her rid herself of her pullover, which seemed a rather obstructive item to both of us.

She cast it on the floor without a care and encouraged me to free her twin mounds of their cage; I obliged her only too willingly.

Within no time, the remaining garments were stripped from both our bodies, two pairs of trousers, shoes and undergarments strewn across the floor.

“Is that rigor mortis or…”

She smiled knowingly, teasingly at the obvious indication of my arousal and would surely have had me then and there, had I not regained my senses somewhat: I would not do it up against the wall or on the floor like a drunken private does with a public ledger for cheap coin and thus gathered her in my arms and carried her down a flight of stairs to our shared bed where I could afford the proper care and ministrations to her that she deserved.

I have no words to describe the exact feeling that stirred me when our limbs entangled; for where the passions are alive in all their sensibilities and arrive at their utmost height, the measure of Poetry is but fetters, Language itself is expressive but imperfect- no words can describe the divinity of the moment when she moaned into my mouth, mid-kiss, her pleasure rising at my cold touch on her heated skin, the soft ripple of her chuckles when I made it my declared goal not to leave an inch of her body unkissed and her hums of agreement when she discovered which parts of her geography my pledge entailed; her hands in my hair, first combing, weaving, then grasping it tightly and lastly, the swift, wave-like release of our union, our bodies following their own rhythm that shamed the heartbeat of the world that could be measured in the number of received texts or cars passing in the street below per minute as an insignificant, fickle thing, dead to us, who truly lived, who had recognised the beauty of the moment and inhabited it fully, having cheated the secrets of revolving time of their meaning.

When she reached the summit of her pleasure, my name escaped her, uttered between two quickening breaths:

“John.”

My surname and military rank or academic titles having always been the mode of addressing me and with no one close enough to me to call me by the name my mother and father had given me so tenderly in two centuries, I fully gave myself to her, who was in possession of my body and soul, who knew me by my true name, my true nature, and lost in the close bond of our bodies and the intimacies of the soul we had shared, gained my own share of highest pleasure.

Sated, she allowed me to lay my head across her chest to listen how her heartbeat slowed again.
Although I would not have objected to being able to behold her form for longer, I pulled a blanket over both of us, knowing human bodies cool as fast as they heat up.

She absent-mindedly played with a tendril of my hair between two fingers while I caressed every inch of her body I could get hold of.

None of us spoke, fearing, no, *knowing*, that no matter what could possibly be said, it would destroy the moment.

“We have to get up.”

Sighing, she shifted, prompting me to raise my head.

“Why?”, I asked, disappointed the moment was apparently not to linger.

“We must.”

“We ‘must’ do nothing.”

Oh, are we having another philosophical dispute now?”, she mocked.

“Listen, John. We’ve been gone for quite long, what will Francesca say?”

“She’s still weak, likely asleep.”

I made a dismissive gesture with my hand. I didn’t care about Francesca or anybody else, I cared about *her*, Anna.

All of a sudden, she said:

“Can I ask you something?”

“Why, of course.”

I smiled at her, wondering what question she could possibly have for me in this moment.

“Is it always like this, sleeping with a vampire, I mean? And you, what about you?”

Had she not liked it? I had had the impression she had been rather content with my efforts to say the least.

“What do you mean?”

“It’s a little different, you know, being with you. Your body is not exactly cold, but not exactly warm either and seems to depend on the temperature of your immediate environment—“

“Quite right—“

“Also, you don’t breathe and there is no heartbeat. You don’t have all the things that are so important for humans when it comes to… having fun.”

It was evident that although she was curious, she was somewhat hesitant to ask these things. Considering the last barrier of formality between us had fallen, there was no need for that— I’d rather she asked me questions than brandishing a string of garlic in front of my face.

“You are correct, it does feel different for me. But not bad, not at all. It is just different. My senses
are more sensitive than a human's, which plays an important part and there is always the other person to like being with you and who you like-"

What exactly was I trying to tell her and what did the words coming out of my mouth mean? My tongue wagged on, but my brain was apparently numb and dumb with sated contentedness still.

Anna blushed in my stead, who could not blush for the lack of human blood. The bashful rose blossoming on her cheeks made her even more beautiful and complimented her features most advantageously.

“No more talk”, I declared, and rose from my position propped up on my elbows on either side of her shoulders to once more reveal the treasure buried beneath the blanket.

She wanted to protest, but relented, sighing theatrically and with a smile when she deemed my caresses of her fully exposed body most agreeable.

We loved each other a second time, her wily hands almost rendering me to a state akin to both to highest elation and deepest despair that made me think I would combust, die, before she granted me merciful relief in her tender care.

Panting, we let go of each other.

“We should really get up now. God, I’m glittering!”, Anna exclaimed, laughing, while looking down her front.

It was her laugh in this very moment that proved my conscience’s undoing; it reminded me of someone in whose arms I had lain for twenty-four years, who had loved me and whom I had loved with reverent fervour, body and soul.

Now I had become guilty of using her, as I had feared, to project my love for a dead woman, my wife, onto her and live out my passions that had not been tended to for quite some time.

Or had I? I had not thought even once of my poor Eliza when I had lain with Anna.

On the one hand, I was relieved, I had not used her, on the other I felt guilty, as I have always done when I visited other women to satisfy my sexual urges, for having cheated on my Eliza and having besmirched her memory. Until this day, I cannot tell how many dark-haired women with a passing resemblance to the goddess who reclines for eternity beneath the stones of Wolford Chapel I had bedded in more than two centuries.

I could not tell what I felt, only what I thought I should feel and these two opinions tore in their dispute with one another my mind apart.

We rose and Miss Williams, Anna, repaired to the bathroom to clean herself of the traces of our passions, especially the glitter. When she was done, I too washed the glitter off my skin and with it the moment of liberating carelessness we had enjoyed.

Twenty minutes later, both of us, clean and dressed, looked presentable enough once more, but the water had only washed over my body from the outside. Inside, I was awash in a sea of feelings, of right and wrong, contemplating agitatedly if I should not have heeded Francesca’s words.

We rose and Miss Williams, Anna, repaired to the bathroom to clean herself of the traces of our passions, especially the glitter. When she was done, I too washed the glitter off my skin and with it the moment of liberating carelessness we had enjoyed.

For the remainder of the afternoon, I avoided her, locked up in my study under false pretences. There was food, Wi-Fi, a TV and my excellent collection of books- she would not be bored.

And yet, I felt bad for leaving her alone after having celebrated the union of our bodies, I felt as if I
had discarded her like a child does a toy he has grown tired of.

I was far from tired of her, I realised and once more hoped that Eliza, if she looked down on me or had any other mode to follow my activities, would know and understand.

But why did I feel the urge at all to ask my deceased wife for permission? Did I need to? Why?

It was no use. Defeated by my conflicting feelings, I laid my head in my hands, trying to think everything through.

At six o’clock, she knocked, asking me to join her in the kitchen. Sensing I could no longer hide from her, I rose from my desk and went to the kitchen where, to my surprise, she had set the table for three, two plates with a glass of water and cutlery each, and a solitary glass at the third place.

“David said he’d come. His wife made lasagne, we’re getting the leftovers”, she informed me, her back turned to me while preparing a bain-marie. I could hear a trace of hurt in her voice.

For painfully long five minutes, nothing happened. Neither of us uttered a syllable, we just sat at the kitchen table next to each other and while being worlds apart. The scent of freshly washed hair and soft skin hung heavy in the air.

What could I tell her? What would she want to hear? What should I tell her?

Thankfully, David’s coming delivered us from this uncomfortable silence, as he chatted merrily, saying his daughter was already better and praising his wife’s prowess in the kitchen, which he despite several attempts could never hope to surpass for several minutes without interruption while Anna chewed on the same bite of lasagne for the entire time.

“The reason I’ve come is not cold lasagne, as you can imagine.”

He paused, unsure how to proceed.

“We need that Arnold-business to be solved, as quickly as possible. Linda told me Arnold, or Gustavus, as she knows him, called her at work. I can’t lie to my wife forever and I am also worried because he has our phone number and everything. I want him dealt with before he hurts her or the children.”

Never before had I seen David this way, stern, ready, eager even to fight- never would I have imagined this man could ever resemble a soldier, but in this moment, he did.

“By ‘dealt with’ I assume you mean extinguished?”

“Yes.”

His decision had not come to him lightly; the muscles around his jaw contracted visibly as the word of affirmation exited his mouth, so much so even it was visible despite his large beard obscuring the area.

“But how? How are we going to do it?”

Anna looked as stern as her fellow human on the other side of the table, her mouth a thin line. Would that she could smile as carelessly as she had this afternoon again soon, when the ruin that threatened Exeter, or rather England, was repelled for good.

“Bait him somehow?”
“David, you can’t be serious. We discussed that already, Francesca won’t be part of this plan.”

“Who said either of you were?” I snapped, interrupting their bickering. They made it so I could not think.

“He is a vampire who can easily extinguish either of you. Do not think that you want to face an enemy like him. I shall take care of this threat.”

“Pardon me, John, but you’re not exactly, how to put this, his type. Someone who was married to Peggy Shippen and bit Francesca will not exactly fall for the charms of a completely bloodless six foot three ginger guy with a mullet, amirite?”

“Listen. When you’re very, very hungry, say you have been starving for a week, you would eat a plate of Brussels sprouts if it was the only thing you could get, is it not so?”

“But Arnold’s fed. He has had quite a bit of Francesca, didn’t he?”

“He did.”

“And what if he isn’t in Exeter anymore? We need to think about everything.”

“You said he called your wife this morning. From where?”

“From work, I think?”

“Work would be London?”

“Yes.”

“Good.”

“Why is it good if he’s getting farther away from us?”

Anna answered this question for me.

“Because that means he is no danger to us right now and will probably not expect us when we strike.”

“I could dress up in a blonde wig, add some perfume-“

“That is out of the question”, I ruled. Anna would not endanger herself on this mission.

“I just keep wondering about one thing: Why did he leave Francesca in the car park?”

David’s question was valid, yet to me unimportant.

“He could have been disturbed.”

“Yes, but would you kill someone in a university car park where anybody can come by and see you? If I were a murderer-“ Dave paused, “or a vampire, I’d hide the corpse, build a new garden shed with a concrete foundation, if you know what I mean or dissolve the body in acid, bury it- whatever, I wouldn’t let it lie about in public. I would try and eliminate any possible risk that the body can be traced back to me.”

My colleague had a point.
“David is right, why there? They were a couple, he could have lured her into his flat in London or gone to hers- he could have had it a lot more easily than that.”

Anna’s brows furrowed pensively.

“He has always been greedy”, I said, “perhaps he could not wait.”

“No, no. No.”

Dave’s head crushed into his arms with a ferocity that made me somewhat concerned for him.

“What is the matter now?”

“‘He has always been greedy’” David echoed me. “It never was about Francesca, she was only his plaything, his past-time while he was waiting for the real thing. It was about you. Anna, do you have your laptop nearby?”

Anna rose and returned post-haste with the requested device. With a few clicks, David had found my online CV (entirely fictional of course) and list of publications on the university homepage.

“Here.” Anna, standing over David’s shoulder, read from an essay on the tactics employed by the British at Yorktown.

“…A man whose cowardice and disloyalty rightfully obscured him to British history, whose debatable military prowess and personal charisma, or rather the lack thereof, set him apart from capable and loyal commanders of the time, such as Lieut.-Col. John Graves Simcoe or the famed general, later president George Washington, to mention only two outstanding examples from both sides- or here: Benedict Arnold’s prime objective throughout his time in service to Britain was undeniably both social and financial self-betterment, which he aimed to obtain by marriage to his second wife, Margaret “Peggy” Shippen-Arnold and an impressive zest for self-presentation in order to remind the public of his importance to the army. In truth however, many of his contemporaries were aware if the fact that he served neither King nor Country, but himself. A liar, a coward and, as contemporary evidence suggests- Christ, you didn’t even put a footnote there, if you were anybody else, I’d say you made that up but you probably witnessed it- a brute to his wife.”

She broke off.

“Slick move, mate. Totally cool, giving yourself a honourable mention while giving Arnold a post-mortal public dressing-down and publishing it in one of the major journals in your field under your real name. And these are only two passages from the same article.”

For one moment, I felt the urge once more to aim a heavy tome at David’s head as I had done before, but I did not, mainly because I did not keep books in the kitchen, which was fortunate for him.

“I guess he’s been keeping tabs on you when he found out you’re running a smear campaign of sorts against him. Francesca being the only one who ever really made an effort to talk to befriend you, he arranged bumping into her somewhere and tried to use her to get close to you. He probably used me and Linda, too. Anna can be lucky Arnold hasn’t approached her yet.”

Sighing, he leant back in his chair.

They all were in danger. Arnold probably knew about Anna as well, if he had befriend the Coopers and Francesca for the sole purpose to get close to me. I could not decide if under these
circumstances she was safer by my side or at the other end of the world.

“I think Francesca was a warning for you. You were supposed to find her and he wanted to hurt you, maybe he thought you- you cared about her in a romantic sense. He wants you to find him. For revenge.”

“Get. Out. I need time to think.”

I eyed both mortals as they more or less obeyed my order. David shrugged, mumbled something like he’d be off to his local Catholic church procuring rosaries and holy water for everybody in his family (pity they don’t repel vampires outside the realms of popular fiction) and grabbed his car keys from the pocket of his jacket.

Anna lingered for a moment in the doorframe, before she took her laptop and went to the guest bedroom, where I could hear her watching Netflix. How curious. In my time, penny dreadfuls needed to be read, not watched.

It was all wrong. Why did he not confront me directly? Two hundred years ago, the Arnold I had known would have come at me, yelling, and I would have smirked until he was unsettled and discouraged enough by my unblinking stare to creep back into his den and leave me alone. Time seemed to have changed him. He had tortured Francesca to gain my attention, he had befriended humans for months, only to get to me.

How could I have known he was dead? Well, how could I have known he was not, at least not in the traditional sense of the word?

As a vampire myself, I should have guessed I was not the only one who had seen the late 18th century dwelling on this earth, but my arrogance had fooled me, tricked me into believing I was the only one suffering from immortality, the only one ever bitten by a vampire.

A wry, deadpan part of me wondered if next, a Banshee-Brewster, Werewolf-Woodhull or Zombie-Tallmadge would come and find me. Since there are many reported sightings of ghost-horses in European folklore, they would surely bring the tragic Bucephalus as well.

I went to the living room and poured several glasses of sherry, but the alcohol did neither help me find a solution to my problem, nor did it make me forget the feeling of guilt that was devouring me from the inside.

My actions had put several people in grave danger, and one quite literally almost into the grave.

Arnold was my responsibility.

It was past midnight when I went to bed, but not before quickly slipping into Francesca’s room and taking her phone from the nightstand.

The code not having been changed, it was still Benedict Arnold’s birthday. I opened her contacts and copied the phone number saved under “Darling” (which almost made me vomit, thinking of this man in terms of endearment) into my own device, where I saved it as “Traitor”.

This small act of defiance did not solve the overall issue, but it gave me the faintest hint of glee.

Anna lay in the middle of the bed, her laptop still playing a video. I switched the device off, put it on the floor and re-arranged the covers around her which she had almost kicked off entirely.

As I lay down next to her, she murmured something in her sleep and drew somewhat closer.
For a moment, I allowed myself to watch her, peacefully reclining there, the moonlight weaving threads of silver light into her hair.

Knowing what I was about to do, I was painfully aware that I might never see her again, if things went badly.

Eventually, I managed to tear my eyes away from her, reached for my phone and opened WhatsApp, delivering my formal declaration of war.

**Traitor**

I hear you are still among us, General.

1:37 ✓✓

I was waiting for you to contact me

1:39 ✓✓

So I thought. I propose we settle our “dispute” as gentlemen.

1:40 ✓✓

What “exactly” do you propose?

1:41 ✓✓

A duel of course. Dr Francesca Montebello sends her regards.

1:42 ✓✓

For five long minutes, nothing happened. Uneasily, I listened to Anna’s slow, regular breaths and found my hand wandering to her hair, stroking it from her face to allow me behold her countenance. Then, my phone vibrated again:
When?
1:47 ✓ ✓

Tomorrow at dawn. Wolford Chapel, Honiton, Devon. No seconds.

1:49 ✓ ✓

Weapons?
1:50 ✓ ✓

Whatever you choose to bring.

1:53 ✓ ✓

You're a dead man walking, simcoe

1:54 ✓ ✓

Am I not already? Just like you.

I look forward to seeing you again,

General.

1:58 ✓ ✓

I turned the phone off, not even waiting for Arnold's reply, set a vibrating alarm in order not to wake Anna and granted myself another two to three hours’ rest.

When I rose, I found my body once more entangled with that of Anna Williams and carefully wrenched myself free, even though I would have rather taken my place at her side again and dressed in my usual attire of three-piece suit and tie.

She would have woken up in a cold bed anyway, with or without me in it.
I left a note (for this is what one does when one leaves unexpectedly, leave a note) on the kitchen table, informing Anna that I was out for a short walk and would be home by ten in the morning and left instructions when to feed the cat.

I left my phone behind as well; should I die for good, I would not be tempted to burden her with a selfish farewell call or message in my last moments that would scar her soul for life.

As I started the car, I realised that this duel would, unlike the one I had once fought against Woodhull, be likely one until death- the ending of immortality. With me on the backseat was my bayonet alongside a silver crucifix pendant wrapped in a piece of cloth I had taken as some sort of memento of a former lover from the 1860s. Dropped into a wound made by my bayonet, it would be fatal.

The dagger I had left with Anna, for her protection, however much it might have aided me.

So early in the morning, the world still dark around me, the streets were empty and I found myself alone driving through the rolling hills that once were my home.

I had chosen the venue for our encounter for several reasons: firstly, it was practical. Far enough away from people to attract attention and secondly, because if I had to die definitively, I would want to die somewhere dear to me, among my family- or, since they are all dead and gone, their graves.

What would Eliza say?

She would scold me for my folly and foolhardiness to be sure, but the bitter words would be sweetened by the tenderness in her eyes that revealed her deep fear for me.

And then I thought of Anna. What would she say if I would not return? Would she be sad? Would she miss me? Would she care? I could only hope she would take care of Diana. I hated the thought that, in the event of my unfortunate demise, the cat would be rehomed to an animal shelter.

Besides, there was still Francesca who would for the coming one or two weeks still be reliant on a carer. Even if I would not be there to instruct her, Anna could help her until she was strong enough to get up again, having been instructed by me.

But would Anna care?

I was only burdensome to her, Francesca and to David. I was not worthy to be remembered, by her or anybody else. John Simcoe, DPhil had not distinguished himself as a good man.

After an hour's drive, I arrived at my destination. Heavy-footed and heavy-hearted, I waited, leaned against the church door, for my challenger, no, my adversary to arrive.

As I waited, it occurred to me that I had never gone to battle nervous before.

The realisation that before, during the war in America, I had not cared about my own “life” (for then I still believed I was mortal, while in truth I was already mid-transitioning) or rather losing it on the battle field fighting for a cause I believed in because I had never looked past the day I lived in struck me with force. In these days, there had been no tomorrow for me, only now.

Today, things had changed; there was a tomorrow on the horizon for me, one in which I could ask Anna-

“Simcoe.”
A voice I had not heard in a long time addressed me.

Chapter End Notes

"Benedict Gustavus": Gustavus was the code name under which Arnold exchanged secret messages with André.

"The Abyssinian Trick": because I never quite understood why "TURN" twisted Simcoe's backstory so much, I have decided to stay a little closer to history, which means Simcoe never went to Gondar with James Bruce's expedition. In order to fit the quote from the show in, it's an acquaintance who has taught him the trick.

"I would love to send him a fully armed batallion to remind him of my love.": A line lifted from King George III's first song in "Hamilton", "You'll Be Back" and slightly modified to suit the context.

"I hate and I love" etc.: Catullus 85, also known as "Odi et Amo", which Simcoe quoted some time in season 2.

Public ledger: 18th century slang for a prostitute.

"For where the passions are alive..." etc: a modified quote from an undated memoir by Simcoe, today in Colonial Williamsburg's manuscript collection (SCMS1930.6), which you can find digitised and transcribed online.

The full quote reads:
"Where the passions are alive in all their sensibilities & arrive at their utmost height, the measure of Poetry is but fetters, Language itself is expressive & imperfect; ..."

In the same scene, I have also included a snippet from a fragmentary poem ("the secrets of revolving time") written by Simcoe in 1791.

Reading Dr Simcoe's "research", I hope you don't get the idea that all historians write like this. He doesn't write and research to broaden his (and other people's) understanding of past times, he has seen these days in person and publishes his pieces as some sort of "revenge", which, as we have seen in this chapter, backfired spectacularly and with terrible consequences.

While of course expressing one's personal views is perfectly acceptable, one should not use derogatory terms in one's scholarly works and above all, keep an eye on those footnotes.

"He served neither King nor Country, but himself" is an allusion to chapter five, the smallish intermezzo called "The Rebel". In 1916, the year of the Easter Rising, the Irish Citizen Army (ICA) mounted a banner reading "We serve neither King nor Kaiser, but Ireland!" on the façade of Liberty Hall in Dublin. Constance Markievicz, from whose perspective this chapter is told and her friend Kat are both members of the ICA.

The typos in Arnold's texts are intentional.

Thanks for reading!
“She will not have long”, the doctor announced to the group of several women and one man waiting outside the sparsely lit bedroom.

Inside, the frail body of an old woman lay in the bed that had been much too big for her alone most of her life and in which she looked even more lost now, thin and sickly.

She had lived to a ripe old age. It was time for her, after a long period of gradually growing weaker to depart this world.

Henry had gone to pray at her bedside. He always did. A man of the church, it was only logical he would be there for her in her last moments and grant her spiritual guidance.

His sisters waited until the door was opened once more by their brother.

“I fear her mind has already left us. Caroline, she called for you, but don’t indulge in false hope: her speech is incoherent and she imagines things. She talks about the old days, mainly, but in cryptic language; among other things, she spoke of a broken carriage and a gunshot; do any of you know what this might be about?”

"I do", Elizabeth answered. The age difference between her and her youngest siblings was quite staggering, but among themselves, they had never let it become detrimental to their relationship and had rather viewed their several contrasting ages as an expression of the everlasting love their parents had shared.

“You were quite young then and at school if I am correct. She had arranged for the pony carriage to wait for her coming back from a ride to Ashfield to collect her on the road to St. Cyres, but when she reached the spot where the carriage should have been, there was nothing but wheel marks. Riding back to the house, parts of the carriage and a wheel were found, broken, and back at the stable, the pony waited with what remained of the carriage dragging behind it. The man in charge of the stables made a few enquiries and it appears someone must have fired a gun that had spooked the pony and caused it to break free and destroy the carriage.”

“Who fired the gun?”, Henry asked.
“Hm. Nobody knows. A poacher perhaps. Or one of the tenants. But why does she-“

“She is old and she is dying. Now go, Caroline, she asked for you.”

Hesitantly, Caroline entered the room. The smell of medicine hung in the air and bit the insides of her nostrils.

The figure in the bed looked so shrunked and shrivelled, she barely recognised her. In days gone by, she had been such a stunning presence, but then, Caroline, too was not the youngest anymore.

Brushing an errant strand of iron grey hair from her face, she addressed her mother.

“Mother? You wanted to talk to me?”

“Caroline, is that you?”

“Yes, mother."

"You must do something for me“, the old woman rasped. She could barely talk.

Caroline nodded.

“Mother? You wanted to talk to me?“

“Go- the bottom drawer."

Puzzled as to what her mother could possibly want, Caroline obliged her wish and opened the bottom drawer of the commode across the room.

She was greeted with the unassuming sight of handkerchiefs, which irritated her at first before she lifted one and found that the handkerchiefs were a ruse, a cover sheltering the true contents of the drawer from prying eyes.

No one would be interested in handkerchiefs.

Underneath, a collection of keepsakes and treasures revealed itself to Caroline: a bundle of letters tied firmly together with red tape, an envelope containing a lock of hair she had taken of each and every one of her children when they had been young (not as old and grey as they were now, those of them who were still alive) and other small mementoes of days gone by like an old painted fan, a piece of silvery fabric and a battered book Caroline could at present not examine for its content.

None of these items were of any monetary value; in truth, her mother had sold most of her valuable pieces of jewellery, apart from a few she had kept for sentimental reasons and given to her daughters instead, and given the money to efforts she deemed charitable.

All she held truly dear was kept in this drawer, hidden from away from prying eyes, a life of over eighty years told in a collection of objects.

What a sad thought that in a matter of days, she and her siblings would be in this room, likely together, the bed cold and empty, and make decisions on what to keep and what to throw out or give away.

What, how much, would they keep?

Would they inadvertently dispose of something they should not, an item they could not have known had borne great significance to their mother?
And how should they know. She had never talked much or intimately about certain things.

For some periods in her mother’s life, Caroline was convinced, official versions existed, stories that had been repeated word by word whenever someone asked. Why this was the case, none of the children had ever questioned. It had simply always been this way and none of them had given it much thought.

Now, it was too late to ask these questions.

Underneath one handkerchief that was, judging from its size, not a woman’s, Caroline’s hand found an envelope of good, firm paper.

With a soft sting in her heart her fingers glided over the three letters of a monogram embroidered in one corner before she rose from her kneeling position beside the commode to retake her seat beside her mother at the head of the bed.

“Is this your testament? Henry is the heir, I think it should be he who-“

„No, not my will. Read it.”

She did as she was instructed and broke the wax seal.

When she was done, her eyes, large and round with disbelief, found her mother’s.

“What is this?” “

You are to follow my instructions.”

„This is- Mother, this is neither Christian nor will it succeed.“

“Do you remember the carriage?”, her mother asked completely without context. Henry was right; her mind was leaving her. Thanks to the previous conversation among her siblings, Caroline knew what the old woman wanted to talk about.

“I do. On the way to St. Cyres, the pony frightened by a gunshot, the broken carriage- I remember.”

“Yes”, the old woman affirmed and inhaled deeply. Talking exhausted her almost to the point of eternal exhaustion.

“And do you remember the night when Anne-“ A coughing fit interrupted her, but Caroline knew what her mother was talking about.

“Yes.”

“The eyes”, her mother breathed, her own giving the impression she was no longer in the present day, but in the very same room on a night long past.

“I saw them.”

“I believe you.”

Perplexed, Caroline tried to detect an emotion on her mother’s face that would give away the reason for her cryptic questions.

Many years ago, she had ordered both her daughters back to bed and forbidden them to talk of
what they had seen— or rather whom, for it had been a person lingering underneath Caroline’s bedroom window.

She had called it a “pack of nonsense” and scolded Caroline, the elder of the two, for her morbid type of literature and her blossoming imagination which she, like her father, tended to take one step too far.

This new reaction startled Caroline— her mother had never been one to admit a wrong. Strong and steadfast, her word had always been law and, Caroline was sure about that, had her mother decreed the world to be not an orb but flat, within a week the most eminent scientists would repeat her exact words, of such rigid perseverance and tenacity was her persuasiveness.

“Will you help me?”

A pair of watery hazel eyes dim and worn from age looked at her pleadingly.

Reluctantly, Caroline nodded.

Who was she to deny a dying woman her last wish, her own mother at that?

“You may… Have your share, if you like…”

“No, I will do as instructed, but I will have no other part in your… scheme than that.” The old woman gave her a sad smile and nodded, as good as she could.

“Then it must be so. But keep it to yourself. Swear, upon all you hold dear.”

“I swear.”

Two fingers in the air and one hand rested on the bible on her mother’s bedside table, Caroline obligated herself to secrecy.

“Good. Now go. I need to sleep, child.”

“General”, I chimed, painfully aware of the sound of my voice, which I hated with a passion for more than 250 years, “what brings you to these parts, or should I say, to be here, in general?” I raised an eyebrow, hoping to look self-assured.

“Retribution, I’d say. You slanderous—“

He came at me with his fists, but I backed away a step, causing his right hook to hit nought but air.

“Ah ah ah. We shall not stoop to this level. I wish to talk to you before we shall come to that part of our little meeting in due time.”

“And what should that be about?”

“Dr Montebello.”
“Simcoe, always leaping to a lady’s defence.”

He chuckled mirthlessly before he continued.

“She was tasty, our dear Francesca. She’s dead now, is she?”

Nodding, for I was telling the truth, I briefly wondered if I should tell Arnold about her new state of existence. On the one hand it would be gratifying to see his face when he found out he had been robbed of his triumph of having killed her, on the other, I had no desire to endanger her for the rest of eternity.

“A pretty little thing. Intelligent, good-looking, and very obliging to my desires.”

I wanted to vomit as he licked his lips suggestively, which brought the image of Francesca’s violated wrists back to my mind.

While he reminded me more of a Disney-villain than the man I had once known, I had no doubt this brazen braggadocio was a sham to assure me of his assuredness, just as I resort to nonchalance or ignorance to do the same.

He was just as afraid as I was, not knowing how our vampire-selves, no longer bound by the courtesies we afforded each other in our first lives, or were bound to exchange due to our stations in life, would clash, how we had changed, or worse, stayed the same.

“Why did you hurt her?”

“Don’t tell me John Graves Simcoe has grown to care about people.”

“I don’t”, I replied, “but I still consider myself restricted in my actions within the constraints of a few moral and legal boundaries. And I do care about my job and the reputation of the institution I work for. You, sir, have extinguished one of our best, which is why I am not entirely impartial to your latest victim. Normally, I do not care about who you kill, or if you kill at all, but once you venture to poach in my territory-”

“I see you understand, Graves. Francesca never interested me for her personality, not even her well-shaped arse. She was a plaything, yes, she looked pretty on my arm, let me have her body when I felt like it and allowed me to drink her blood. I cannot say I was dissatisfied with her, but I never loved her. Besides, my intentions for her were never of the romantic kind in the first place.”

I had long remarked upon Francesca’s slight resemblance to Mrs Margaret Shippen-Arnold. It had become common knowledge throughout the ages that Arnold, upon realising he had been deceived by his wife and John André, who had been lovers, he had become somewhat disillusioned with love. When he died in 1801, “died”, like me, I cannot recall Mrs Arnold mourning longer than was expected did not exactly speak of true love. Not like my poor Eliza, whose bed remained cold for the forty-odd years following my supposed death, unable to ever let anybody else into her life again. She should not have. She should have been happy. She should have been loved by someone else, let herself be loved, and not have sworn herself to be a corpse’s bride for the rest of her life.

And like Francesca’s death, which, as David had predicted had been a means to summon me, I was guilty of rendering her unhappy.

“I see, but did you truly not see any other way to meet me? My contact details are displayed on the university homepage, you know.”

Arnold rolled his eyes.
“You know full well, Graves, that you wouldn’t have responded.”

“Probably not.”

My field of studies and my "interest" in John Graves Simcoe, whom I passed off as my ancestor, were well known and after the release of that ungodly TV programme, I would have considered it an obvious hoax by some of my students and deleted the message.

“See? I needed to send you a message you would understand.”

“Oh, I understood. You wanted to see me. Why, pray tell?”

“I became a vampire when I met a gentleman in London. We talked, and when he told me what he could offer in exchange for my blood, I agreed. I had no pleasure in life- my wife deceived me and nobody ever acknowledged my efforts. It was my design to start anew, to find the fame that belonged to me and safeguard and uphold my name- only to find out all the world would turn against me, make me a villain synonymous with Janus and all the demons of hell, and then I discovered you, your writings, you dragging my name through the mud without any real cause, after more than 210 years- to hear you, the sanctimonious colonel, the messiah of Upper Canada, slander my name without cause when you deemed me dead, relishing in the fact that you could take it all out on me, your resentment? I saw right through you, Simcoe, your "ancestor" and your writings, and I will have my revenge, my honour, back!”

His speech did not sound as if trying his hand at bettering his situation under a new name in eternity had gone just as well as his first attempt at immortalising himself and made me wonder if he had sold a gun to a young Serb in Sarajevo in 1914, had been chief engineer on the Titanic or had been involved in the 2008 banking crisis.

While I could still muster some wry humour to face this situation, it became apparent to me that my carelessness had rendered Francesca most unhappy, that it was my fault, that I had killed her.

“I suspect, one of us will not see the next day, then”, I commented as casually as was possible to me.

Arnold took this as his invitation to lunge forward at me, but I eluded him; it was a strange feeling, the fear of being extinguished, the sudden elation that flooded my body, rejoicing in the fact that I was once more doing what I had proven myself best at in life, fighting, and my eagerness to end this despicable person for good, who had abused two women I knew and killed God knows how many people, who had chosen this odious half-existence in search for glory.

Like tigers or lions, we circled each other, two ruthless predators ready to strike.

Arnold attacked first and sent another fist in my direction while I drew my bayonet, which I had put in my coat pocket.

“Do you know why I favour a serrated blade?”, I asked him, wanting to underline the threat of the weapon with some psychological terror.

“I am by no means interested in that”, he spat, trying to wrench the weapon from my hand to turn it against me, “it won’t kill me.”

“No, you are correct, but using this, killing you will be far more interesting.”

The thought of Arnold, begging for mercy and writhing on the ground in pain, his intestines all pulled out of his body and draped around him in something that could be likened to expressive
modern art with me standing over him and dropping the silver cross I had brought into the gaping, bloody cavern of his abdomen, causing him to scream as he slowly burned to ashes spurned me to be quicker, to bring this moment about so I could relish in it, live it and kill this vilest of all creatures of the dark I had come to know.

Arnold reached into his pocket and what he pulled out was a silver blade, forged in the style of a hunting knife.

“Surprise.”

“I will be surprised if you find a way to use it on me.”

My witty comeback did not convince me. I didn’t have my dagger and had never bothered to obtain any other weapon made of silver in my entire time as a vampire; I had never had the desire to wage war against my fellow creatures, nor had I ever previously been involved in anything like this dispute with Arnold.

The surprise Arnold spoke of came in an altogether different form for us both.

Both of us could hear the car approaching and froze when it drew nearer, followed the gravel path intended for pedestrians only down to the chapel. It was a light blue Ford Fiesta that had passed its days of glory a long time ago and mastered the off-road challenge with more speed and elegance than I would have thought possible.

With screeching tyres and not without a good deal of skidding the car came to a halt. Even before the car had stopped moving altogether, a woman stumbled out from the passenger side; her footing was insecure and her walk shaky and yet, the determination in her step was tangible in the air.

“Benedict!” Arnold turned and the moment of surprise, which he had prophesised me, took hold of him, too.

“You said she was dead!” Arnold snapped.

Had only I been somewhat less surprised myself in this moment, I could have used this brief instant of utter paralysis to my advantage; could have disarmed this despicable knave and ended him with his own knife, but I too was too surprised to even fully register what was happening right away.

Francesca stood, hands at her hips in front of us, dressed in a combination of what seemed to be clothes extracted from my wardrobe over the black office trousers she had worn the day she had died.

She looked somewhat odd to say the least, like the Doctor in Doctor Who right after having regenerated, the new body still stuck in the last one’s clothes and at the same time had the air of a queen in dress of state.

One of my coats, which had knee-length for me but for her ended somewhere around her ankles topped an ensemble of a light blue shirt and tweed waistcoat. Around her neck, she wore one of my finely patterned silk scarves.

“I am dead”, Francesca hissed. “Very dead. Don’t dare to cross me, Benedict Arnold, I know who you are!”

She bared her long, new teeth in a belligerent gesture that would have made me think twice had it been directed at me.
“How”, Arnold demanded to know.

“John didn’t let me die just like that. He isn’t like you. He gave me whatever this-“ she gestured up and down her body in one flowing motion with her hand, “is. It’s not life, but it comes quite close. Guess you’ll have me sticking around for longer than you thought.”

“Francesca darling, it is your dear John who made you what you are. He started your transition, killed you for good, he is the reason why I even have shown any interest in you, came to use you. Pray tell, do you know about the war? Do you have any idea what this man is capable of? And you deem me a monster,” he spat, very ungentlemanly for his saliva to land right before the tips of Francesca’s shoes.

“I do not care what you have to say to me and if you mean to tell me that John’s Wikipedia article says he ambushed and killed some sleeping Americans during the war, then I must disappoint you. I knew that.”

“Your ‘John’ did quite a fair bit more than that. Funny, what history chooses to record and what it doesn’t”, he hissed.

“Even if. Can’t have been any worse than you-“

She should not have said that. Enraged, Arnold made two bold strides toward her and grabbed her by the lapels of her coat.

Before I could even move, a second figure jumped out of the passenger side of the car, leapt almost over the bonnet, which astonished me, given her stature did not exactly make her predestined for athletic pursuits connected to jumping high or long and threw something in the air, toward me.

“John, catch it!”

Thanks to my quick reactions that surpassed those of any human being, I caught the dagger, still in its sheath.

I watched it fly before I caught it, effortlessly, by the leather that shielded me from the deadly blade and threw the protection aside, aiming the blade at Arnold.

“We shall finish this now”, I could hear myself smirk, even if I did not feel like it at all. Arnold was still a threat, still there, still angry. Even if I knew my fighting skills in life, at least in man-to-man combat, had surpassed his by miles, I was not certain what abilities he had trained in the meantime. I for one had changed over more than two hundred years, somewhat at least, and expected him to have done, too.

Now David had joined the scene too, he had driven Anna’s car, and looked on, terrified, unable to say anything.

Seeing the three of them, an unfinished vampire and two humans stand there and watch, three so vulnerable targets for someone like Arnold, spurned me on in my endeavour to end him for good.

In my head, vivid images unfolded in which all three of them lay dead on the ground, sprawled across the graves of my family, David gutted with a small knife, not swiftly and elegantly as my bayonet would do, but messy and all the more painful, intestines and blood colouring the grass in his immediate vicinity red, his eyes wide in pain and shock, never to close again by themselves.

There was nothing left of Francesca but a scorched skeleton, burnt, charred, killed with fire, another effective weapon against vampires, her soul-shattering screams still in my ears.
And then there was Anna. *Anna.* Her delicate little body lay on the ground—no, she did not lay there, she looked as if she was in motion still, caught in a complex ballet figure, dancing while her eyes were fixed on me, as if she was dancing for me only, teas ing me, if only there hadn’t been two marks of red on the side of her neck. She had been bled dry, her body arranged for me to find it in this pose, she had died for me, like Francesca had, only she would be dead forever—

She really would be, if I did not kill Arnold.

Trying to wipe these images away, I concentrated at my task.

He was strong and a born fighter—his limp that had irked him so in life did not burden him in death—and several times I had to avoid his blade and kicks, for, though I had expected this, he did not fight entirely by the rules.

We fought on for a while, the silent audience of three looking on. From the corner of my eye, I could see Anna’s chest heaving desperately and Francesca clutching her by the shoulder as if to keep her from intervening.

I had to win, had to end this scoundrel that was intent on doing no good, on unleashing the same savagery I had once displayed when not fully transitioned. Only he was, and he did it on purpose.

His knife, longer than mine, missed me narrowly several times. In the distance, Anna gasped.

Then, the moment came. Arnold let down his guard, exposing his chest to me in an attempted attack.

It would all end now.

“Travel safe, General”, I said conversationally as I aimed for his heart without thinking twice.

“If I fall… You’re going down with me.”

Somehow, I had suspected it would come to this, but it had to end. We all end at some point and I would die as I had first envisioned when I had been human, a soldier in battle.

*Eliza,* was my only thought, I would see her again soon. Would she wait for me? She would, and I would hold her in my arms and we would be happy again, united after almost two hundred and eleven years of cruel separation. I would love her and make up for the time we lost.

All this I thought, preparing myself for the blow I was about to receive and yet nothing could prepare me.

My arm outstretched to bury my own blade inside him while pulling him close with the other in order to sink the full length of the dagger into his heart, his knife dug between my ribs on the left side of my body.

Instinct prompted me to let go of my own weapon and take a step back, wherefore the wound was not as deep as it could have been, but it would suffice. I was to die, this time forever.

“See… you… in hell… Graves” Arnold rasped, sounding oddly content for a finally dying man as we, Anna, Francesca, David and I watched on in horror how first he slumped to the ground, lifeless like a human body before he slowly began to disintegrate, his skin peeling away from his flesh before the underlying structures too started to loosen like puff pastry, for lack of any more elegant example, from the bones, which were the last part of him to dissolve to dust. Nothing but his clothes and the smell of burnt flesh was left of him and my silver dagger, which had split the heart
of this heartless wretch in two.

Everything started happening so fast around me.

Arnold had won, it occurred to me. He had beaten his enemy in one last battle, man to man, against the odds, just like in the old days.

“Francesca, get the clothes, put them in the back of the car, we can’t let whatever remains of Arnold lie around here. David, you drive. I’ll go in the back with John.” Anna, who though pale and horrified, had assumed command of the situation, cold and controlled, her mind banishing the horror of the situation and what she had just witnessed from her conscious to allow her to function machine-like, pulled me to my feet and how I even managed to stumble to the car, I have no way of telling. She propped me up half-sitting for my long legs did not allow laying me across the seats and unbuttoned first my coat, waistcoat and then shirt to lay the wound open to her glances. However out of place this thought may have been, I wished in that moment the context of her removing my clothing would have been a different one.

The silver burnt like fire and left the wound looking as if I had been struck by a glowing blade fresh from the smith’s anvil. A dark crust of my almost purple blood had formed around it that opened as soon as the fabric of my shirt was taken away and allowed the blood to run freely, staining my trousers and likely the car-seats.

Anna, who had ordered Francesca to hand her the first-aid-kit (which even in most situations humans may have need for it is barely enough to treat any injury more serious than a papercut) disinfected the wound, not knowing that except for increasing the pain, disinfectant was no match for silver before she tried to dab it clean.

I could not hold back expressions of pain any longer and when she was done with her provisional wound-dressing, she did her best to calm me.

The stinging and burning became unbearable and I yowled in pain, realising this was what feeling one’s blood slowly being poisoned must feel like.

The hour’s drive back to Exeter was much too long.

I was a soldier. I had to be strong. My hands curled into fists and my teeth drew blood from my lower lip in an attempt to keep myself from crying out. I did not want Anna to worry even more about me, nor did I want to inconvenience the others more than I already had.

At home, I was instantly put into bed, my upper body left exposed for treatment.

“Are vampires receptive for pain killers?” Anna asked.

I nodded weakly. She drew a packet of ibuprofen from her bag which she likely kept as cure for the pain her monthly affliction bedevilled her with, and gave one to me. I gulped it down with some water she fetched from the bathroom and tried to ease my tensed muscles, which did not help much.

With all three of them gathered around my bedside, I felt bad. Bad for them who had worried for me, who had come for me and put their own mortal lives into danger in order to assist me and who I now had disappointed.

I did want Eliza back, more than anything. But I didn’t want to die yet either, I realised, not for good. I could not even imagine it properly anymore, this concept, even if I had tried to talk myself
back into believing in it again on the battlefield at Wolford, I was more terrified of slowly watching my existence dwindle into dreary nothingness than any mortal, which was ridiculous given I had died before- and well, not lived, but continued to exist to tell the tale.

I was scared.

“You daft bastard”, David said, but it sounded more like a plea than an insult, almost as if he wanted me to throw Lord Byron’s works at him again in order to prove him that I was not as badly wounded as I truly was.

He looked at me, stared at the wound Anna had tried to dress as good as she could in the back of her car with limited supplies (Yorktown sprang to mind) and added, “so, what do you need to get you back on the mend again? Anything I can get you? Seriously, if you ever do this-“

“No.”

“What do you mean, ‘no’? Christ, look at you! All black and blue around the wound perhaps some-“

“No. I will die.”

“But you, we, are already dead”, Francesca pointed out, shaking.

She was still weak and now, in the safety of my house, she allowed herself to show it again. Francesca belonged into bed, rest, and have someone instruct her properly. I even wondered how she had managed two car rides with two warm-blooded humans so closely by her side. Maybe she had learned more than I thought from being with Arnold for so long, maybe she already knew what I was about to say.

“It was a silver blade. Silver is lethal to vampires. My blood is tainted.”

I closed my eyes, feigning I needed to rest. I was tired, as tired as a vampire can be, but only did it to escape the faces the three figures by my bedside made, David’s terrified disbelief, Francesca’s pale shock and the despairing horror mixed with, well, what?, on Anna’s face.

“John Graves Simcoe, I haven’t pulled myself together even if I can barely stand anymore and am hungry, so hungry in fact my instinct tells me to take either David or Anna regardless of all consequences, for you to just- you can’t-“ Francesca was lost for words, staring at her shoes, ashamed of what she had said as well, while David tried to inch just a little away from her. I realised they would not let me off that easily, in all possible senses of the phrase.

“How did you find me?”, I asked, if only to steer the conversation away from me for a moment.

“Aside from Anna finding a silver dagger on her nightstand in the morning, which is weird and terrifying enough, you left your phone behind and you’re not any more imaginative than Francesca”, David commented drily, “3-0-1-2”. Got it right on the second try."

“You have- excuse me, you did what exactly?”

Anna continued their tale from there.

“You were gone without saying goodbye and there was the cryptic note to feed the cat-“

“If you’ve cared for one living organism since I know you it’s that cat”, David interjected before Anna continued once more.
“It didn’t look right, especially since you left your phone as well. I woke Francesca, who phoned David and then we decided it would be best to—”

“To rifle through my personal correspondence?”

“If you want to call it that”, Francesca, her voice quite weak, remarked aridly, “and yes, we know about Lola now. Why do you insist on calling her that when her real name is Chantelle?”

How hurtful she was. I was dying and Francesca, herself not at the cusp of the powers she would soon have, hurt me so? A thing condemned to wither away, to go from this world in great pain?

Besides, my romantic adventures a few weeks prior had naught to do with her, or this all, this farce of life and death, this Comedy of Errors, in which I was the Error.

The exertions of the morning proved too much for Francesca, who must have summoned all her strength to be even able to go—her knees gave way and her eyes rolled back in her forehead as her cuspids showed in her open mouth.

Luckily, she was so weak, weaker even than I had expected, showcasing how she must have functioned on willpower only, that Anna and David could carry her downstairs, where I could hear Anna working in the kitchen, possibly preparing a meal for Francesca.

Then, the doorbell sounded. David’s voice bade Anna farewell.

She returned to my bedside and awkwardly pulled a chair close, as people in films always do. Perhaps this, I, even was her first brush with losing a person forever. But then, did she lose me who never had me? Oh yes, she had had me. In more than one sense of the word, for she had not only shared my bed, she had taken a large share of my heart as well.

“David got a message from his wife. Don’t know what’s going on, but he had to be on his way.”

I had listened in on their conversation. It was his elderly aunt, hospitalised with a stroke of yet unknown extent. Today was not a good day.

“It’s going to be all right”, Anna assured me, her voice indicating she meant me, not David’s aunt.

“No, it is not. Do not indulge in illusions, I will die, forever this time. I was wounded with a silver blade, my blood is tainted. It is only a matter of time.”

I gave her a sad smile.

“Please tell me you’re wrong. You’re immortal, that silver-thing is a myth, right? Like the allergy to sunlight and Christian symbols? You’ll get better and then—”

Tears ran down her face in strong rivulets, which she tried to hide from me.

“I am afraid not.”

“How long do you think you have?”

“Days, two or three weeks at the most.” In this moment, when forced to say the words out loud, I realised for the first time that my time was indeed running out. At least I would waste away rather sooner than later, which was a comfort.

She took both my hands in hers when she heard me say that, lifted herself onto the edge of the bed and said “I don’t know what to say, think. I feel empty. I don’t want to lose you and yet, I will.”
“Not right now.”

The pain dulled somewhat by the analgesic, I managed to sit up and offered her my good side, arm outstretched.

Sobbing, she crept onto the bed and buried her face in my shoulder, pressing her body against mine as if her physical presence could keep me with her, save me from my designated fate.

I wrapped my arm around her in an attempt to comfort her shivering human shell, yet I could not find the strength or the words to say anything that might indicate hope, a silver lining on the horizon of this day when there was none.

Instead, I buried my face in her hair and wept, too.

Not for myself, I have never had pity for myself, not after all I’ve done; but because we hadn’t had enough time.

For what went unsaid that day, by both parties, was our greatest regret: neither of us, out of a sentiment not inflict more emotional pain on the other, could bring ourselves to say the three simple words that had swept us up in their tempestuous stream in a mere matter of days, thus electing to perish by our own swords rather than at the other’s hand.

It had been too early to speak them yesterday, and it was too late now.

And while I could not say “I love you” to her, I hope she felt that I said it with every sinew of my aching body that held her as close as my waning strength permitted:

_I love you._

I laid all my strength, both physical and mental into this thought, hoping it would manifest in a way Anna’s dull human senses could feel.

Whether it was by coincidence or a miracle of non-verbal communication I cannot tell, but Anna’s arms around me tightened in the exact moment I let go of my thought, sending it to her on the wings of a keening swan and words took shape in my head as if they had just been spoken to me loud and clearly:

_-I love you, too._

It was 1781 all over again. Only this time, I would perish.

Anna did not let anybody else come close to me in the coming days, claiming she had the most profound knowledge of how to care for me given that she was the only one who had completed a first aid course in the past five years.

She had pretended to be ill at work, which Prof Cholmondeley, knowing her to be reliable without fail accepted without wanting a doctor’s note for the entire first week she cared for me.

I did not know what happened after that; all I knew was she was home with me all the time but I never asked, or dared to ask, for I selfishly did not want to be affirmed in the guilt that already filled my heart guessing she was neglecting her duties for me, who was not worth her attention.
My remark since when these classes included what to do when someone un-dead was stabbed by a silver blade never left my mouth, both because I knew that I had to economise my remaining strength for other purposes and because I could not bear being uncivil to her.

I grew weaker with every day. Not drastically so, but stealthily.

It was frustrating and saddening to experience how almost daily, everyday activities became a challenge I needed assistance to accomplish; when I could still get up and sit in the armchair by the window, I needed someone to support my weight; when I could no longer do that and was shackled to bed, I needed assistance to change my clothing on a regular basis and at last, I was moved, turned from one side to the other to keep me a little more comfortable and eventually was spoon-fed by my brave Anna as the paralysis of my every limb manifested.

Anna, the angel in this darkness did most things for me, was my hands and eyes and mouth. She washed me, fed me, read to me, changed the TV channel when I didn’t fancy yet another cooking show.

She barely left my room. After three days, David had come over with an old IKEA desk from his basement and put it up in my bedroom, so she could do her coursework and even eat there.

When two days after I received my wound, Anna and David had gone to fetch my car (which had accumulated two parking tickets I would never have to pay for I was going to leave this world forever anyway), they had stopped at her flat and brought with them several boxes of personal belongings that moved into the guest bedroom.

Francesca, who had recovered somewhat (but never wished to talk about it, or how she managed without any proper instruction, which I had lacked, too and subsequently turned into the monster I am because of it) often cooked for her, knowing how to do it from days not too long past and assisted Anna best as she could before she returned to her own flat every night. I suspect she was relieved not having to witness her eat; I knew she secretly envied Anna for being human without saying a word, yet her longing glances toward the other woman were evident to me when the two were in the same room.

Anna washed and dressed my wound three times a day, wiping away the crust of purplish blood and sticky purulence, reassured me with gentle words when I flinched with pain and above all, spent hours seated beside me, holding my hand.

It was easier to bear this way, and yet harder at the same time. Had I not wished for death, longed for it desperately for most of my shabby blood-consuming existence?

Why was Fate, or God, so cruelly depriving me of my existence in such a slow fashion when for the first time, I had begun to see meaning in it?

And then there was Anna.

Both David and Francesca had taken the news of the imminent end of my existence in their own way; Francesca had nodded, gravely, and tried to be as pleasant and cheery around me as she could while feeling obligated to manage my students and my household, pretending at some farce normalcy; David on the other hand had turned into the exact opposite of the man I knew and had for long despised and became quiet, serious even. He did not visit often but whenever he did, his visits were accompanied by a thoughtful gesture, the desk for Anna, fixing the leaking tap in the kitchen or taking the bins out on his way to the car. In his own quiet way, he had become the heart and soul of the house who helped wherever he was needed and never asked for any reward. He didn’t even tell any of us of his aunt, who was better, as I could smell on his jacket that reeked of
hospital and gerberas, but not of ICU.

In the meantime, I was planning on drawing up my will.

This time, there were people for whom I could put my affairs in order. My fortune, which had accumulated over the years in the eternal vaults of the Bank of England, would be divided among Anna, Francesca, David and the Simcoe Memorial Fund, which would sustain a studentship for one bright young scholar in the field of early modern history at Exeter University every two years.

The house would be sold, the movables donated to charity, except for personal items which I intended to be passed to specific people. Other than that, my heirs were free to keep whatever they wanted.

David was to inherit my library, for obvious reasons. Besides, Francesca being a mediaevalist and Anna a student, he, as the only other early modern scholar might find some use for them.

Francesca would be given my desk, which would, being antique and very heavy, make her look even more authoritative in her office when receiving petitioning students (I intended the gift to encourage her to return to university, to teach and research despite having become a vampire, for she had all the talents it took and would be wasted anywhere else), and Anna would inherit a ring I had stolen long ago, a keepsake my Eliza had worn one day and carelessly left on a table, the window open; I had to have it. It was still warm when it passed into my possession and she suspected a magpie behind the theft.

Anna’s delicate cream-coloured fingers would look even more elegant with sapphires to adorn them.

My uniforms, both the original and the copy, were to be donated to the Province of Ontario, who were invited to do with them whatever they pleased.

A discreet solicitor was called and the document finalised.

What an odd feeling, to know one would die. I tried to be of good cheer, mainly for Anna, but inside, I wept.

Sometimes, she would wordlessly lie down next to me on the bed and simply encompass me in her warm embrace. At times, tears wet my chest while she remained in this position and as long as I was able to, I stroked her back comforting.

When my state worsened even more drastically and I started to slip into delirious episodes, she was there for me all the time. She talked to me, cradled my face in her hands and spent the night at my bedside.

She was so, so strong.

I sent her away, multiple times, told her that she ought to return to her life, her duties and forget about me, but she only had looked at me, hurt and insulted and informed me in the same breath that she never could, she never would.

Soon, she did not even move to the guest bedroom to sleep anymore. She barely ate and only did so because Francesca, superior to her in strength, threatened to force-feed her if she could not bring herself to ingest a morsel or two at breakfast, lunch and dinner. To my knowledge, Francesca kept meticulous watch over Anna’s eating habits and I must say I was relieved, for it had not escaped me that her ribs and hipbone were protruding more and more and her face looked gaunt, aged beyond her slightly more than twenty years.
The only times she left the house for longer than five minutes was when she ran errands, buying some of the little food she ate or when, once each week, she made the trip to her own abode to collect her mail, which was usually one parcel or so and a few letters alongside the usual paper waste that went into the letter-box uncalled for.

If that hadn’t been enough, she sometimes went into the street, so I wouldn’t hear, which became more and more difficult for me to achieve as I grew weaker with each minute of every day, to talk to a man named “Nick” on the phone, sometimes in an agitated voice.

I had never asked her about her family, I noticed. Was he a brother, cousin? Or maybe her- I did not want to think about it, but felt shame for having bedded her, for having even allowed her to attach her emotions to me.

Anna had prematurely grown into a woman twice her age and had shouldered the full responsibility of my care.

And I felt guilty. I did not want her to shackle her fickle, short little human life to me, she should be meeting her friends, get sick on late-night alcohol and kebab while watching the sixth episode of a stupid TV series at 3 a.m. and forget to do her homework on time. She should live, and let me die, who was already dead.

One time, I implored her to find the silver dagger and end my suffering.

She bade me not to speak of such things and told me that she never could.

Apparently, she had not given up hope yet, forlorn hope, that a miracle could cure me.

In a dream one day, I was certain I was in Canada, and I was ill. My head burst and I was weak, just like in this moment. Despite my mental absence, I could feel the caressing hand that combed the hair out of my face and held my hand afterwards.

“Eliza-“ for in my odd dreamland where memory mixed with fiction and reality, I was certain it was my Eliza, and I was not in Exeter, but Canada.


A kiss found my forehead, and shortly after, a second one brushed my mouth, soft like a feather.

“I love you”, I rasped, best as I could. I was aware it might be the last words I would ever say to her, and if this be so, I wanted them to be important. There was nothing more important I could tell her than that, nothing I wished her more to remember about me. She could forget everything else, how I looked, how my voice sounded or how my caresses had felt, just not this.

“I love you, too. I always loved you and I always will.”

Everything went dark.

When next I awoke, I was even weaker than before, barely able to lift my eyelids. It would not be long.

I was being manhandled, I noticed. My body was heaved up like a heavy ragdoll by someone much lighter who had to use all her strength to move me.

The development was unwelcome; all I wanted was to lie down and sleep, but she, for I was still certain I was in Canada with Elizabeth, did not allow me to. Instead, I was propped up against a
warm human body, just like I had held Francesca when I fed her for the first time, only that the
woman whom I believed was Elizabeth Posthuma Gwillim Simcoe did not hold a glass to my lips.

Instead she turned my head so it would rest in the crook of her neck, my back supported by her
shoulder, my lips touching her skin. It must have looked like an unholy Pietà.

In the same moment, I felt how my head was being readjusted by a small, hotly burning hand until
my mouth rested firmly against the throbbing veins of her neck.

“Drink. It's worth a try. You saved Francesca, with your blood, I can at least try to save you with
mine.”

This was too much, even in my destitute state. How sweetly her voice resounded, made her flesh
vibrate and tremble- weak, my instincts governed me where reasonable thought was no longer
within the realms of my capabilities and my teeth sunk into her flesh.

It took me several attempts to bite down strongly enough to draw blood and in retrospect, I cannot
fathom how I managed at all. The primeval, unholy lust for blood conquered even my sickness.

My last supper, it seemed.

A gasp, a suppressed cry of pain-

She breathed shallowly, trying to overcome the pain of the bite, but at the same time tightened her
arms around me and put one hand on the back of my head to provide me with better support.

She tasted of apple blossoms, of rolling hills and meadows on a summer's day and like the
overwhelming flood of an ocean all at once and combined with an element I had never tasted
before, sweet like an exotic spice and positively intoxicating.

She tasted divinely, eternal, better than anything I’d ever had and I was determined to have more,
more, more-

Chapter End Notes

Forlorn hope is a military term for a band of soldiers leading a larger operation, in
which the probability that they are going to be killed is high.

"That ungodly TV programme": We all know which show he means by that...

"If I Fall You're Going Down with Me" is a song by the "Dixie Chicks"- listen to it, I
maintain Simnold or Arncoe or whatever you want to call it would have been
interesting to say the least. ;)

"3-0-1-2" stands for 30th December, the wedding anniversary of John Graves and
Elizabeth Simcoe.

So, we've now reached point break, but don't worry, it won't be all smooth sailing
from here. It can't be. There are going to be two or three more chapters plus an
epilogue, I guess.
Thanks for having stuck with me thus far, you guys are the best!
Resurgam

Chapter Notes

Oh my. I don't know what to say, why am I even doing this to you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

No human I had ever tasted, by the neck or facelessly from a blood bag had ever tasted any better than she.

I drank greedily and only half remarked on the door opening and the ensuing tumult as David and Francesca entered.

“What’s going on, we’ve heard a cry-“

“Don’t come any closer.”

She grew weaker beneath me, yet she was still strong enough to separate our bodies and lay me down again.

I was too weak to protest, and yet, an odd, energetic excitement began to pool in my gut.

I could hear a spray bottle being used and smell the antiseptic she put on her neck. She pressed a fresh pad onto the twin wounds, this too I could smell, and leant back into the cushions next to me.

“Please, before any of you say anything, could you at least bring me a glass of water and some snacks? I’ve donated blood, I need some refreshments.”

“THIS is hardly the Red Cross!” David shouted, outraged, probably disgusted and smelling unmistakeably of fear.

“It isn’t but the result is the same. I’ve lost approximately half a litre of blood and could use something to eat and drink. Could you please bring me a sandwich or some of the leftovers from last night? Jesus, don’t look at me like that.”

Disregarding me completely, the shouting-match continued. Francesca was livid, David was terrified.

“What do you think you’ve done?”

Never had I heard my colleague, who was so well-mannered and in charge of her temper at all times, shout like this.

“If my theory is correct, I saved him. No need to thank me.”

“Feeding him won’t save him?! I have no idea where you take all your ‘information’ from-“

“That doesn’t matter. I have authority over my body. I, and I alone, decide what I do with it. You cannot tell me what to do.”

“Do you know how selfish you are? This isn’t about you, it’s about John, in case you haven’t
noticed. What you’ve done is disgusting.”

“I do what I think is right and don’t you accuse me of being selfish. I’ve done what I did with John in mind, and John only! Or do you think it’s fun to let someone bite your neck and drink your blood? You, Francesca, of all people?”

The bed under me shifted somewhat as Anna obviously tried to stand up and she seemed to manage, too, but had to face soon after that she had risen too abruptly for not thirty seconds later, she, weakened from the blood loss and the shouting, collapsed onto the bed once more.

“Just get out, both of you, will you?”

“Fat chance, now that we’ve had to witness this?”

“Leave me alone!”

This time, there was a hint of tears in her voice.

It was too much for me to bear. My head hurt from their shouting and, without truly comprehending what had happened, felt compelled to voice my dislike of their behaviour towards Anna.

I wanted to speak, but could not. I was too weak to produce coherent sounds.

The wincing sound that left my throat called them all to attention.

“John?”

Francesca knelt down next to me within a split second.

Next, I tried to open my eyes and managed to, at least a sliver wide, to face them.

“Oh my God, David, look!”

“He hasn’t been conscious in almost a week!”

“See? It works. I told you.”

I had to close my eyes again for the light was too bright and because I was tired and confused. Almost a week? It surely couldn’t have been more than a few hours? And where was Eliza, who had cared for me during this time? So I wasn’t in Canada, I was in Exeter, and I was a dying vampire in the care of his two colleagues, one of them a vampire as well and a young mortal woman who had taken care of me, and who had- who had let me drink her blood.

For the first time in a very long while which I could only sketchily determine by attempting to listen closely to any time periods or dates mentioned by my three carers, I was conscious enough to realise I had done great wrong.

Even if she had offered her blood to me, I should not have drunk it, for Anna was no delicious treat ready for the taking, she was wonderful and I loved her.

But I was still too weak to say anything, to even extend my hand to her to take hers in an attempt to show how truly sorry I was, I could only watch as Francesca led her away by the arm and into the bathroom, where, by the sound of it, she was seated on the rim of the bathtub like a child by her mother, and cleaned of my spit and her blood under incessant, though genuinely concerned chastisements that despite (or maybe due to?) their well-meant nature caused Anna to be
emotionally affected.

I could hear her sob faintly in the distance, at which Francesca changed her strategy and consoled her instead of scolding her for what she had done, almost killing herself in the arms of a vampire who could not be trusted in his current state.

-Could I ever be trusted?

From that day on, it was agreed between Francesca and David that Anna was not to be left alone in the same room with me.

Francesca moved into the living-room for the time being, from whence she, the commanding officer during my time of incapability, coordinated all necessary operations from managing the online-submissions of my students’ homework (I did not want them to be forced to retake classes due to my unforeseen absence) or cleaning the kitchen.

Two days after Anna’s reckless attempt at saving me from eternal darkness God knows how she thought that would work, my aching, paralysed body surprised me with a tingling sensation in my toes and fingertips.

As I had not yet regained the ability to speak and did not want to indulge anyone in false hope (perhaps this was the onset of the final stage of my ordeal?), I did not alert the others to my change of condition until a few days later, I realised I could move my fingers again- very clumsily and only a little, but they moved at my willing them to do so and could feel the soft material of the bedclothes.

Very slowly, I, the dead man, returned to the world of the living.

A week later I was able to sit up (provided someone propped me up into this position and held me there) and drink from an (admittedly very, very lightly filled) glass all by myself.

That day it was decided that by some miracle, I had not perished and would not perish from the wound Arnold had inflicted on me.

As my wound was examined by all three of them in a public viewing, they found it without the foul-smelling crust of yellowish purulence that had covered it no matter how thoroughly Anna had cleaned it thrice a day and instead, was sealed by what looked like a thin gossamer-like layer of scabs.

Nobody could fathom how that came to pass, even if, all three of them being historians at various stages of their careers, assured me they had done research into the topic but found nothing. And how should they have, vampires being believed to be the product of human imagination until this very day.

“So… You won’t die?”, David had asked disbelievingly during my second week of recovery.

“You daft bastard, you’ve been dramatic again as always, haven’t you?”

Oh what would I have given for enough bodily strength to get up and find a suitable tome to aim at his head, as our shared history demanded.

Sadly, I was still unable to walk and hold a heavy volume such as Lord Byron’s complete and annotated works in my hands, which had reduced my bedside-book pile, which I slowly had taken up stacking again, to very light reading in the most literal sense of the phrase.
Mentally I made a note to ask Francesca or Anna later to fetch me *Les Misérables* from the living room shelves and put it on the bedside table for me.

One could never know when it would be useful.

David had observed with not inconsiderable amusement how my eyes had wandered to the small pile of thin volumes within comfortable arm’s reach of me, contemplating if Tacitus’ *Dialogus de oratoribus* or a volume of select poetry by W. B. Yeats would inflict greater pain if thrown by the piteously weak hand of an incapacitated, though critically disgruntled vampire, and said: “Wouldn’t try that just yet. Right now, I think I might actually be the stronger of us two.”

He smiled, knowing how I hated any comments of that sort but then continued on in a more serious tone: “For real now, you have no idea how you might have ‘survived’, for lack of any better term? I mean, you really were more there than here. Could it be that maybe it really was Anna who-“

“No”, I cut him short as quickly and with as much force as possible, “human blood, which you have fed me, too, does not have any such properties.”

“Maybe there is a difference between the ‘canned’ blood you drink daily and ‘fresh’ blood? Something about micronutrients or vitamins and such? I’m no vampire-nutritionist, though.”

“It can’t have been her.” I commanded him with my eyes not to further belabour the topic and he obliged me and changed to talking about the spring weather instead, that his neighbours had moved out and a young family with three little children around the age of his own brood had moved in and that a presentation of Francesca’s at a conference had been acclaimed very much, so much so that an eminent researcher in her field had asked her to write a contribution for a volume on the Second Council of the Lateran in 1139 he was editing.

Of Anna, he didn’t speak much. Only that she had returned to her work and studies, but had, together with David and the help of my boss’ secretary, moved my belongings back into my usual office, which had in the meantime been renovated (just enough) to be deemed fit of human habitation by the administration whereas she would continue to occupy the crammed little unlit chamber.

My heart sank at hearing this, but then, how could we ever work together in the same space again, after all this? It surely was better this way.

Besides, our relationship, of whatever nature it had ultimately been, had died, withered like a beautiful flower plucked by a selfish hand and left to wither in a vase.

I was still ashamed of myself, could not find rest at night when I thought about how much I had liked the taste of her blood, even enjoyed it a little when she had exclaimed in pain when I bit her like the predator does the last hopeless struggle of his prey, enjoyed how nevertheless she encouraged me to drink my fill- I was perverse, debauched and despicable.

Once, I had tried to talk about it with Francesca, the only other person who could relate to my struggles, but she had only looked at me with a sad face and nodded, not wanting to speak of the matter at all, yet understanding what I meant.

Since the day I bit Anna, I had not looked her in the eyes again. I quite simply could not.

And during my convalescence, we were not allowed alone in the same room without a sentinel to watch over our interaction, which did not permit me to speak freely to her, to say the things I would have liked to tell her, could I only have brought them across my lips, nor could I invite her to
simply lay down by my side again as she had done oftentimes before to simply let the time trickle by and become meaningless in each other's company.

She had started eating a little more again I observed, as the slight, healthily pinkish flush of her cheeks indicated, which was good.

When she changed my bandages one day, the only times our bodies we would touch due to the nature of the task at hand alone, I asked her how she was doing and she had said “fine, thank you”.

I told her I was happy for her, prompting her to flash a smile at me, a ghostly apparition of a smile, pale like a gust of wind, a memory of different days, before her face turned all neutral again and she watched from a distance as I emptied the glass she had given to me, waited to take it back downstairs with her and on her way out adjusted the bedclothes perhaps a little too long to match her facial expression, Francesca at her heels.

As soon as I was able to walk again, the frequency of her visits lessened; when I returned to work and we sometimes passed each other by in the corridor, our interaction was limited passing each other with a nod of the head or polite meaningless words of nothing, pretending to normalcy where there was none.

It hurt. I had loved this woman and then used her. Standing at the window, awaiting an appointment with a student, I watched young people leave the building in throngs or small groups, couples holding hands, friends laughing together.

Perhaps Hewlett had been right all those years ago when he had put that blasted apple in my mouth. All nature was a circle of creation and destruction. I had almost been destroyed, but my existence had been saved, for the second time I dwell on this earth. And for the second time again, I had fallen in love with a woman who would have been prepared to give me everything of her, nay, had given me everything, and I had shattered our porcelain-happiness.

Slowly, I was descending back into the darkness again. I barely spoke to my colleagues, became again the silent spectator at their mealtime congregations, hiding behind a book, but this time, nobody asked any questions. Those who knew everything knew not to say anything and those who only knew I had been very sick for a long time, eyed me with distanced compassionate concern, from stranger to stranger.

My student knocked on the door. She was a young, a girl still almost, freshly enrolled this past year and still at the stage of wonderment and excitement when university promised excitement and adventure and has not yet become a chore.

She was American, so much I could tell from her accent, and possessed a natural happiness that had nothing to do with the false smiles and curtesy her country is so often associated with and only introduced herself with her first name. Although I would have preferred to call her by the honorific “Ms” combined with her last name, enquiring after her surname would have sounded awkward as well.

_Holly’s_ lively brown eyes beamed at me as she held a draft out to me on which she wanted to have my opinion.

It was titled “”He was without reason shot most savagely’- British Atrocities Committed against Civilians during the American War of Independence”.

Instantly, I knew where this was going. The file she had accessed (which is fully digitised and available without payment online, to my dismay) was the record of my court-martial for having
shot Lucas Brewster.

With great spirit and true interest in the matter, she proceeded to tell me for twenty minutes how she had gone about her research, what she was lacking and that she was hoping I approved of her efforts.

Reluctantly (though this she couldn’t tell, not knowing who I truly was) I nodded and handed her draft back to her.

“Very good. I hope to read more from you in due time.”

Holly beamed at me as she rose from the chair I had offered her, shaking her light-brown waves that gleamed golden in the sun out of her face and thanked me.

As she shook my hand, her smile faded abruptly.

“Oh, I forgot- You’re- oh my I did it, I fully embarrassed myself. I’m sorry for having been so tactless.”

“There is no need to apologise for anything at all.” “There is. Gosh, I’d forgotten you’re John Graves Simcoe’s great-great-great-grandson or so.”

“Holly, do not let your studies be guided by trying to please anyone but yourself. Be content with what you do and have passion for your work. A true historian stands their ground. Besides, my ancestor I can avouch for, was not a very nice man.”

Holly nodded and thanked me, excusing profusely for what she thought was a terrible blunder.

Not too long ago, I would have reacted quite differently, the encounter with Arnold however had encouraged me to reconsider my place in history: For history, I was as dead as all the others, Arnold, Hewlett, Woodhull and the rest, my legacy already preserved in ink. But John Simcoe, DPhil, was, at least in the eyes of the world, alive. He could still make his name, do things right. If only he wanted to.

I watched as summer passed by from the safe twilight of my office, working there most of the time and barely noted that Holly had entered her paper in a student competition and won a scholarship for her and how the fourth season of that unspeakable TV programme drew to a close. I did not watch it, but apparently, my treatment of Caleb Brewster had been a focal point of discussion among its fans.

They hadn’t even mentioned my Eliza in the end, even when they showed my character in Canada. I would never have gone there without her, would never have supported those cold, dark Canadian winters without my Sun.

Autumn came quickly and in October, the first leaves fell from the trees.

Anna and I still did not speak again. I called myself a coward for not bringing myself to talk to her, but figured it was too late. I had tasted her, I had known her more intimately than anybody else ever would, I had hurt her.

I was ashamed, for whenever she passed me, I associated her countenance with the taste of her blood and my wish to drink her dry, which I had harboured even before my sickness.
It was better for both of us if I stayed away from her as far as possible, even if both our hearts were malcontent with this arrangement. She had loved me and I loved her still, but shame and my nature forbade me to ever venture close to her again. I would only make her unhappy, just as I had made Eliza unhappy.

And she deserved to be happy more than anybody else.

In the meantime, David had taken it upon himself to make me a sociable person again. My melancholy, in which I questioned whether having been delivered from evil injury had been such a good thing after all, had not passed by unnoticed and so, for instance, I was dragged to attend a football game with him and Francesca once.

Wales played Ireland that night and the two had elected it would best be watched in an Irish pub.

“Alcohol, cursing and chanting *Fields of Athenry*, would do me as David put it, “a world of good”.

I was not so certain but since Francesca, whose love for the game had gone entirely unnoticed by me all the time, had declared she would like to watch it but she bet her money on the Irish team to win, which would mean the *Fields of Athenry*-bit would have to be cancelled, I reluctantly agreed to come along.

Ten minutes into the evening, David, who had formerly professed his support for Wales, had turned coats and found himself in a circle of middle-aged gentlemen of audibly Irish extraction (Kerry, if my inability to understand them was anything to go by) and provided them with the second round while from the TV screen, the Welsh captain mocked me with his name.

By half-time, David had not returned to our table but continued to enjoy the inner Gael he had discovered in his English soul and, with a fake lilt that outshone in awfulness the Irish accent donned by Gerard Butler in *P. S. I Love You*, sang along to the all-time favourite *The Irish Rover*, which blared from the loudspeakers as most occupants of the pub rushed to use the break to stock up their provisions of snacks and drinks.

*On the Fourth of July, 1806*

*We set sail from the sweet Cove of Cork*

*We were sailing away with a cargo of bricks*

*For the Grand City Hall in New York*

*Twas a wonderful craft, she was rigged fore and aft*

*And oh, how the wild wind drove her*

*She stood several blasts, she had twenty seven masts*

*And they called her The Irish Rover*

God, no. I didn’t need any more reminders of ships, New York, the damned Fourth of July, which yearly marks my defeat as a soldier of the Royal Army or the year 1806. Especially not the year
We had sailed seven years when the measles broke out
And the ship lost its way in the fog
-Big fog!-
And that whale of a crew was reduced down to two
Just myself and the Captain's old dog
Then the ship struck a rock, oh Lord! What a shock
The bulkhead was turned right over
Turned nine times around and the poor old dog was drowned
And I'm the last of The Irish Rover

I ordered another sherry. Death at sea was another topic I did not fancy discussing, not after my father’s tragic demise, my brother drowning and the incident that had forced me to fake my own death in the year of our Lord 1806.

Silently, I emptied my glass and left even before the Boys in Green could score the winning goal, asking Francesca to excuse my absence to David, should he still be sober enough to realise I had vanished.

Two days later, he had approached me ruefully, telling me he was sorry for having abandoned me and, to make up for it I presume, extended an invitation to me plus a guest of my choice to his Halloween party two weeks later.

“You’re having something special planned for Halloween?”

“I don’t dress up if that’s what you mean.”

“Yes, Wednesday, you truly are a moody, daylight-avoiding homicidal maniac who looks like everyone else, we know. But could you imagine joining me, the wife and some friends that evening? It will be fun, I promise.”

“Are you suggesting this because you’re pitying me because you think I’m lonely or because your conscience dictates you to do so after leaving me to my own devices at the pub?”

“No, because my wife will invite all her friends from the sci-fi book club and she graciously allowed me to invite a few friends, too.”

I felt somewhat bad. So he did consider me a friend, not a charity case? A broken curiosity of days gone by? It was moving, in a way.

I sighed.

“In costume?”
“Yes. Well, I think you could tell Linda and the other guests you are a vampire, flash your teeth for a sec and dress as you normally do, but they’ll just think you’re a lazy-arse uptight, fun-avoiding bore. Which you are not, I’ve done some research on you. You did dress-up back in the day, so come on.”

And so, I found myself with an appointment for 7 p.m. at the residence of Linda and David Cooper on All Hallows Eve.

I had accepted to make David happy and because I knew he would not leave me alone until I would give in. I could save me the trouble of a lost battle this way and preserve my energy for the classes I had to prepare.

Overjoyed, he patted my back in a jovial manner, as men befriended to one another do these days, and told me how happy he was to receive me.

I was not and promptly did forget about it all until, at 6 p.m. that night, Diana, in a foul mood, had made a mess of the living room by defiling some paper she had found- the formal invitation David had handed me.

Quickly, for lack of a costume (it would have been a travesty anyway, a vampire pretending to be a human pretending to be something else), I dressed in my usual green (my “costume” would probably be the costliest and most accurate of them all) and hurried to the cellar, where I keep my excellent and rather costly stocks of wine and sherry. A 1918 bottle of my favourite grape variety was quickly found as a gift for the generous hosts.

Thanks to my cat’s whims, I managed to be on time, ringing the doorbell at 7 p.m. precisely.

A woman, dressed in the uniform of the starship Enterprise.

“You must be John, come in! I’m Linda, Dave’s wife.”

She beamed at me and beckoned me inside, complimenting my attire as she did, where the table was set for eighteen guests plus the two hosts, whose two children, a little witch and a tiny fairy, were conversing with some guests they seemed to know well.

All in all, except for Francesca and David, I only espied five familiar faces from work, of whom I did not know any personally. Thus, I settled down next to Francesca, who had donned a red, skin-tight dress. On her neck, I discovered to my horror, just in the same spot Arnold and later I had feasted on her, two red spots made with the same pen she used for correcting papers.

“Modern Sarah Chagall from Dance of the Vampires”, she smirked. “Never take yourself too seriously.”

She said that with an eyebrow raised in an almost comically fashion- an unmistakable slight against my supposed costume.

David finally made it over to say hello, wearing a toga made of a bedsheets and, to everyone’s surprise, no beard.

“Evening, John! Glad you made it. In costume, even.”

“I would have made a far less impressive Marcus Tullius Cicer-Coe than you”, I quipped back as I remarked upon his facial expression which looked terribly like Francesca’s only a short while earlier.
“You met Linda?”

“I did. Very cordial, very pleasant. You are a good match.”

“You should have dressed up as Mrs Bennet”, David grinned back and I let him enjoy his momentary win as Linda joined her husband, gave him a peck on the cheek and made a remark how much she liked his new look.

“You know, John, I am slowly trying to civilise my husband. This is the first step. Next thing the cargo pants will be banished forever.”

“What? I have shaved my beard for you, you ungrateful-“

“Most beautiful, bonny, clever, intelligent, queenly flower of all women who has deigned to marry you” she finished his sentence with a second peck on his other cheek and it was evident from their jesting that they were two people made for each other.

A bitter sting in my heart reminded me at the sight of their happiness that I could never have that, never give to someone else what they gave to each other, even if I was ready to do so and had love in my un-quivering heart ready to be lavished upon someone who could never be allowed near me.

“Sorry John, please keep an eye on my husband for me while I’m back in the kitchen, can’t let my helpers do everything!”

She rushed away, her two daughters in tow who, like most guests, probably smelt the very seductive redolence of home-made treats, hoping they might be allowed to have one of the candied apples or home-made chocolate muffins.

Clanking noises could be heard from the kitchen, muffled voices, someone talking to me, the murmur of the other guests, devils, witches, pirates and what not, I however was far away from them, alone in the crowd, saddened by the joyful sight of Linda and David Cooper.

Ten minutes later, the Linda Cooper and her band of helpmeets moved to the living-room and at their front, to my shock and horror, marched the one I so had dreaded to meet: Anna, a tray in her hands, led the vanguard.

She was dressed in a dusky pink and white dress, a robe á la turque, if I remembered correctly from all the tailor’s bills that had been sent to me with a tall hat like the Duchess of Devonshire had worn adorned with feathers and a large bow in the same colour as her dress. It sat coquettsishly lopsided on a head of luscious, slightly powdered, curls, of which some strands fell freely over her shoulder. Beneath her hair, I could see large pearl earrings dangling from her ears.

A choker necklace, as was ironically he fashion of the day once more (though not combined to the same garments as in the 18th century) completed her accoutrement.

When she saw me, she almost halted, but at the last moment remembered someone was walking behind her and to prevent any accidents, walked on and set the tray of champagne glasses she was carrying down on the living room table.

Whistling, “oh”s and “ah”s accompanied her entrance. I shrunk back best as I could to hide behind Francesca, which was of course of no use, for she was much smaller than me.

The two little girls danced around her and she, in perfect manner, bowed down to them and told them that if they were good girls, she’d get them similar costumes next year.
“Where did you get that awesome costume? It must have been very expensive,” one incredulous guest I didn’t know asked. “Did you lend it from a film production?”

“Yes”, she affirmed lightly, too lightly. She was lying. She hadn’t lent that dress anywhere. It suited her body perfectly and had been made to fit only her.

“You look stunning.”

Accompanied by many companies from the other attendees, she made her rounds introducing herself to the new guests she hadn’t met yet because she had helped Linda Cooper in the kitchen.

When she came to me, both of us hesitated for a moment. What were we to do? We had spent an afternoon in each other’s arms, shared secrets far beyond anybody’s imagination and yet neither one of us could bring themselves to take and shake the other’s hand. Too much harm had been done, too much blood been spilt between us.

One of guests, a poorly-dressed devil (to be taken literally) used the awkward silence between us to comment that we both looked like we had dressed to match each other period-wise and that it was either intentional or, judging from our faces, a funny coincidence.

As more and more of the merry party added their opinions to the melee of voices, I was pushed and pulled up from my chair and manoeuvred to the centre of the living room. Anna was similarly manhandled and made to stand next to me.

“May I introduce the Duke and Duchess of Wellington” someone boomed, upon which, seeing it as my duty to educate the man who had by my count already imbibed several glasses of Mrs Cooper’s special punch, I corrected him.

“No, I am John Graves Simcoe, commander of the Queen’s Rangers during the American War of Independence and first Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada”, I said and stared David directly in the eyes who in turn rolled his own towards the heavens until only the white of the eyeball was still visible.

“Wow, that’s a very specific costume, John. And here I stand, only another boring roman in an old bedsheets.”

“You told me I should make an effort”, I retorted, slightly offended in full stockings, coat and breeches as the rest of the party began to take their phones out.

“A little closer together!”

“Smile, you two!”

“If you’re the governor, is she the governess?”

Under loud brouhaha the joke was anticipated as blinding flashlights rendered me and my involuntary companion almost sightless.

“Incorrect. I am plain old Mrs John Graves Simcoe”, Anna replied with gracious patience as we two were again urged to move closer together and Anna’s arm came to link with mine.

I tensed as our arms touched, and she tensed too before both of us tried to relax, knowing how well our bodies could amalgamate, or had, in the past.

In this moment, I had the desire to hold her again, to love her, to atone for my sin best as I could
and apologise, here and now.

Her blood pulsed faster, and her breath was quickened- did she feel the same?

Mercifully, the doorbell ended the zoo-gawking. It was the neighbour and her herd of little boys and girls in dress-up to collect the two Cooper-children to go and beg sweets from strangers.

Several little ones who had been standing close to the door came to gawk and shuffle inside to take a look at Anna who, sensing an opportunity to escape, had opened the door and was helping the younger Cooper to dress for the cold outside.

“Are you a princess?”, one of the girls with a fake hennin on her head and a princess dress forced over her warm jacket wanted to know.

“No. I am Mrs Simcoe, an adventuress of days gone by who explored the wilderness of the Canadian woods- and gave great tea-parties”, she added winking at a little boy dressed as the Mad Hatter from *Alice in Wonderland*.

She looked at me with a mien I could not decipher. There was a hint of a challenging smile on her lips, restrained fear, hurt, pain, mischief, joy, warmth, coldness- her face seemed illuminated with every emotion.

She was beautiful.

I looked away, feeling unfit to being allowed to behold her face.

Throughout the evening, I could not think. I ate nothing, claiming not to be hungry, and drank only two glasses of wine. She sat across the table from me, which did not ease the situation.

After dinner, everyone moved to help the hosts clean the dishes away, which provided me with an opportunity to get hold of David for a moment and pulled him into the hallway.

In a low voice, I asked him why he hadn’t told me Anna would be there.

“You didn’t ask”, came his plain reply, “and did you think we wouldn’t invite her, after everything we’ve gone through? Besides-“ he paused ominously, “it was she who asked if we would invite you.”

My stomach dropped to the floor.

Why did Anna want me there? Had she not had enough of me, and I of her? Had we not made it clear to one another that we did not desire each other’s company anymore?

Francesca, trying to help as always, took pity of me and involved me in a conversation so I would not be alone when David moved on in order to bestow some of his other guests with his attention.

“I know this is hard for you, with Anna here, and- you know, I can smell the others, too, so-“ She broke off and stopped whispering in a tone only audible to vampires, bats and dogs.

Obviously, Francesca, though a master of her urges, was in a way as tormented as I was.

“We could go to my house afterwards, have a drink, if you like.”

“I think you won’t be having a drink with me”, Francesca replied, “She wants reconciliation. She told me that before you arrived. Talk to her. Later, if it’s less awkward, when the others have gone.”
Later turned out to be 11 p.m. when Linda ruled her children, returned from their rounds with eye-watering buckets full of sweets, finally had to go to bed.

Quite shaky and unsure of myself and how this evening would end, I stayed behind and helped to clean up the mess so many guests (some of them well drunk by the end of the night) had made.

Anna too remained and together, we stocked the dishwasher and later cleaned and dried the dishes, glasses and cutlery that had not fit into the machine by hand in silence.

We worked together most economically, like cogs in a clockwork. I cleaned, she dried them, our rhythm of giving and receiving new stacks of plates or glasses perfectly in time with the other.

When all was done and goodbyes and thank-yous were exchanged and the door finally closed behind us, Anna spoke to me for the first time that night, the previous pseudo-courtesies aside.

“I’ll drive you home.”

It was no question or offer, it was a declaration of intent which I was to obey. And I did so gladly, for, I figured, alone with her for the first time in ten months I would perhaps be able to muster the courage to speak to her.

I could collect my car the next day, it didn’t matter to me. Perhaps she had thought I had come by bus or had walked the five kilometres from my house, for I had parked a little further away from the house to give me time for a short contemplative walk before arriving at the party.

Folding myself into the front passenger seat of her car, I watched how she removed her hat, placed it in the back and then sat down behind the steering wheel, pulling her skirts up somewhat to be able to reach the pedals without them getting in the way of her feet.

For several minutes, we drove in the right direction and I, focussed on how to best approach the topic I had tried not to think or speak about for so long, almost wouldn't have noticed she took a wrong turn.

“Wrong way-“ I began, but the snapping sound of the central locking system silenced me.

“Right way”, she calmly said and let the car take up speed as we exited the boundaries of Exeter.

“Where are we going?”

“Wait and see.”

“You are effectively kidnapping me, I demand to know-“

“And I demand you shut up and wait”, she hissed.

Humming, she switched the quite dated CD player on and inserted, driving one-handed, a home-recorded CD.

Il y a des mots qui brûlent mes rêves

Tant d’interdits sur mes lèvres

Que je n’avoue pas
J'ai tant de plaisirs qui se taisent

Tant de désirs qui se plaisent

A rester sans voix

J'ai devant moi la vie que je n'ose pas

Au fond de moi l'envie que je laisse la

J'entends chanter dans mes nuits

Les mots que l'on ne dit pas...

Lowly, she sang along, the siren who had kidnapped me, and I, my French never having been stellar, made a few feeble attempts to understand the words.

Somehow, being kidnapped was not the worst thing that had happened to me. I didn’t know where we were going, but there would at least be enough time for us to talk.

“Anna”, I tried to begin a conversation, “I am-“

“Shush Simcoe. I need to concentrate on the road.”

She was lying, for singing and humming along to the music was perfectly fine and so, somehow quite intrigued by the thought of being led to a destination I didn’t know by Anna, I did as she told me. That was until I realised that I did not know her motif to do so.

What if she didn’t mean well at all? But she had nursed me, been there for me in my crisis- what motif could she possibly have?

I had bit her.

Fear set in and for the first time, I paid exact attention to where we were going. To my surprise, I recognised the country road we drove on at the next junction.

“Why are we going there?”, I demanded to know, my voice painfully shrill.

“Wait and see”, came her reply and she turned the music up in order to signal me no further interruptions were wanted.

Eventually, she parked the car on the same gravel path David had the previous winter.

We were at the chapel of Wolford Lodge, the only remaining structure of my family home.

The central locking system clicked again, allowing the doors to be opened.

“Follow me. No bullshit, right?”

She got out of the car quicker than I did, hesitant what would happen if I did as she said. Would it be wiser to remain seated? Should I overpower her? I could do that easily.
Anna made her way around to the passenger side, opened the door and grabbed my hand.

“Come on now.”

My hand in hers, I followed her to the chapel door, which she opened with a key.

“How do you-“

“You forget I had access to all your belongings for quite a long while”, she explained and held the door open for me to pass through before her.

“Oh for God’s sake. Do you think I’ll ram a silver blade between your shoulders if you turn your back on me? Please.”

It was dark inside, but Anna found the light switches on the wall that would ignite the small lamps that illumined the small exhibition on my family and me kept for the tourists who sometimes passed the chapel by, tinting the room in twilight rather than darkness.

As soon as the light was on, she turned to face me and said “Look at me, John.”

I did, but said nothing. She sighed and took a few steps closer to me, until she was close enough to reach for my face and cup it between her hands.

“Miss Williams, who do you think you are to presume you can-“

“Don’t ask who I am, ask me who I was. Look at me.”

Not yet knowing what game she was playing, I decided to let her play and see where she would take us. I cannot deny I am naturally curious. Her right hand took hold of my chin, slightly turning my head somewhat to the side so my features would be better illuminated by the light of the ancient lightbulbs.

“Such a beautiful man. Even in death-“

It took me a lot of composure to remain calm. I didn’t like that I could not figure out what was happening or what she was getting at.

“You really don’t know? Look at me, John.”

Holding my face in place, she forced me to study her features.

“Nothing? Really? Well, I guess I will have to show you, then. Close your eyes.”

And with that, she lunged forward and placed her lips on mine, hungrily kissing me until I yielded to the demanding onslaught of her lips and tongue and allowed myself to savour the surprise attack and kissed her back with equal fervour if only to best her in her efforts in order to win this round, whatever that meant.

She pulled away abruptly, leaving me, taken aback, at a disadvantage.

“And now?”

“What do you mean? I don’t know what game you’re playing, Miss Williams, but I assure you, you are well advised to-“

“Miss Williams”? Think, you damned poltroon, think.”
She was angry I could tell, but why I could not comprehend, not even as her palm met my cheek with intentional force.

Williams. William, the middle name of my two elder brothers, William and Mary, predecessors of the Hanoverian kings, Wil- Williams, Isabella Williams, the dead woman in the Black Forest.

What had I done? If I remembered correctly, she had had a little daughter, well little at the time, and had I once walked into our then-shared office and found her watching a German TV documentary re-investigating the case of her horrific murder twenty years later?

How could fate be so cruel that I loved a woman whose mother, unbeknownst to myself, I had killed in blind rage and bloodlust? She looked at me, found the horror in my eyes, but seemed unmoved by it.

Perhaps this all was a trap and she had lured me here to finish me herself, had nursed me back to health and befriended me in order to have my trust, to slowly let me pay for the sin I had committed, for having robbed her of her mother before she could probably even remember her and this was to be my end, here, in a spot that could not have been more cleverly chosen due to the meaning it bore to me as the burial-ground of my family and the place in which Arnold had almost killed me.

She wanted me to suffer at her hand. She wanted me to kill Arnold so she would be given a chance to do it herself. She had slept with me to make a mockery of me, expose how easily a mortal woman could turn my head and to make my own death hurt even more, emotionally, for now, I would not be killed by a stranger, but by someone I had trusted- slowly grown to love, even.

Letting me bite her had been nothing but a way to subdue me, too- I may have killed her mother, but she was stronger than her and well-prepared.

She never intended to save me. She wanted me dead and nursed me back to health so, as the warrior she evidently was, she would meet her opponent at eye level, recovered, and not weakly writhing away in his bed.

She was no Hewlett, that was for certain. She had pulled me back from the abyss of almost-extinguishment to be the causer of the push that would eventually sent me falling down its dark, rocky canyon.

“I start to understand why David calls you what he calls you. Pray tell, what is that special moniker he reserves only for you?”

One eyebrow raised, she awaited my response.

“‘Daft bastard’?”, I tried slowly, somewhat embarrassed to let such foul language slip past my lips, especially in the company of a lady and a little bit also because it was she who made me say it.

“That would be it. And I subscribe to his opinion of you whole-heartedy.”

“Your mother-“

“Is quite dead.”

“I didn’t want to kill her. Had I known about you, had I known she had a child, I would never have- It was an accident. There is no way ever that I can apologise or make amends for what I did. It was never my intention-“
“Never knew her, really.”

Anna Williams, daughter of my last victim, eyed me intently, but with a strange calm in her features while I burnt from the hell within me.

“I mean, it’s quite funny. Even after the Arnold-farce, you keep thinking you are terribly special, don’t you? It is always about you, and you only- and all this is, in a way, but stop drowning yourself in self-pity, we both know it doesn’t work. You are immortal, after all.”

“Anna, I know you cannot forgive me-”

“You didn’t kill my mother. Williams. Think harder.”

All of a sudden, my formerly blinded eyes could see: These eyes, the mouth that had just kissed me, the endearingly pointy chin- I had beheld all this before, had- Gwillim, my Eliza’s maiden name and Welsh equivalent to the anglicised Williams.

I stared at her in surprise and suddenly, the world around me collapsed.

“Well now, I see the penny has dropped. You bloody idiot. I spent a whole year trying to make you realise who I am. I thought- I thought you would recognise me-“ Her tough façade crumbled and she started to sob.

“But you’re dead. You were very old when you died, more than eighty”, I observed, my voice now considerably softer.

“Look at yourself and tell me if that means anything, you don’t look quite like a 211-years-dead 54-year-old either”, she retorted. “And no, I am not dead. Far from it, actually. I never died. And now, I need you to say my name to ascertain you really know who I am.” “Elizabeth-“ “-Posthuma Gwillim Simcoe. The very same, Lieutenant-Colonel John Graves Simcoe, Queen’s Rangers, Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada, first of his name, King of the Andals and the First Men et cetera. Though how you managed not to realise who I am I’ll never know.” “I thought you were dead.”

I could not say anything else. The woman I had loved, wanted at my side for so long had been with me for the entire past ten months? I had shared a bed with her, she had nursed me back to health- how did I not see who she was?

Well, the last time I had seen her in 1850, she had been very old. Now, she was very young again and, apart from Mary-Anne Burges’ crude likeness of her which could never do justice to her real beauty, there hadn’t been any likenesses of her to remember her by. All I had were my memories, veiled by more than two hundred and ten years of pain and longing.

“No. Do you think I didn’t realise that something was wrong with you right away when we were first wed? You thought you were terribly inconspicuous, right? Sometimes, when you slept, you didn’t breathe. I asked the doctor and he said while it wasn’t healthy some people did and lived on, but when I told him you did not breathe for several minutes, he said that was impossible and that I had likely counted too fast, that I should not worry, you were fine. But I knew what I saw. You never really ate anything, or much at all, and you were sickly most of the time. Hell, I don’t think I’ve ever known you fully, well, recovered is the wrong word- you just never seemed healthy. At the time I put it off as what happened to you in the war, but I started to ask myself questions. Not to speak of the fact that you were so pale and your skin was always so cold. I noticed these things. And all the little odd things that happened around the house, the dead woodland animals and the occasional bloodless goose or chicken the servants reported- it all started to make sense one day.”
“How?”

“You stuck around, after you died, that is. You were always there. You watched the house. Caroline and Anne saw you. Anne was too little to remember you, but Caroline recognised her father. I didn’t believe in vampires, ghosts or anything before but- the bloodless cadavers of rodents the servants kept on finding, you appearing under Caroline’s window at night- I started to read, buy books, consult experts. Eventually, I found Flamel. Nicholas Flamel, the famous alchemist, currently undercover as Nick Burns at the department of Chemistry at Yale. He and Caroline became my co-conspirator. Flamel was sympathetic to my plight when I met him in London with wife Perenelle at his side, and needed only a little persuasion to help me. He sends me the potion I need bi-weekly. I faked my death when I knew my natural end was nigh with the assistance of Caroline, who I swore to secrecy when she passed on the opportunity to have her share of my ‘medicine’ in order to give the children closure, drank the damned dram and accidentally overdosed a little on it, making me look like I’m in my early 20s again, and while my coffin was carried out of the house at the front, I left the house through the backdoor. It pained me, but I had to know. I know you would never have left us if there hadn’t been a terrible reason. And to think, you were still there, that you still loved us-“ She had to breathe deeply a few times before she could continue.

“I searched the world over for you, and I didn’t find you. I came close once, in 1997, when the murder of Isabella Williams was in the tabloids all summer. That’s where I got the idea from to call myself Williams, by the way. And Anna because of Anna Hewlett, whom you knew as Anna Strong, your first serious crush, or however you want to call it. She truly was beautiful.”

“Did you know her?”, I asked disbelievingly.

“Yes. It’s a long story. And I thought the names 'Anna' and 'Williams' would make you look twice.”

“How did you find me then?”

“The wonders of modern science and technology. As soon as I had the opportunity to do so, I googled you daily. When I found out one day you moved to Exeter and had taken up a teaching position at the university, I posed as a student and applied for the job at Prof. Cholmondeley’s in order to be close to you, to get to see you. In my free time, started taking walks again where we used to walk, I sat in the wet grass at Dunkeswell Abbey and nearly gave myself a bladder infection while waiting there for hours, hoping against hope you’d one day walk up to me and you’d see me and it would all be the same. That never happened. But I was right. I was here, at the chapel, on my birthday and… there were fresh flowers on my grave. I knew it was you. I always collected them, my birthdays, our anniversaries- sometimes, you’d surprise me with flowers on ordinary days as well. I always picked them up and took them home.”

The smile she gave me through her tears almost ripped my heart in two.

“You still loved Elizabeth Posthuma Gwillim Simcoe after all these years. I really wanted to be with you again, tell you who I was but I was afraid- look, we aren’t the same people we were in 1806. I have changed, a lot. And by that I don’t mean we now know about all the developments that have been made since then, I talk about the things that happened to us, our experiences, the hurt, the pain, the joy, the happiness- I didn’t want to rush things. What would you have said if I’d rung your doorbell going ‘Hi there, I’m your wife of 235 years, can I please come in?’”

“Eliza. My Eliza.”

It was a small wonder. I could not tell if my world had fallen apart or reassembled, that however
didn’t matter. Eliza lived and she was with me in this very moment.

“So of course I jumped at the chance to be with you when David had to move out of your shared office. Lucky me. And to find you quite liked Anna Williams- I tried to tell you once, you see, but I didn’t want to destroy everything because we were happy, among all the terrible things with Francesca and Arnold, we had us, like a brief sliver of sunlight between dark rainclouds, but it was beautiful. And when you sacrificed yourself- I didn’t know it would work, but given I carry immortality of a different kind in my blood it was worth a try- I just couldn’t let you go without ever knowing the truth.”

Anna- Eliza, took my hand, fire meeting ice.

After an eternity of silently looking at another, she asked “Now, what will we do?”

“I love you. I don’t know.”

“Do you love me because of the woman I once was, or do you love me for who I am now? We have both changed. Good God, it’s been centuries!”

“I fell in love with Anna Williams when I first saw her”, I said simply. “If this is who you are now.”

Gently, I dared to brush a strand of hair that had fallen from her coiffure into her face away. My gesture broke the spell and Elizabeth, not caring for her hair (or the cleanness of my coat) leant against my shoulder and wrapped her arms around me, prompting me to do the same.

We held each other. In one way, it was just as it was supposed to be, but it also was the exact opposite: it was all new, we were still the same people, and yet we weren’t.

Anna, Eliza clung on to me and I to her, never letting go for fear it could be a dream.

“I’ve waited so long”, she sobbed, and I too could not suppress my tears.

We sat on the floor, seated there without ceremony like teenagers, and somehow, the world seemed to have begun and ended at the same time in this very place.

How often had we been here together, with the children in our past life? And here we were again, centuries later, and we still were there.

Eliza was no more the woman I had wed, and I no more the man she married.

We were all new and just the same all at once.

Chapter End Notes

Now you know. "Anna Williams" is a very much alive Elizabeth Simcoe's alias. Did you notice the box of books in chapter 2? When the box breaks, it reveals tons of books about Flamel "Anna" claims are for her boss' latest research project. Then there's the guy called "Nick" she talks to on the phone a lot in chapter 8. She is oddly unfazed at Simcoe's big identity-reveal in chapter 4.

Eliza is, by the way, the unnamed woman from the intermezzos and the lady from the
introductory paragraphs of each chapter. Her meeting with Stoker is self-explanatory and she was in Dublin because that's where Francis, her eldest spent quite some time and when the rebellion came, she thought Simcoe might show up there, too, perhaps he had joined the Army again?

In case you have noticed, both unnamed women and Anna have, for example, made excessive use of the phrase "what a pack of nonsense", which historical!Elizabeth is said to have used quite frequently.

I have to be brief here, due to the limited character count, but if you like, I'll make a list of all the clues in the end.

Now, the notes:

"Passing each other with a nod of the head (...)": lines lifted from (and adjusted somewhat to suit the story) W. B. Yeats' poem "Easter 1916".

Holly is a homage to my cousin, who also picked her name. A fellow vampire enthusiast, she is one of only two people who knew where this story would go. She also bravely endured my ramblings about the story in general and should therefore be awarded a medal for bravery.

Simcoe's court-martial and his account are both entirely fictional. He was never court-martialled and there is no such document.

The match was Wales vs. Ireland, played on 9th October 2017, ending with a 0-1 win for Ireland.
"Fields of Athenry" is the song the Irish fans sing when their team are losing. It's about a young man being shipped to the penal colony of Australia during the Great Famine of the mid-1840s for stealing some corn to keep his family from starving and first gained international attention at the match versus Spain at the 2012 European Championship.
The captain of the Welsh team was listed as A. Williams (A standing for Ashley, not Anna of course).

"P. S. I Love You": Simcoe read the book and watched the film several times. He liked it a lot and cried even the third time around. He also listens the songs "Love You 'Till the End" and "If I Ever Leave This World Alive" from the soundtrack regularly. But Gerard Butler's Irish accent remains awful.

Co. Kerry has a very distinct, very hard to describe accent. Look it up, I guarantee you, even mother tongue speakers unfamiliar with this part of the world struggle to understand it.

"The Irish Rover" is a real folk song, best sung very loudly by many people together having a good time.

"Yes, Wednesday (...)": How could I pass up on the opportunity to bring my favourite Addams-Family character into play?

There is a letter by one of his daughters to a family friend telling her about a Shakespeare-themed masquerade at Wolford. In case you are interested, Simcoe went as Prospero from "The Tempest".

The song in the car is "Les Mots Que l'On Dit Pas" ("The Words One Doesn't Say") from the French musical "1789 Les Amants de la Bastille" ("1789 The Lovers of the
Bastille"). The text would have given Simcoe a hint that he isn't the only one who has something to say...

You can take a look at Wolford Chapel from the in- and outside on the internet.

The whole scene about Anna's/Elizabeth's mother works so well because Elizabeth's mother died very early, too, only hours after giving birth to her daughter.

Next up: the two figure out who they are and who they are for one another. Eliza might give a more detailed account of what she has been up to and David and Francesca haven't found out yet, either.

Good Lord, you really deserve a prize for having stuck with me. Thank you so much for reading thus far, there is a little bit more to come, I promise.
Chapter Summary

Elizabeth doesn't like vampires being dramatic, "Anna Williams" flat mate doesn't like Taylor Swift's early work and Simcoe doesn't like nylon(s).

Chapter Notes

Count Dra-Coe-la is back. Sorry for the awful pun.

She drove us home; we did not speak. At my house, she waited for me to bid her adieu and leave her, which I did not.

“You are my wife”, I said, confused, for we had shared our lives before and I was ready to commit to such a thing again, “what is mine is yours also. You are home.”

Fighting back tears she tried to hide, she parked the car around the corner and returned to me, waiting at the door.

“After you.”

“Thank you, General.”

A smile crept on her features and illumined her face with hope.

“It’s definitively more comfortable than my flat and I quite find I like your cat.”

This time, it was I who held the door open for her and bade her inside. Diana glared at us from the top of the staircase, eyeing Eliza curiously and not entirely without a certain air of mistrust in her large amber eyes that seemed to glow in the twilight of the dimly-lit corridor.

“And now?”

Eliza was right. I did not know what we ought to do, either. It was past 2:00 am, no work that could be used as a pretext awaited either of us within the next few hours, no appointment or telephone call.

“Do you fancy a drink? Are you hungry?”

“No”, she answered with a furtive yawn.

“Do you wish to go to bed?”

“Not the worst idea. Could you help me with the dress and the hairpins? I don’t have a ladies’ maid these days to wait on me.”
I led her to my bedroom, the way she already knew. Just as in the old days, I helped her undress and was quite surprised how this task still came to me with relative ease.

As I reached the (historically correct) undergarments, I turned away and held my best dressing-gown out for her to don while I would go find something else for her to wear.

“I can sleep in my shift, it’s alright.”

“You know I don’t heat the house, it will be quite cold.”

With that, I handed her a forest-green sweater (cashmere, I believe, selected for its softness), which, once she put it on, reached down to her knees.

She had everything she needed and that I could presently offer to her and so turned around to leave.

“Wait.” I froze mid-step in the doorway.

“Will you not stay?”

In all honesty, I had only wished for such a development, but never considered it a possibility; after our afternoon together, I had thought back to it many times wistfully, asking myself when in the past 211 years I had ever felt so right, so alive, so very much myself as with Anna Williams by my side, or rather, depending on the exact second of our time together, beneath or above me, if Anna was sent to me by some divine entity I had thought to have stopped believing in to save me, an angel in the guise of a petite human woman with dark hair and eyes that tell stories of heaven whenever I look at them.

I was wrong, Anna Williams was not my saviour.

Elizabeth Simcoe was, had always been, ever since that fateful day I returned from America early in the year 1782 to spend some time living with my godfather, his wife and the latter’s ward, my Eliza, for supposed convalescence from a condition I could never recover from.

Without Eliza, I would have sought my way to an early grave then; after having killed the girl at the harbour and realising the full scope of my needs and capabilities, I wished nought but eternal sleep upon myself and it was Eliza who rescued me, showed me the world was still bright and beautiful, at least as long as she was with me and made it so.

I had lived a twilight existence ever since I was forced to let her believe I had died (oh irony! Had she not lived her life with a dead man for full two dozen years?) never happy or content, like a migratory bird never staying long in one place and tortured by what I was.

Thus, I undressed, putting on a lapelled pyjama and slid under the covers, which technically I have no need of, but which I indulge in having for comfort.

Elizabeth slowly followed my example, but did not use the cushion and blanket the bed, made for two at all times, provided for her and insisted on sharing mine instead.

Remarking upon the question weighing heavy on her lips, I clarified:

“I always kept it this way. In case of a miracle. Or, less fanciful, as a monument to you.” She smiled bitterly and buried her face in my shoulder.

“Well, I guess this is a miracle then.”
“No, you are a miracle”, I replied and chastely kissed her forehead as I wound one arm around her small frame, like a tendril of eternal ivy.

“You’re cold”, she observed, and my heart sank.

“Is it unpleasant for you?”

“No, it is just- strange. The last time we certainly both didn’t care about that and when- you know, when we were married, you always prepared yourself, I figured that out by now.”

“I did”, I affirmed, “but- were married?” The question did perturb me.

“Officially, I am a widow, or rather was, given that officially, I am dead and so are you. I don’t think the legal system has any clauses for marriages of people who live longer than one human lifetime and who both already faked their deaths several times under different aliases.”

“Then- then- you don’t-“ “Hush now. Let’s not talk about this tonight.”

With that, she closed her eyes and made her nest by my side, making herself comfortable in the blanket and cushions close to me.

Instead of indulging in another night exchanging our passions as we had done before when I had not yet known her to be my wife, we elected to hold each other, neither of us quite being able to believe we were together once more.

We did talk, talk about many things when the morning came. Eliza was the first to rise and went downstairs to find some piteous instant coffee, a remnant of the vigils she, Francesca and David had held by my side during my long illness and made herself an ample amount in an old thermos jug, from which she poured herself several cups throughout the morning.

When I first awoke, I was startled, for I was alone- had it all been a dream, had my Eliza been nought but the bitter-sweet product of my imagination? No, I realised, my body was warm, warmer than naturally so and very agreeable. I had spent my night with a human by my side and, at a third glance, I found a yellow post-it note likely taken from my office on my nightstand:

Will be right back.

-E.

“E.” returned indeed and settled herself on the edge of my bed, smelling of coffee and toothpaste.

“I’m glad about all the stuff we left back here”, she commented, her hair done up in a towel from having washed the last remainders of powder out of it, washing away the coiffure of the Elizabeth I had known many years ago to restore the look of Anna Williams- save for her dress, for she had put on her habillement of the previous night.

“I’ll get us some breakfast”, I said and rose to dress and go to a local French bakery to buy some croissants, pain au chocolats and perhaps some dainties for afternoon tea. Now with a lady in the house, I would loathe to force the lowly standards of a bachelor (since I could no longer call myself a widower) on her.
“Us? Human food makes you sick.”

“It does. You’ll eat, I will sit there with you and make conversation.”

“You poisoned yourself for twenty-four years, eating at the table with me and the children.”

“I did. It doesn’t matter now.”

“It *does* matter. Had you told me-“

“And would you have believed me?”, I asked.

“Yes. Or- it depends, I suppose”, she replied defensively and in turn now, too rose from the edge of the bed.

“No, you would not have.”

“Yes I would have! Do you think I didn’t notice something wasn’t right with you? You were always sickly, pale- I would have done anything to help you!” “Would you have wanted me to drink one of the servants dry at the dinner table, in front of our children?”

“Stop being so cynical. We would have found a way. Perhaps if you had told me, you would never have had to fake your own death. Tell me, why did you *die*?” “I don’t think so. The reason I staged my death was to protect you and our children. I killed two men aboard the ship, having been led to temptation after not having touched human blood since having come to know you. Wanting to shield you from the disgrace of a murderous, cannibal husband, I thought it best to end this farce with my untimely demise, which would likely move those who knew and would have wanted to see me hang or otherwise executed to no effect to remain quiet.”

Hurt, her eyes filled with tears, she looked at me. “Do you think I would have loved you any less? I married you *like this*.”

“How can you tell?”, I riposted. “Horrified, you might have wished to rid yourself of me and perhaps feared for our children, who were born human, just like you. It was best I left.”

I realised my voice had grown shrill. How my explanation did not make perfect sense to her eluded me, but apparently, judging from the face she made, I had offended her.

“Why do you always have to be so stubborn? Going to Canada, wallowing in the fact that you consider yourself a monster, your apparent decision against happiness- I don’t get it. You frustrate me.” Hurt by her harsh words, I turned my back on her and left the room.

“Yes, that’s what you always do when you don’t know what else to do, you run away! 211 years and you haven’t learned a thing!”

Her voice accompanied me as I left the house without reacting to her accusation other than slamming the front door shut with unnecessary force and without a word of goodbye.

Outside, the new month greeted me with its typically grey, drizzly weather that matched my mood. Could we ever be happy again? Could Eliza and I embark on a future together, or were more than 200 years spent apart too much to overcome? Did our past matter more than the present, or did the present and our apparent love for another outweigh everything else?
I bought some rather unpatriotic pastries and enough macarons to rescue the French economy. Partly because I wanted to show her I loved her, lavish her in everything she might or mightn’t crave (and given my financial means which exceeded what I let on through my style of living considerably, I could offer her a great many things, not just some insignificant little dainties) and loved her still and partly because I couldn’t decide which flavours she would like.

-How little I knew about her. I did not know her anymore.

The thought made me sad and prompted me to extend my morning walk and take a bus to the inner city to the wine merchant of my trust to procure a few odd bottles of whatever reasonably unreasonably priced liquid of life they had, a strategic move, for, if Eliza would decide to see reason, we could drink them together and if not, I could at least drown my sorrows for a night or two.

I continued to a local supermarket to buy provisions, some basic things. I wanted to make her stay. If she had it comfortable in my home, she might stay, I reasoned.

Under no circumstances did I want to lose her again, but she had to see my position as well. I had never wanted to leave her, my nature had forced me to do so.

When I returned home an hour later, my feline master greeted me much too joyously, rubbing herself against my legs, ignoring the heavy plastic bags I was carrying.

“Now where is Eliza?”, I asked her, half-expecting her to answer me, which she did not, of course. Instead, she simply eyed me with orbs of amber for a few seconds before she stretched languidly and made her way to the sofa, where she positioned herself in such a manner it would not leave room for anybody else to sit there with her.

My wife, or the woman who had been once, I found had left the building, but she had left me another note, which she had rammed into the wooden kitchen table with my bayonet, which apparently she had found in my study, from whence she must have procured pen and paper.

*Always the same. E.*

From the depth the bayonet was wedged in the wood and the force I needed to pull it out again I concluded it had come to be stuck there with great force. It had never occurred to me my darling’s gentle hands could achieve such a feat; perhaps it had come with taking the dram brewed by Flamel.

My first instinct was to leave her to herself, wherever she had gone; had not she started it? Should she mope, perhaps hoping I would come and crawl to her on my knees, apologising and kissing the hem of her gown (or in these days, perhaps the leg of her trousers).

It was she who started it; did she not understand anything at all? I had gone through so much pain for years for her only, had missed her madly and mourned her for more than 160 years- and now she hurled such accusations at me?

I wondered how meeting Anna Strong, nay, Hewlett, had influenced her. Clearly she was displaying some of Anna’s more unfavourable qualities in this moment.

In my resolve to have her make amends with me and not the other way around, I decided to remain
where I was and to instead drown my evening in sherry and blood, in whichever order.

While outside, a gale from the sea drove clouds heavy with rain inland, which within a matter of minutes darkened the already grey evening sky even further. A characteristic November fog began to build, which slowly transformed into persistent rain.

I should have been content, alone, with my sometimes-pet keeping me company, my thirst stilled by expensive alcohol and human blood and Mozart’s Requiem playing in the background while outside, the world looked dismal, but I was not.

Restless, I lifted Diana off my belly, who was positively discontented by being evicted from her preferred resting place, wherefore I quickly bedded her on the sofa where I had lain and spread her favourite blanket over her, almost as one does with a sleepy child.

Diana, I mused, was the only family I had in this day and age.

-Elizabeth.

After trying to right my somewhat dishevelled appearance in the mirror, I retrieved the macarons and a bottle of wine from the kitchen, put them into a plastic bag and went on my way.

Although the walk to Elizabeth’s abode was not long, I arrived drenched, my hair dishevelled and more miserable than before.

It truly was a walk of penance.

At last, I reached Eliza’s address, where she lived with her flatmate, whose name if I recalled correctly was Gemma, and rang the doorbell. A voice, to my dismay not Eliza’s, answered via the speaker system:

“Yes? Who is this?”

“It’s John”, I tried, hoping the familiarity of introducing myself by my Christian name would indicate to the woman with the American accent on the other end, presumably Gemma, that I had legitimate business at this address and was well acquainted to the person whom I was about to request, “Is El- Anna in?” Without another word, the door opened with an electric buzz. On the first floor, a door stood open and a young woman, around the age of “Anna Williams”, I supposed, waited there. In the background, music was audible, somewhat muffled and the scent of the air escaping the flat smelt distinctively of my love.

The young woman who awaited me wore a towel on her head and was clearly dressed in cosy home wear. Quickly, I apologised for my uninvited intrusion and professed to her I had not meant to cause her any trouble.

Gemma, as she now introduced herself, assured me it was nothing and bade me inside, insisting I leave my soaked coat in the bathtub to dry.

“So you’re Mr Heartache?”, she asked critically, more critically than most of my students met my tales of the War in America in fact, and looked me over, as if she had expected something, or rather someone else.

“If you wish to call me that.”

“Let’s say I wouldn’t have thought-“ she paused, visibly searching for a diplomatically acceptable answer. Of course she had; deeming her flatmate a woman her own age, she had probably awaited
a totally different man to come, younger than I was looking (though judging us by our real ages, the ten year age gap between us weighed no more than a second) and less conservative in his attire; perhaps a student in trainers and sportswear that is so widely worn in this day and marks the decline of male elegance.

“She’s been in her room all day. Doesn’t want to come out and listens to Taylor Swift- loud. We started with *Picture to Burn* when she came home, but now, we’ve arrived at *White Horse*”, Gemma continued with the voice of a doctor might use to describe the progress of a patient’s condition from the first to the next, more serious stage.

“Annie likes the old albums”, she added with regard to Eliza’s choice of music, frowning as if she wanted me to know this was by no means her opinion before she went on, “Anna didn’t talk to me about anything, so I don’t know what you did-“ Gemma’s dark eyes gave me an even darker look as if she wanted to tell me I would meet an untimely end if she were to find out I had harmed Eliza, Anna, in any way, wherefore I was quick to reply “I think the misunderstanding was of a mutual nature.”

The young woman before me raised an eyebrow and curled her mouth into a sneer, whether at my quaint way of expression which I never quite could rid myself of or at my words, I could not tell.

“…is what they all say. You look sorry, though.”

Of course, Gemma had been aware of the double meaning the word sorry entailed, for indeed, I must have been as sorry a sight as I was feeling rueful: wet from head to toe and my hair a mess, holding a plastic bag with wine and dainties, my person must have given the impression of the archetypical “boyfriend who f-ed up”, to use a phrase Gemma might use.

-I wasn’t even that. Not her boyfriend, no longer her husband, just somebody she used to know centuries ago. A shadow of a former life, a memory with no business in her world outside fond, wistful recollections of days gone by.

Quietly, Gemma tugged at my sleeve, signalling I should follow her. At the door at the end of the short hallway, she knocked.

“Annie-girl?”

No answer came, no verbal one at any rate; in reply, the music was turned up as if to signal she did not like company at all and that she would simply drown out anyone whom she did not want to see or hear (until the neighbours upstairs would call the police, I supposed).

“Stop it, Anna. I’ve been putting up with TayTay the whole day. You’ve got a visitor.”

Either she ignored Gemma, or had legitimately not heard her over the loud, sad song she was listening to. At any rate, her flatmate shrugged, saying “the floor is yours. You better show her how sorry you are. You know I’ve had to live with that the whole day? By the way, whatever’s going to happen, please keep it down, I’ve got an 8 am class.”

With these last words, she disappeared to her own room, closing the door behind her, leaving me to stand in front of Eliza’s door, not knowing what to do.

At last, I decided to knock gently before entering.

I opened the door softly. The room was fairly big for a student’s abode, shelves lining the walls filled with books and trinkets to show to visitors, signalling she was a woman who knew the world, who had seen places, a desk facing the window and a bed of the size to only fit one person
comfortably in the corner. While the rest of her room looked a lot like the interior of a modern-day Wolford might have looked like, the corner around her bed was more liberally decorated with photographs showing her in recent years with people (I recognised Gemma in some of them), tickets to events she had been to and the like stuck to the wall, as if she had tried to create a visible reminder to herself who she was, where and when every morning she woke up. Or maybe she simply liked those pictures, those memories, her life now?

My love lay in said bed, facing the wall, her back turned to me. She had discarded her 18th century attire in favour of a T-shirt and leggings and her legs and arms were wrapped around the blanket as if she needed something to cling on to, eyes closed.

Gently, I closed the door without making any noise and whispered, not wanting to startle her, “Eliza?”

She turned around sharply and sat up in one swift motion. Nobody wanted to face their adversary in bed or asleep, I knew that from my days in the army.

“Well?”

Eliza made no move to silence the umpteenth return of her song of choice and looked at me from swollen eyes.

“You know I’m not good with white horses, I told you as much back then”, I said and reached for the laptop on the desk, which was coupled to a sound system and silenced Taylor Swift lamenting the cold, hard truth of love lost.

She almost smiled at that.

“I am sorry”, I whispered.

“Don’t be.”

Her answer startled me.

“Why?”

“Why not? I’ve had time to think. This is who we are now. I was foolish to assume- to even look for you- you know, I look at your face and I see John Graves Simcoe, my John Graves Simcoe, but you aren’t- and yet you are, and I am not much better, I’m- I’m not the nineteen-year-old who believed in happily-ever-afters anymore-“

I could not hold back myself anymore, either.

“But you are Eliza”, I insisted, attempting to hide a tear fuelled by the memories her speech evoked by brushing it away with the back of my hand.

She shook her head.

“We both aren’t who we were, I see that now. You are not the man I fell in love with and I’m not the woman whom you asked to marry back in ’82. And besides- you are-“

She gulped, unable to say the word.

“A vampire”, I completed the sentence for her, “but that I have always been.”
“Which doesn’t make it any easier”, she answered, averting my eyes.

“No”, I agreed, “but I shall not accept that as a reason why we should not be happy.”

“But can we be?”, Eliza asked, her tears drying. “I don’t know, even though I’ve been looking for you the world over. It sounds ironic, I know.” My love gazed into the distance, drawn to the past by memories of old.

“I shall leave if you want me to, and you need never see me again”, I offered, even if said offer would tear my heart in two.

“I didn’t say that”, she answered quickly, “all I- I don’t think I know you anymore. Or myself. Meeting you again was so- so different- I thought it wouldn’t bother me, what you are now that I know, but you kept it from me for twenty-four years- I don’t even know if I can trust you-”

“And can I trust you?”, I retorted. “After all, you kept playing your little game with me for quite a while.”

“You cannot blame me for wanting to get to know you”, she defended herself, “after all, I did recognise you. You blind fool did not even recognise me.” She was hurt, I could tell.

“And how should I have, after all these years? Last I saw you, you were an old woman, almost eighty-eight. I had your portrait with me always.”

I pulled my wallet from my pocket, opened it and showed it to her. In the place where most people kept pictures of their loved ones, I had her portrait, drawn by her best friend shortly before our departure to Canada.

Wordlessly, she reached for the pompadour she had had with her the night before and pulled out hers, revealing to me a photograph taken from the university’s website.

We exchanged a sad smile, mourning all that had been, all that could never be.

In this very moment it became clear to me that leaving now would be the worst mistake of my existence, that if I left her now, affirming we were not fated or meant or however to express it to be together beyond the year 1806, I would never see her again.

Still standing before her, I reached for her laptop again, opened YouTube and typed a song into the search bar.

As the first chords of dulcet guitar playing soothingly enwrapped the room in a comforting melody, my beloved, for she still was and always would be, looked up.

You fill up my senses

Like a night in a forest

Like a mountain in springtime

Like a walk in the rain

A smile crept across her features, accompanied by tears, though not of the sad and desperate kind.
Let me drown in your laughter
Let me die in your arms
Let me lay down beside you
Let me always be with you
Come let me love you
Come love me again

“You are dead, and I won’t have you do such a terrible thing as last winter again, or I will be terribly cross with you”, she sniffed.

I could do nought but shake my head and opened my arms as she stood up and rested her head against my chest.

We stood like this, both awash in a sea of feelings we could not make sense of, moved beyond any possible description for a while.

When the song ended, she looked up to me, took the edge of her sleeve and wiped it across my own salt-stained cheek.

“There. Now, I must ask you something.”

“Yes, I will.”

“You haven’t heard yet what I have to say.”

“It doesn’t matter.” “It does- John, if we are ever to have a chance again- I would like us- to say it in words you might be more familiar with- would you court me again?”

“You mean like I’m your boyfriend?”

I was of course not unfamiliar to the modern concepts of love and courtship.

“Yes, in a way. I want to know you again, the new you. And you don’t really know me anymore. I need time and if we have anything, it is that, ridiculously much of it. We literally have forever. Will you date me?”

“As Anna or as Elizabeth?”, I could not help but ask.

“Anna when we’re out, but actually I quite like you saying my real name”, she confessed in a hushed voice. “I was hoping to hear you say it again for over two hundred years.”

And so it was agreed. I was to court her as the new boyfriend, or anything close to that Gemma had come to know me. For the coming weeks and months, we met more or less openly, doing, as I had
heard other couples do, things together like watching some terribly experimental French black and white film at the cinema or simply watching the sunset at the beach or sometimes, or rather most times, spending an evening or afternoon at either of our homes, talking, doing nothing.

The night we had agreed on our new arrangement, I could indeed persuade Eliza to taste some of the macarons I had brought and take a glass of wine with me.

It was a very beautiful evening, our almost-separation aside, and we had finally talked, without rage, without accusations.

Gemma (I could tell with my more sensible ears), had fallen asleep in her room and was no threat to us, so we could speak freely.

Eliza understood why I had not told her about my condition and almost wept again when I told her how I had become such a revolting thing in the first place.

I in turn shed a few tears when our conversation came to the topic of our children and Eliza, with ample hindsight one hundred and sixty years after her own death, expressed ruefulness and guilt at having, as she had thought “shielded” our daughters from marriage, from ever feeling the same pain she had felt at my supposed demise.

“When you were gone, it felt as if you’d taken a piece of me with you. I wasn’t myself, for some time. That’s why I dedicated my life to finding you as soon as I found out you weren’t gone forever, but still, there was so much pain- I didn’t want them to go through the same.”

As if seeking for my absolution, her eyes found mine.

“It was another time”, I tried to console her, knowing from my own experience that my daughters had not wanted a thing; they had had comfortable lives and each of them had been bright and talented in her own right. We couldn’t change their fates, they are dead- but we still had a future.

“...And then, looking for you, I found I still enjoyed life- I did so many things over time, saw so many places- my life was not unhappy and I only missed one thing; my John. You know, the longer I was looking for you, the more doubts I had I would ever find you. And what if I didn’t? I tried to live, to enjoy myself for my own sake, and I did. But I still missed you. I wrote a novel or two in the twenties, and after a champagne-fuelled night of debauchery in New York I stood alone on the balcony of an expensive hotel and watched the sun rise. We had a splendid party that night, and I was still a little drunk, which only increased my euphoria as the sun rose over the city. It was such a beautiful sight and I was just standing there, taking it all in, how this glowing ball of red, orange, pink and gold illuminated the sky and then, suddenly, as I was trying to put the beauty unfolding before me into words in my head, I can’t even tell you where that came from in this very moment, I was thinking ‘John should be here and see this’, and I got sad. There always were little moments like this one, but overall, I think I did well. I worked as an illustrator, a writer, I studied engineering back in the 80s and worked part of the 90s as a wildlife photographer- I did so many amazing things.”

“I wasn’t happy”, I replied, “never, really. Not without you.”

“Oh John. You still don’t like people much?”

“No”, I confessed.

“Silly, silly you. You are so much more than just your grief, your hurt, your pain. You were a writer, a colonel, the first Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada, a good father to our children and
now, you are a scholar and you teach young people, aren’t these things worth celebrating?” “Why should they be?”

“Because look at what you have achieved! You really are a daft bastard.”

She smiled.

“Macarons?”, I asked, offering her the box of dainties from the plastic bag I had set on the floor.

I watched her eat, and adored the sight, the faces she made when she liked or disliked a flavour, the sparkle in her eyes when she looked at me- this was my Eliza. She had been, was, and always will be.

“Coming to think of it”, Eliza added to our previous conversation between to bites, “TURN’s given you the fame you always wanted, and they hired a very handsome man to portray you. Not as handsome as your real self, of course.”

“TURN is the most-“ Before I could give her my full, undiluted opinion on this arrant nonsense and complete waste of screen time, she cut me off.

“Give it a rest. It’s not exactly historically accurate, I know. Now, tell me what you did without me.”

“Write. Tried to right my name, which this unspeakable TV series has dragged through the dirt again, tried not to be what I am-“

Did I do anything more? No, I did not. Eliza looked sad.

“Then let’s hope you’ll do more in the future.”

She swallowed the last bite of a violet-flavoured macaron and hugged me as we sat there on the edge of her bed, where we remained for a good while longer until the dawn rose outside her window and together, we drank the last remnants of much too warm wine, watching as the sun ascended the sky in the most glorious colours. Although generally, vampires must be wary of direct sunlight, the fewest of us burn like torches when coming into contact with the sun. Most of us only develop sunburn-like symptoms fairly quickly. Though a day at the beach might be the end of me, watching the sunrise could do me no great harm, or at least none that I cared about.

As the street below her window steadily grew busier again, I told my love to rest, catch up on a few hours of sleep, while I walked home, my clothes crumpled, my hair a mess, and yet I strode homewards with the same pride and glory in my heart as I had felt leading the Queen’s Rangers to battle.

The next two months were full of joy. Although Eliza and I had agreed that Francesca and David were not to know anything about us yet and I found it harder and harder to answer their questions about why my disposition was so changed recently and my mood so cheery (nobody seemed to believe the reason was my definitive convalescence from the injury I had sustained earlier in the year), I could not have relished the time more.

Eliza and I started to spend more and more time together, and it was, though different from the first time we had courted, wonderful, dream-like. Never would I have thought I would ever see her again and although I would have married her again then and there the day she revealed her true identity to me, the time with her, getting to know the woman she had become over time, was just as
exciting as the spring and summer of 1782.

In early December, she started spending some nights at my house, much to Diana’s dismay, who was then banished from the bedroom, which she had previously regarded as her domain, the bed and the place next to me specifically that was now occupied by Eliza.

The first few times she stayed over, I bid her be allowed to hold her so I could feel the drumming of her heart resound within the hollow emptiness of my own immortal shell. She obliged and later informed me in the morning that I had fallen into a vampire’s sleep-like state within minutes, soothed and comforted by her. She said I looked “cute” when in this state, though I doubt that, for I could only suspect being a corpse, I could not look very lively or appealing at any time, especially not with my eyes closed, lying as still as someone who would never rise again.

 Mostly, we were very happy. Our new arrangements suited us both, and I was greatly pleased to simply be with her. Eliza too seemed content with the way things were, though both of us knew there were impediments to our mutual future happiness; namely the fact we were hiding the truth about Eliza from David and Francesca and the arrangements both of us needed to be together.

After having left her previous employment as a student assistant, “Anna Williams” had revealed to have obtained qualifications as a translator (“I always loved languages”, Eliza had said, “now I can put my knowledge to good use.”) a few years prior and managed to find a situation at a sizable publishing house, where she worked on her translation of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*.

“You know, when I read it for the first time, it was quite fashionable”, my love said one evening. “Now I have to write annotations so people who haven’t seen one of the old-ish movie adaptations will even understand the plot.”

December came and for the first time in years, I did indulge in Yuletide celebrations, had my own even. On the twenty-third, I proposed a Christmas Eve-eve (the title had been contrived by my clever girlfriend), knowing that Francesca and David would spend the following day with their families.

Francesca had gotten back on her feet, faced her parents and relations. After some research, she had convinced them of having contracted Raynaud syndrome and some dietary issues based on the stress and emotional turmoil she had experienced working in academia, causing her fingers to be cold and her diet narrowed down to very few things, so as to not worry them too much. Of course, they had done exactly that when they had first heard about her supposed health issues, but had come to think Francesca was well after visiting them and calling her mother, as she had promised, at least once every week.

It was still hard for her, the entire concept of her existence as she had confessed to me, and one day she might tell her mother, the person she trusted the most and was closest to, but first wished to enjoy a family Christmas like all the others, feel at home, safe, for the first time in months. She had procured presents for everyone and received an early present from me; a small cool box she could either power via the cigarette lighter in her car or plug in the house filled with the only substance her diet required.

Francesca had begun procuring her blood from one of my contacts and made it a point to never bite a human, for she had experienced it herself and did not want anyone else to feel the same pain. Thus, she rejected my offers to teach her how to feed herself without any contacts to easily bribed hospital workers available, which concerned me somewhat, but in the end was at least in this very moment not the most pressing matter for her to resolve, especially since she was soon very adept procuring blood for herself from sources hitherto unknown to me.
David, of whom I thank to having had Eliza back had not seen much these past months, was well and happy with his wife and children and I a well-liked visitor in his home, which prompted David and me to tell Linda about my true nature when she insisted I should watch the children on a “date night” for her and David, for the girls had inconceivably taken a liking to me.

She had taken it badly for about a week, unwilling to believe me, and Eliza and I did talk about this a lot, for it made me worry she might have second thoughts about me, too. At last, Mrs Cooper had, perhaps under David’s influence, relented, invited me over and told me she would impale me personally if either I would reveal myself to be a con-artist or a danger to her family.

With that, the matter was closed, until about a week later, I received a call:

“I did some reading about you, apparently you can handle more than two”, Linda Cooper had greeted me over the phone, “David isn’t home, I can’t reach Anna and my mother just called because her car broke down. I need you here right now. Prove it.”

And so I had. Little Isabel (“Izzy”) and Melissa (“Melly”) were overjoyed. Although it pained me to think that I too had once had little girls like them, seven in total, I tried not to let wistfulness overcome me. The two were agreeable in their conduct and eager to make an impression, both on me and on their mother for being “big” girls who could be left alone without her. At the ages of seven and four, the two were easily charmed into biddable behaviour by affording them both the honorific “Miss” before their name, as one addressed young ladies of good breeding in my own time, without the negative connotation it may have gathered over the years and speaking to them civilly in a fashion that made them puff their little chests out with pride for being treated as grown-ups.

Miss Isabel invited me (and albeit begrudgingly, her little sister too) to join her for the tea party she had been setting up on the living room floor when her mother had been called away to assist with the broken-down car. My way of drinking imaginary tea from an empty plastic cup with my little finger extended raised two pairs of eyebrows and prompted me to explain to them the rules of conduct they ought not hesitate to adopt at table and in company. When I assured two bored, frowning girls that this was how princes and princesses took their tea and that such graceful skills were greatly admired by adults, I was asked to teach them more.

Linda’s twenty minutes trickled by and became two hours; I received another call informing me the tow truck had not arrived as planned and several complications thusly arisen soon after.

Since Miss Melissa had stated she was hungry for the past half-hour, I ordered pasta from my most trusted source, this being a meal most children enjoyed as I had heard, and enlisted the two girls’ help setting the table according to my exact specifications.

When Linda eventually arrived, her children were found to be sitting at the table, upright like candles and employing knife and fork in a way most adults these days are incapable of. With pride I thought that I would have invited them to Wolford, were these the late 1700s, to come play with my own girls without hesitation.

“Well, you’re surely not the worst babysitter I’ve had”, she mumbled incredulously and threw me a smile that spoke of her regretting ever having questioned my integrity and my nature.

From that day on, I had been welcomed in the Cooper household with warmth and joy, although I did not make use of it often, for I preferred spending my time with Eliza and besides, I saw enough of the family’s most obnoxious specimen at work already.

“You’re not around the office much, lately”, David had observed, “not like in the olden days, when
you wouldn’t leave the building for days writing whatever you publish all the time. And so absent-minded. You know, yesterday when Louisa, the one from classical antiquity with curly hair, was waiting in line at the copier behind you and she had to point out to you that you have to press the button to make the thing copy your paper because you were only standing there staring into the distance with that faint, imbecilic grin on your face? Either you’re doing drugs now or you’re in love.”

“Perhaps she is a drug”, I replied cryptically, giving him a smile of the sort I have come to know people either find intimidating or insolent, or both.

“And Anna?”, David had asked. “You’re over her so quickly?”

“We have come to a mutual understanding. She will be invited, too.” I had to be careful now, for we had planned to tell them of Anna being Eliza and that we were courting on Christmas Eve-eve. Coldly, I directed the conversation back to his family and how he should bring them, too.

We had naturally thought much about how to tell them but in the end, the moment came before we could do anything about it or produce one of the speeches we had planned and hammered into our heads together.

Although we had invited the guests for 7:00 pm, the doorbell rang at 6:30 pm and everyone, the Coopers and Francesca, were at the door. Eliza was in the kitchen, playing Christmas music on full volume while cooking, singing along enthusiastically. Although I have no taste for it, I did not have the heart to tell her to stop. As I opened the door to greet them, Eliza, who had not heard the guests entering before, stopped in the middle of God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen, tuned the music down to a low, pleasant background murmur and came into the hallway, her hands buried in oven gloves and her most shapely figure obscured by a much less appealing apron.

There was no need to elaborate, our guests instantly put two and two together.

“You-“

“We wanted to tell you”, Eliza began soothingly, motioning everyone to sit at the table and take a glass, which she quickly filled, perhaps hoping as much as I the alcohol would make them easier to deal with.

“We are dating.”

David almost spat a sip of wine back in his glass in surprise. Linda looked at us, her forehead creasing.

“I only know the short version but didn’t you-“

“Yes”, I interrupted her, “we sorted that out.”

“Allright”, she mumbled, not knowing what to make of it and willing to hear more before she would crush us with her final judgement.

“There is more”, I continued Eliza’s tale to get it over with, “Anna- Anna isn’t Anna. She is-“ I could not bring myself to say it. Those words were too beautiful to speak them, too incredible even for my own ears.

“I am not who you have come to know me as. It is quite a long story.”

And so she told them. Miss Isabel and Miss Melissa had excused themselves to go play in my
study (leaving me to call after them not to touch anything) for this was whence Diana had retreated and who would now be bestowed with more cuddles than ever before in her life.

Francesca was on the verge of tears, Linda, the most down to earth of them, shook her head, making her red-brown chin-length hair swing back and forward while holding her husband’s hand.

“Well, I guess it’s not hard to believe Elizabeth would have looked for you after the research I did on you both.”

“The dress I wore at Halloween, it was made after one of my old ones”, Elizabeth said.

“Hm”, David mumbled and held up his phone.

“Sweetie, do you think-“

“Well, there is a resemblance”, Linda replied.

Evidently, the two were looking at pictures of my wife online to ascertain themselves they had not been told a most elaborate fib.

David was the first to speak again after a short and very uncomfortable moment of silence.

“You know, with you, John, nothing shocks me anymore. I’ve had you throw books at me, then what happened to Francesca made me your co-conspirator hiding an un-dead body and lastly, you taught my messy children how to eat. The last thing probably astonishes me more than anything else, even the fact that you apparently didn’t know your wife was still alive and only discovered it at our Halloween party.”

Everyone nodded in unison and Francesca rose to embrace Eliza, calling her by her real name for the first time.

“Why did you call her Elizabeth, Francesca?”, a curious little voice shouted across the parlour. Miss Melissa did not know yet, and we deemed it unnecessary to hit the children with news they would not understand, that even the adults in their lives had struggled with at first.

“This is a very, very important secret”, Francesca smiled benevolently, “You must promise me to keep it.”

Miss Isabel had joined her sister, apparently bored with bothering the cat, eager not to miss out on anything and be at a disadvantage, and both girls nodded with most adorable serious expressions on their faces.

“Elizabeth is a real princess and it’s important people don’t know her real name, or she couldn’t walk around alone or even visit you because people would want to take pictures or shake her hand. Because she will never be queen, she has decided she doesn’t want to sit in the castle and do what princesses do these days and live a normal life. Promise you won’t tell anybody?”

“Promised!” two excited little voices screeched.

Eliza smiled, for indeed her blood was noble and she a descendant of ancient Welsh kings.

Dinner progressed and Eliza’s homemade duck was greatly appreciated. We sat and talked a while longer until Miss Melissa fell asleep on the sofa, sitting between me and Eliza, and her parents thought it was time to go.
“Merry Christmas”, we all shouted to each other one last time and Miss Melissa waved tiredly at Eliza and me from her father’s arms as he carried her through the snow to the car.

“Merry Christmas, John”, Eliza breathed as the door was closed and the two of us alone and kissed me. I could taste the relief which she now felt at the acceptance everyone had shown her alongside a hint of duck and red wine.

I kissed her back a little less innocently and her body answered mine. Throughout our courtship, we had not yet shared a bed again, at least not in the common sense couples do. We had each wanted to feel the other’s presence again and had lain in each other’s arms for that purpose, but we had not engaged in any more passionate encounters since the last time in what must have been January or February when she had still been known to me as Anna Williams.

Smiling at me, she took my hand and led me to the staircase, grabbing her sizeable handbag on the way with her free hand. When she dropped it in my bedroom, it fell over and revealed its contents to my gaze: a smallish bag of cosmetics, make up removal wipes, some clothing and lastly a most delightful piece of rose-coloured satin and lace.

“You planned to stay to night?”

“I did.”

“I don’t think we shall have use of it, pretty as it is. Let me just-“

“No”, Elizabeth said firmly at having guessed what I was about to do, “don’t. I want you now. As you are.”

Heating my body I had wanted to do for her, with her pleasure in mind, but since she did not mind my natural coolness, which tended to match the room temperature (like lukewarm bathwater at most, which was as warm as I get without artificially inducing warmth, for I had begun to heat the house somewhat for the times Eliza would pay me visits and with the children coming over for Christmas Eve-eve, I did not want them to catch a cold), I obeyed her as she expectantly turned her back to me. It was an invitation to pull the zipper of her black velvet dress down, which had accentuated her celestial beauty in the most flattering light, making her look even more like a goddess and I obliged without hesitation.

She shivered as I traced the line of her spine with one finger before gently pushing her sleeves downwards.

“I can still-“

“It’s not the cold, you daft bastard”, she sighed teasingly, leaning back against me, making me realise her shiver had been one of anticipation of what was yet to come.

In her tights and underwear only (though still wearing a pair of black heels, a little detail which I thought was very pleasing to the eye), she turned around to in turn undress me, her tender little fingers making quick work of the much too many buttons of my three-piece suit. I could no longer wear them, I reasoned, for it took much too long to be rid of.

Without more hesitation, I picked my love up and placed her on the bed, assisting her with her bra and tights. While freeing her breasts of their most unnecessary prison was sensual in the extreme, getting her tights off was an altogether different matter. These vile things had nothing of the elegance the stockings of the old days did, which could be loosened by removing the garter and rolled down, if one had for some unfathomable reason a dislike of such charming accessories.
These vile contraptions of nylon and stretchy plastic however defied all elegance and did not want to part from the flesh they seemed to suffocate with their tight grip. At my third attempt, my greedy, impatient fingers ripped through them, at which I was admonished and a demand for a new pair was made, though in a laughing tone, and she, kicking so as to assist me, exhaled theatrically when the deed was done.

The rest of our clothing was much easier shed and our night, the first as the people we had once been and yet weren’t, was spent in mutual adoration.

How I had missed her. Although my heart had always had an Elizabeth-shaped hole in it for two centuries of painful separation in which I had believed her dead, suddenly little details returned to me which I had not realised I had missed about her. The way she tilted her head when she laughed, which I had observed at dinner; her habit to counter anything she deemed improbable with the sceptic exclamation “what a pack of nonsense” and in this moment, how her breath grew heavier and her heartbeat accelerated until I too was swept up in its rhythm, almost believing I too was alive again, united with her through this more intimate connection even than what was to follow.

We loved each other, not consumed by passion as we had been the last time, but slowly, indulging each other’s company, drawing the sensation out, making these few precious moments last and all the more intensive.

A pair of hot, darling hands mapped my body as if she were new to this most familiar territory- or glad to feel it again beneath her fingers after long years. She kissed every single one of my scars, promising me that it all was over now, that I was the bravest man she had ever known, that she would make it all go away, the unpleasant memories, the past, the future even- in this moment, only we existed, the universe had reduced to a bedroom in a moderately big house in Exeter and Elizabeth was the sun around which this universe revolved; or perhaps she was the universe, for she is my everything. To find joy in having her with me again, hearing her most rewarding little moans and sharp inhales when I obeyed one of her wishes to her satisfaction- there are no words to describe it. She was mine again and I hers.

In the aftermath of pleasure, her limbs entangled with mine as effortlessly and naturally as if we had last done it only yesterday and both of us, tired and content, fell asleep.

The next morning, I was woken by Eliza half-laying across my chest and smiling down on me, kissing first my mouth, then the tip of my nose and my forehead.

“Good morning”, she grinned and I could not help but notice how her chest was tightly pressed to mine, which caused my body to yearn for her once more and I took the opportunity, wordlessly pulled her entirely on top of me to continue where we had stopped the last night and this time it was I who took advantage of the situation, running my hands down the length and breadth of her body until she took them and placed them at her hips, where she evidently wished to have them and subsequently incited a new round of the heavenliest of pursuits.

“Good morning”, I finally replied cheerfully when she collapsed wildly gasping for air against my chest once more.

Together, we spent a very intimate, quiet Christmas; she gave me a pair of terrible Christmas socks and made me wear them for her (and not much else) whereas I, not daring to opt for jewellery, for jewellery always indicated the state of the relationship between the giver and the receiver was almost akin to being affianced, gave her a gift card to an art supplies store, knowing she had always enjoyed painting.

“That is very thoughtful of you”, she had praised me and I felt a little proud for having thought of
“I could get sketching supplies and draw you like one of my French girls”, she smirked, to which I only answered, winking, that if this were her wish, I would oblige her, and, coming to think of it, who were those “French girls” she had spoken of?

Although this had clearly been intended to be taken as a joke, I noticed how her face darkened as she said “well, I’ve had some time to spend in Paris over the years.”

Although we were both busy pretending we were in love for the first time, the past caught up with us too often and with it, the wounds and injuries Eliza had not been able to kiss away: one night, I confessed to her I had in the past, during our marriage, almost harmed her, for this secret had tormented my soul greatly and I thought she ought to know; she had nodded, saying she had suspected such when she had found out what I was, but said it didn’t matter to her now, for I had exercised restraint and the only time I had fed off her, she had offered me herself when I was too weak to even know what I was doing and at, well, the door of eternal sleep. While she pretended it meant nothing to her, I knew it did; I could feel it.

“It’s what you are and we can't change that. What happened in winter- I wanted to save you, you had no say in it and that's that, no need to be sorry or anything.”

She smiled feebly at me, eating a salad I had prepared for her (she had laughed, grateful for my offer, and remarked that I could “cook” a better salad than whatever I had served her the last time I had tried to make an impression) while I drank the usual substance from a wine glass.

One is civilised after all, especially in the company of a lady.

When I had set the glass down to speak to her, make a jest or the like, she quickly reached over, tilted the glass and swirled it, as if it were indeed wine and not human blood before dipping her index finger into it and bringing it to her mouth, where she brushed the red substance against her lips.

Never have I seen more sensual, more passion-inducing, more erotic and at the same time disturbing a sight: the blood glistened where a moment before her finger had been, a drop running down her immaculate lipstick-sculpted lips, which I only now realised had the exact same colour as the droplet of blood slowly making its way down her bottom lip.

In this moment, my natural instincts were close to overpowering me, telling me to leap across the table, take hold of Elizabeth and allow my mouth to crush against hers, taste the blood, taste her lips until the carefully-drawn line of her lipstick would not exist anymore and she’d lay panting beneath me, gasping for the breath I do not need, and then devour the rest of her, right there on the kitchen floor, take her, have her, bring her to the same rapture I was experiencing, as if this would ensure she never would, never could leave me again and lastly, at the precipice of passion, employ my teeth to make her mine forever in a wave of red-tinted lust, pleasure and pain.

Although she looked most appealing, instead of pinning her to the floor and giving in to my urges, I looked away, saying “stop that”, my voice raw with desire and fear of myself at the same time.

From the corner of I could espy her quickly licking up the blood on her lips with one movement of her tongue while she cleaned her index finger on a paper napkin (I only use the good, white linen ones on feast days or special occasions, for in the days where house servants are rare and good ones even more so, I do not fancy ironing them every time, which is a most tedious and time-consuming affair to trouble one’s self with). The whole incident could not have lasted more than a second or two- seconds that to me had felt like decades.
Eliza made a face and reached for her own glass, water infused with syrup, to wash the taste, so divine to me and yet visibly disgusting to her, away.

“Don’t ever do that again.”

“I wanted to know what it tastes like.”

“You need not know. Eat.”

“Perhaps one day I will need to know.”

I shuddered at what she was insinuating and did not dare to ask her about it, hoping it had been uttered in defiance rather than earnestness and quickly buried this horrifying thought underneath some silent self-reproach for my baseless lust and hunger for blood- was Eliza safe with me? Could I be trusted? Could we ever be more-?

Chapter End Notes

"Picture to Burn": Angry breakup song from Taylor Swift's first album.

"White Horse": Sad breakup song from Taylor Swift's first album.

The song Simcoe puts on is "Annie's Song" by John Denver. Of course, the title is as important to his argument as the lyrics, and Elizabeth recognises that.

"Les Liaisons Dangereuses" is a 1782 novel by French writer Choderlos de Laclos. Society, scandal and seduction for profit- need I say more?

Raynaud's syndrome is a condition that in essence means reduced bloodflow in your extremeties, most commonly the fingers. There are different kinds of Raynaud's and varying stages of severity. Some, as I have read researching it, even have to don gloves to grab a can in the fridge because otherwise their fingers would turn blue brought on by the momentary coldness of opening the fridge door and getting the can.

Apparently, the Gwillims really were descended from Welsh kings from days gone by as one biographic account states and the quarterings in Elizabeth's coat of arms (which was later represented in the joint Simcoe- coat of arms) are testimony to the many nobles in the family in the past.

"Draw me like one of your French girls" -you all have watched "Titanic", right?
An (Almost) Eternal Wait

The incident was quickly forgotten (for a while, at least), as it happened in the very early stages of our second courtship, which in so many respects proved to be sweeter than the first: no aunt, no godfather to stand in our way or to object on grounds of personal spite, no frowning at the sight of young lovers of any age out and about without a chaperone, and perhaps sweetest of all, the possibility of spending the nights in the same bed.

I had forgotten about it entirely, thought she had done it to be coy and seductive, which was absolutely unnecessary, given she made me drowsy with love whenever I laid eyes on her, wanting to give her everything, my heart, my body, my soul.

We lived in perfect happiness and quickly arranged around the other; I would clean her French press each morning when she had left for work and sometimes surprised her with tea when she returned in the late afternoon while she sometimes visited me at work, her former workplace, too, and we would go out and sit in a park or the like together for an hour.

Our eating arrangements were surprisingly easily made; she cooked for herself (she had ruled I must not again try after burning a pan so badly it had, together with its contents, be thrown out) and aired out the kitchen afterwards. Then, we would take dinner together in perfect harmony.

For breakfast, she usually had things that I did not mind smelling too much; muesli or the occasional croissant if I had spent a night awake as sometimes happens due to my nature and brought her a croissant from an early morning stroll through town.

With my days spent at her side, my most perfect happiness obtained by kissing the rosebud lips of the woman I loved, started to show in my features as well; Francesca, a goddess in her own right for those partial to immaculate blonde curls, remarked upon the lively hue of my face, the almost blushing cheeks and the gentle mellowness in my eyes and unusually high spirits and David called me “the best looking corpse” he’d ever seen, which I chose to take as a compliment, even if I had renewed thoughts about the sweetness of disembowelling him, which I refrained from because of his wife and children and because I was wearing a suit I did not want to soil with the remnants of human intestines and their contents.

While I basked in the sun of my Eliza’s presence and she, too, seemed perfectly happy with me by her side, which she professed often and did not leave any doubts about in her generous proffering of kisses and caresses, she seemed to wither like a plant in a darkened room while I flourished in the light of her existence.

Her face grew wan, her smile strained even when genuine and I thought it was the work she was throwing herself into, that translation she was working on so many nights each week, ready to finish it.

I told her we should embark on a holiday, go to Italy perhaps, where a nineteen-year-old Eliza had confided to me more than two thousand moons ago when we had lain in a sun-lit meadow one beautiful summer’s day, she longed to go someday, but which we never had, not when my condition did not permit me such perilous travel which might have provoked me to lose my senses and attack without wanting to do so and thus exposing my nature to my wife and all the world, not when we were in Canada and then, in 1806, it had been too late.
She could take her things for sketching, and we would go to seek the most picturesque places along
the coastline and drink expensive wine each night and come together in the congress of holy
matrimony, in which I (though I did not dare to speak of it) still believed and privately thought of
her as my wife still, not as some newly-acquired girlfriend.

My beloved had agreed, she was working very much indeed but to my surprise asked me to go to
Spain with her. I told her I had no liking for Magaluf or how these other unsavoury places were
called, and found myself much surprised she apparently did, until she revealed the exact destination
to me:

“Badajoz.”

My heart sank, and yet, I booked two flights. On the plane already, I could feel her snuggled close
to me, her heart beating nervously.

And then, when I visited the town to which she had gone for one reason only, to see where our son
lay buried, my heart broke in two. Quite the opposite of what I had intended, the tragic beauty
looked even paler in the much too bright sunlight and all dressed in black, dressed in mourning. I
too had opted for said colour, knowing this was to be the farewell neither of us had had or come to
have.

From old charts and through a little research we had come to find the approximate spot of his
burial, which we visited as soon as our baggage was disposed of at the hotel. Leaning forward in an
attempt to thrust herself onto the ground, she wailed, clutching one hand to her mouth in an attempt
to stifle her cries in order not to attract any attention, the other lay on her belly, as if the emptiness
inside manifested where many years ago, Francis had grown for nine long, wonderful months.

I restrained her from throwing herself at the foot of the wall with a tender, yet firm embrace, but
she resisted me; I doubt she even realised it was I who was with her, for in her pain, everything else
seemed to have grown indifferent to her.

Of course, I too wept, for the first time at the approximate site where my son had fallen, but
demanded of myself to remain strong for Eliza, who kept thrashing against my arms a few minutes
more before she accepted my embrace and quietly sobbed into my chest. Had I not- had we not- we
had killed him, hadn’t we?

He had grown up in a world we had shaped, and grown to live with my memory haunting the house
and his mama, whom he loved more than anything in the world.

It must have been painful for him, whose relationship with me was not the easiest of all my
children, to grow into manhood in the shadow of the portrait of an old man while he, young and
adventurous, longed to make his own name by entering the army, too and aspired to greatness of
his own, tired of the dusty, wilted laurel-wreaths of his father.

Eliza in turn cursed herself for having let him enter the army, for having not forbidden it when she
could have, for she should have known better- had not both Francis’ grandfathers died abroad in
the war, buried in the sea off the Canadian coastline and in an unmarked grave somewhere in
Germany respectively and had not (which my beloved was led to believe at the time) his father
died in service for his country, too, his health crippled by years of strenuous marches et cetera?

But she had let him do it, which was her greatest pain.

I shall not go into painful detail here, for the wounds of the past have not yet healed sufficiently for
me to retell our grief in comprehensible sentences and without making both weep, but we persisted.
We have too long shied away from facing a reality we should have much earlier, but had not felt strong enough to do so alone. Together however, we could finally brave ourselves to do so.

She held my hand and I held hers and both of us donated money to have a monument erected for our son in Spain and vowed to return each year to visit him- after all, only those are dead who are truly forgotten.

-Had it not been for my Eliza’s memory of me, I would be dead in the eyes of the world, too, just as dead as the entombed bodies of long-gone mortals.

As spring came and ultimately faded into the early days of summer, my grief-withered rose gained colour in her cheeks again and blossomed for all to see.

In the meantime, I had asked her to draw portraits from her mind of all our children, which we could put on the mantelpiece. Contrary to me, who had not even been able to recall my own wife’s face, fogged and obscured by pain, she was able to draw all of them just as she remembered them. She did not draw them as the old women and one man she had last seen when she bid farewell to Wolford, but drew them as she recalled them when young, in their late teens or early twenties- I could tell because little Eliza, our eldest, looked just like I remembered her when last I saw her in 1806 when she had been twenty-two years young.

We had them framed and put up alongside a picture Linda Cooper had taken of us at an academic event without our knowledge, looking lovingly at each other, each holding a glass of wine in our hand.

For me, everything was as it should be, should always remain- she was my wife, whatever she said, she was mine, just as I was hers.

I often gave thought to our situation, to who we were for each other and dreaded the day we would finally have to talk about it. Until then however, I could still indulge in the beauty of our relationship-

“John? John?! Oi, Simcoe!”

David, in order to gain my attention, had descended to such levels of rudeness as to wave his hand between my phone and my eyes.

“What is it?”, I attempted to ask politely, yet I knew my patience with him sounded strained. I had been conversing via text message and my mind had been occupied with the person with whom I exchanged messages.

It had not been a good idea to keep him company while he had decided to get some mediocre food from the cantina. I should have remained in my office, alas, the mistake had been made already.

David, who had risen to his feet, nonchalantly walked to where I was seated and leant over my shoulder as if he had every right in the world to see what I was doing.

“Heart-man-woman-kiss-stabbed heart-sunflower-heart eyes-sundown-dancing woman-? Is this the description for some weird pagan ritual I don’t want to have anything to do with or an inscription from the Karnak Temple Complex? Can anyone who is not an Egyptologist read this!? You do know the English language has some seriously awesome features, like words?”

“What is it you have come to bother me with? As you, see, I am quite busy”, I snapped back, wondering how Linda put up with this man on a daily basis.
“Your copy of ‘The Sherry Trade in the 18th Century’?”, he went on as if he hadn’t just yelled the private context of my electronic correspondence across the cafeteria, “can I borrow it? Tried to get it via interlibrary loan, but that takes ages, then I remembered you had a copy-”

“Yes”, I hissed, strained. “It is in my office. Third book case on the right, middle row.”

For a moment, I wondered whether I should ask him if he could fetch me something from my office too, namely Lord Byron’s collected works (a shame it had missed him when last I had aimed it at his head), but let it lie.

I had received a message that required an immediate response (“am at work xxx ttyl”) and was in no mind to spend more time than necessary with him. With a little (purposefully) administered force, I threw him the keys, which he barely caught, and sent him on his merry way.

Bored, as I had after some research deciphered Eliza’s message and opted against more messages, I played around with my phone (the purpose of Candy Crush would forever elude me), waiting for my keys to be returned to me and a possible apology for unnecessary rudeness.

At last, the fellow returned, smacked the key onto the table and making some terrible noise so as to alert me of his presence (he must have been somewhat disappointed I did not flinch nor act surprised).

I was however surprised to see he carried three books under his arm.

“John?”

The imbecilic grin with which he spoke my name made me wonder what foolish design he held now and if he was suicidal- I had not fed yet that day and anger did nothing to saturate me.

“Now, I didn’t know you were into graphic novels”, he chirped, making his seat next to me without having asked if I would mind.

“No”, I answered truthfully, “I do not read comics”, momentarily confused.

“Ah, you misunderstand me”, he patted my shoulder with false, mocking joviality, “I mean it like so: Graphic. Novels. Graphic as in Explicit.” He smirked like a schoolboy after hearing a rude joke when he put two volumes before me on the table, both wrapped in brown packaging paper.

“This bad boy –or should I say girl-? Fell out when I got the book I came for. I was most surprised and much more than I bargained for but I must say I do find it a touch amusing.” He giggled and took an alarming reddish colour, which I would likely have taken too, were it not for my being dead.

“Here-“ he opened the older one at a page he had doubtlessly selected on purpose and spread it open on the table.

“My, my, how NAUGHTY!”, he exclaimed loud enough for some students waiting in line at the cashier desk to turn their heads. I glared at them, hoping they would keep their mouths shut and not pass this news on, especially since I was painfully aware the page Cooper had opened was visible to all around.

Sensing that one of us should retain decorum (after all, we were adults teaching a younger generation and should provide role models rather than sport an image of rude rascality), I supposed one had to speak patiently to him.
“The freedom of the arts, ever heard of it? Besides, if these do not meet with your aesthetics, I do not see why you feel the need to berate me for it.”

“John”, he whispered in reply, “that’s- you kept ‘em all these years? Like, we have the internet for that now.” He nodded with gravitas as if he were imparting a secret to me I had as yet been unaware of.

“I know. But some of us have not yet forgotten the pleasures and amenities of the analogue.”

“But John- this is WIG PORN”, he looked at me as if he had seen a ghost- or a vampire.

“It is literature”, I lectured him, “a book that has sold more copies than your dissertation ever will. If you want me to phone my contact in the literature department to explain the impact of the novel we’re talking about on modern literature-“ “Nah, I just really wouldn’t have needed to know what you get off on.” He made a face as if he had seen something most distasteful.

“Just don’t tell me you and El-“

“That’s private”, I snapped, my teeth showing slightly.

“Do you?”

“No.”

“Is what you say. I mean, back in the day-“

“May I remind you it is your mind that transcends to foul and rude places now, yet you condemn others for possessing copies of books you deem-?” “I mean, I do have comparison. Linda read Shades of Grey when it came out and I must say, this really is on a whole other-“

“It is literature and if you would read it properly, it would teach you a lesson or two about Georgian society around the middle of the 18th century”, I continued, slowly growing impatient with his boyish behaviour.

Sometimes, I am glad blushing does not fall into my repertoire of bodily reactions anymore.

“Kidding aside”, David suddenly said, his stupid face growing more serious now, “how’re things going?”

“If this is another try to get me to tell you about our private-“

“No”, he cut me off, “relax, man. I was teasing you before. What I mean is how are things going, like, generally?”

“Very well”, I answered without thinking twice, “thank you.”

I wanted to give him a frigid smile in order to intimidate him somewhat, but couldn’t- the ice of my smile melted into genuine warmth at the thought of my dearest. We were happy, we truly were. And yet, we had not talked about who we were for each other in a long time since she proposed we court again. Courtship however must end with a higher goal; I am not a man for vane flirtation that passes like a warm breeze in the early days of spring; even when young and alive, I had been a man of Constancy and Convictions which go fervently against such modern fads as “hooking up” for nothing but the fulfilment of carnal desires.

Even Miss Lola, my choice York City whore, had been more than just that.
My conviction being that (Miss Lola and those of her sisters aside) She Who Is Bedded must be wedded (and I bedded my love more often than could be considered decent), I had good reason to again propose marriage.

Besides, she knew me already, my heart and soul inside out and there were no pesky would-be in-laws to take care of. It was just the two of us, Eliza and I.

For us, un-dead and un-dying respectively, marriage could at best be considered an empty gesture, a romanticised day with pretty dresses, champagne, music and dance for it held no significance to us other than it might be beneficiary regarding our current tax-payments and increase our chances on the housing market (for who would not rent a pretty cottage in the country to a pair of newlywed academics with no children and stable jobs and fortunes in the bank?), for we would outlast a human lifetime and Eliza had been right in saying that there were no laws and regulations for people like her and creatures like me when it comes to marriages enduring longer than what is humanly possible and in a sense. To add to the situation, while she did not, I still considered myself wed to her. We had not divorced nor had either party died, so there could be no doubt that at least in front of God, we were just as wed as we had been on our first full day as man and wife on New Year’s Eve 1782.

Eliza however thought differently, which was her right based on the several arguments that could be made for either side to the conundrum.

The day we had first been wed had been the most beautiful of my existence until I experienced the joy of holding my children in my arms; she had been a celestial vision in a silver-white dress that had sparkled like the frost in the meadows and had had dainty little ornaments in her hair, which I had pulled out that night taking any excuse to run my fingers through her perfect tresses of dark chestnut.

I recall putting my hand in hers before the congregation of wedding-guests, among them military men and their wives and what little family both of us could muster Admiral and Mrs Graves aside, and the Curate Rosskilly, who made me repeat the holy words that would tie me forever to her, my Eliza.

At long last, I was allowed to put the ring on her finger, which I managed just barely, shaky with joy and suppressing a few teardrops upon realising Eliza was now Mrs Simcoe and I belonged to her entirely, heart, body and soul, forever.

-Or did I?

Only much later, with her asleep in my arms (contrary to popular belief, the wedding night rarely is a night of great erotic adventure and desire, one is mainly concerned to find one’s way into bed before too many guests notice and shall make untoward remarks and one is anyway too exhausted to perform more than a basic cleaning of the face and ridding one’s self of one’s outer wear before collapsing on the bed together and finding solitude and genuine closeness for the first time that day) I had started to realise what I’d done: I had wedded a mortal who would grow old and die, whereas I would not. It didn’t matter, I tried to tell myself, I would love her all the same as I had when I met her aged nineteen when she would be ninety. But I would have to tell her sometime. And I would lose her one day. Never would I have thought to make her a vampire for it would be insulting to God to drag an angel from heaven and cause her to suffer in eternal hell; and more importantly, I loved her too much to ever hurt her, to condemn her to a fate akin to mine and tell her what I was.

How selfish of me in retrospect, for I had not done so fearing she would hate me then, lowly in the extreme.
Had someone prophesised me the dreary land of ever-changing, ever-the-same decades, centuries passing me by without her only to be allowed to leave purgatory and step into the garden of paradise again after more than two hundred years, invited by my angel’s gentle hand, I would not have believed it and yet there I was.

I had to marry her, as a memory to the old days and a monument to the new tide that had swept into our harbour, to mark the end of dreary days of solitary sadness on my and desperate searches on her part, to finish with our old lives, yet honour it all the same as we started our new one. If not for any practical purpose, then solely because I loved her so much I wanted to show her that I was still willing to bind my fate to hers and because it would be most romantic.

She would like my interpretation, I was certain of that.

Eliza could still say no, which was then what I was most afeard of, dreaded more than I had my ultimate demise in the darkest days of my invalidity, which was why I had to make it perfect, momentous, an instant she and the world would never forget.

Back in the 18th century, there had been no engagement ring, a fad of much later days that had calcified into tradition. I needed a ring, the best ring in the country, diamonds, rubies, sapphires and emeralds all at once, I needed a location and a good idea for I would not be another man who would deliver a tour in a boat with fireworks over a lake. She liked romance, but not of that kind. It was too cliché, too worn out to be called individual and original.

She needed to be told that she was loved in a way that nobody else, none of the weakling mortals she might have met in the meantime or my own self had done before. She had to know that the world had stopped for her and that I had made it so to lay it at her feet alongside my un-querivering heart that might be cold but started to burn whenever she was near, she who is my heartbeat, my pulse, my everything.

After days of driving myself to insanity with terrible or downright tawdry ideas how to go about this operation, I decided to enlist help.

“You have a wife, David”, I approached him the other day, once again at the cantina.

“Yes, you even met her, John”, David replied in a voice one would usually reserve to speaking with a small child being very annoying while trying to remain patient.

I nodded briefly and smiled.

“She is a lovely woman indeed. And lucky to have you.”

At the last sentence, David almost spat a forkful of spinach back onto his half-empty plate.

“John, whatever you’re trying, it won’t work. You know, people can tell when you’re being nice to them because you want something from them.”

“They why are you still sitting here if you see through my supposed stratagem?”, I countered triumphantly, having spotted the flaw in his logic.

“Because you offered to invite me for lunch and I’m going to be staying in late tonight due to a meeting”, he elaborated before adding with a grin “and why should I say no to a meal for free? Food, John, that’s the most effective bribe there is.”

He grinned nonchalantly at me, the terrible man, with green vegetable matter wedged between his teeth. I didn’t tell him.
“Now, to business”, he announced and looked intently at me. “Come on, out with it. You’re a terrible actor.”

“How did you ask Linda to marry you?”, I uttered very quickly and in a very low voice.

“Sorry, didn’t catch that- repeat, please?”

“How did you ask Linda to marry you?”, I repeated, a little embarrassed.

Of all things he had thought I might throw at him, this had not been on his list. His fork sunk from his hand to the rim of his plate and his eyes once more searched for mine with an unreadable facial expression.

“What- she asked me, to be honest- well, it wasn’t really asking more like she first initiated the big talk about marrying and then we decided what we wanted together, announced our engagement to the family, settled a date for the ceremony and I went off to get her the obligatory rock to show off to her girls and make her little sisters jealous- nothing spectacular, really.”

To my surprise, he smiled wistfully at his words as if “nothing spectacular, really” had been very nice and he liked to think back on it.

For my purposes however, this would not do. A mortal woman, who would ideally only get one proposal in her entire life, would of course be stunned by such an event in whatever form it occurred, but my Eliza is a very special person and had seen it all.

I could not for the death of me (which conveniently had already occurred) approach her with a meagre ring and a bouquet of red roses. How very pedestrian.

“You are not helping”, I frowned, which caused David to laugh and bang his fist on the table.

“You should see yourself, mate, you’ve probably been with more women than Casanova over the years, know how the whole marriage-thing works, and now you want to propose to the same woman you were, are, who knows, married to and are insecure-“

“Stop it”, I snapped back in reply, “I have no mind for your lads talk. This time is very special.”

When he saw the honesty I apparently could not hide from him in my eyes, he nodded gravely and answered “well, you better buy a very bling ring then. Is there any place she likes in particular? Paris might be a little cliché but what about proposing to her in Verona at Juliet’s balcony? What better symbol for love beyond death and all that jazz?”

It was a thoughtful idea, especially with regard to what I am, yet my Eliza and I were not two very hormonally overdosed teenagers as the two unfortunates from Shakespeare’s play had been.

It had to be more monumental than that.

For a moment, I considered pulling a few strings and getting both of us into costume for a city festival in Toronto on my, our, holiday (without my Eliza, I would not have been able to do what I did in Canada and therefore I consider “Simcoe Day” as much the holiday of Mrs Simcoe as that of Governor Simcoe) and propose to here there, but I soon realised we ought not build upon too present a memory of our past, a time we could not recover from the rubble of history. We had changed, she certainly had, and thus should rather celebrate the new with tasteful allusions to the old instead of trying to re-enact a life we did not lead any longer.

“You know her best”; David said, “do something she’d like. If she loves the big drama you seem
set on pulling off that’s great, but if she doesn’t, don’t. Make this about her, not you, you vane prick”, he bobbed my shoulder with his fist.

“Arse”, I countered, making it look like I had not taken heed of his advice.

“I have to leave. Eliza wishes to meet me for an afternoon walk. Before I leave you, there is some spinach between your teeth.”

“Thanks mate and all the best to Ann-liza.”

“No. She cannot know we have had this conversation or else, you will find I shall not miss your head this time”, I hissed.

But he only flashed me a stupid grin, unfolded an abandoned newspaper he had found on the neighbouring table and smiled at me, if mockingly or not I could not tell.

On my way to my love, I passed by a rare shop selling newspapers and magazines, prompting me to stop there and look around.

A rotund elderly lady with very red cheeks and a hideous permanent wave that had last been the latest fashion when shops like hers had been lucrative businesses asked me from behind the counter if she could be of service.

“Yes”, I replied quickly, “everything you have got on marrying- brides and such.”

Giving me a bemused glance, the lady manoeuvred more quickly between the narrow shelf spaces than one would have thought, produced five or six different glossy magazines and laid them out on the counter for me. I quickly paid the exorbitant sum she demanded for a little paper and left a generous tip as I was too lazy to look for a smaller bill and was unwilling to spend more time in this uncomfortable situation.

“Good luck to you two”, she called after me in salutation as I left the shop, the magazines hidden within my leather briefcase.

Eliza waited for me, beautiful as ever and hooked her arm with mine as we walked. Her porcelain-perfect little face lit up when I congratulated her on finishing her work project, which would go into print soon and proposed we could celebrate somewhere, take a weekend trip to give her some well-deserved rest.

“That is sweet, but really, packing and unpacking is a lot more stressful than I can get relaxation of a weekend away. I’d rather we stay home, you and I-“ she smirked at me, the little angel-devil, promising me things I would never deny.

On a meadow in a park, I offered her my jacket to sit down on and she leaned against my chest, her eyes closed behind her big, circular sunglasses that reminded me somewhat of the 1920s.

In beautiful moments such as this one, I did my best to stop myself from worrying about what I wanted to do and simply held her and almost fell asleep to the comforting rhythm of her heartbeat.

After a while however, the gentle dame I rested with stirred and woke me by shaking my shoulders.

“John, get up. You’re getting too much sun.”

Indeed, my hands and face, not covered by clothing, had started to take a somewhat concerning hue.
of red resembling human sunburn. At this stage, it was not dangerous as yet, only a little painful and could be re-regenerated fairly easily with a few restoring bags of blood, but if I were to stay in such a situation for too long, self-combustion may ensue.

She led me by the arm into the shadow of a nearby building and inspected my face.

“Good Lord, you must take better care of yourself!”

“It’s nothing.”

“Yes, just as it was nothing when we thought you would die.”

No more was said until we reached home, where she beckoned me to lie down on the sofa in the darkened sitting room and applied cold washcloths to the reddened, somewhat swollen areas of my face.

“You cannot-” she began her latest scolding, but I was faster.

“I thought if I might try hard enough, I might sparkle for you”, I tried to joke, “it is a truth universally acknowledged that Edward Cullen set unnatural beauty standards for undead men.”

To my silent triumph, Eliza gave a suppressed snort, which she evidently tried to hide from me as she felt it would undercut the lesson of her lecture on the dangers of my existence.

And besides, she loved it when I sparkled. Contrary to my estimations a few months ago according to which the bottle of glitter would be left to reside in the back drawer of the bathroom cabinet to gather dust, we had come to find good use for it and were now on our second bottle. And when she was through with me, she often sparkled at the end of the night, too.

“Don’t be silly.”

My darling tried to sound offended, but obviously was not.

“Kiss me.”

“You don’t deserve it, silly old man. Until you learn to take better care of yourself.”

“Old?” Now it was my turn to be offended. I did not look a day past twenty-nine.

“Yes, John, you’re turning 267 in winter. Quite geriatric, don’t you think?”

“And you are turning 256 in a few weeks. I am a true cradle snatcher for courting you.”

“Had she known the term, Aunt Margaret would have called you all those years ago. She didn’t like me marrying an ‘old’ man of twenty-nine.”

Eliza smiled softly.

“We’re so very old, John.”

“And you are still the most beautiful woman in the world.”

“And you still the most inconceivably reckless idiot. You cannot risk burning yourself- you have to tell me when-“

“But you were asleep”, I explained. “I did not want to wake you and was quite fine initially, so fine
in fact, I fell asleep, too.”

“Excuse me, your health is more important than a nap!”, she huffed and looked down on me, readjusting one of the washcloths as she did.

“I am not healthy and have not been since almost 212 years. I am dead.”

Huffing, she gifted me a crushing stare before moving away from me and out of my limited field of vision.

“Quel bavard incorrigible”, I heard her mutter to herself in the kitchen (she had yet to understand the full extent of my hearing abilities which outdo that of a human by miles), slamming the door of the refrigerator shut with intentional force and I chuckled to myself, which did not make the needle-prick sensation in my face any better.

Ten minutes later, she shouted (how often had I told her she needed not to and that I understood her very well even from five rooms away?) to me to say she had forgotten to buy milk and was off, instructing me to stay put and not get up to anything silly as long as she was away.

Rolling my eyes, I picked the wet washcloths off my face (I have heard old drowned corpses look even less appealing than regular old corpses) and for good measure threw one at Diana who had come to investigate the situation and, feline reincarnation of Donatien Alphonse François de Sade that she was, decided it was a worthwhile pastime to stand on my chest with three of four paws and misuse the fourth to apply pressure to my face and slap my nose repeatedly.

With an indignant meow she leapt off me to lick away the shame having been hit with something as horrid as a wet cloth in her well-groomed face had caused her in a dark corner, likely somewhere she could ambush me from later- if she was quick enough.

When she was disappeared, I made my way to my briefcase and took the glossy magazines out that I had procured earlier in the day.

Each and every one of them bore on the front page the photograph of a lady in a white dress smiling perfect white-toothed smiles, some of them in more traditional, others in supposedly more “exclusive” or “edgy” wedding attire for the more individualist brides, usually in front of a pastel-coloured background that probably was supposed to be faintly reminiscent of a boudoir.

Most modern women probably eluded this little detail as boudoirs have become scarce, but they were still drawn in by the confidentiality and ladies-only surrounding where questions and doubts could be voiced and discussed with likeminded female spirits who would not speak a word to another soul it implied as the continued publication of such magazines demonstrated.

The paper-belies were surrounded by captions such as The bling to go with the ring! This month’s big bridal jewellery special, Honey, do we need to invite Uncle Steve? Our expert’s top 10 tips for a stress-free guest list and Big dresses, small prices: 15 dresses under £1,500.

Although there was an occasional reference to a groom (or partner, in the less traditional ones), nothing indicated these magazines were read by anybody other than brides-to-be and professionals in the wedding industry.

Shrugging, I studied them nevertheless in order to find some information I might find useful later-how did one wed in this day and age? Since my death in 1806 I had avoided attending ceremonies I had been invited to like silver for unfathomable reasons in order to save myself the pain if seeing others getting what I had forfeited.
At times, I wondered how my Eliza would look in this dress or that one, imagining her face teasingly obscured by a lace-trimmed veil or her bust favourably framed by an elegant V-neck as I flipped through the pages.

In magazine number three, an hour had passed since my love had left me and at that point, I hadn’t noticed, I found a test titled *It’s the little things that count* - *take this fun quiz with your partner and see how well you truly know each other! Surprise questions with surprise answered guaranteed!* This sounded interesting to me and I filled in the first few blanks when suddenly-

“*I’m home!*”

Thankfully, she had the annoying tendency to shout unnecessarily or else, immersed in my reading as I had been, I would not have heard her. Quickly, I gathered the magazines strewn across the floor and tossed them under the sofa, hoping I might retrieve them later without her noticing.

I had just readjusted the washcloths when she stood in the door:

“*You alright? Sorry I left you alone for so long, I met Gemma and we went for a coffee.*” *The future head bridesmaid*, I thought privately.

“*Your face already looks a little better*”, she commented as she put the wet rags away to feel my skin.

“*And next time before you go out with me on a bright day, you’ll put on some sun screen. I got you some 50 SPF, but that does not mean you should attempt to fry yourself again. I haven’t found you to bury you tomorrow.*” Eliza’s trench coat slid off her shoulders and suddenly, she was a lot shorter, having stepped out of her heeled shoes, too.

Before I understood what was happening, she lay on top of me, giving me sweet kisses I was only happy to return.

We were quite happy, our bodies shifting to best accommodate the other, writhing, until Eliza suddenly exclaimed “*ow- what’s that?*”

Her index finger, the which she held up into the air to investigate, shewed a perfectly round droplet of blood, a pearl of divinity, an incomparable scent.

“*Your tie pin*, Eliza sighed, “*it’s come undone*”, while pulling the blasted thing from my garments and putting it on the table.

My primeval instincts directed my attention to the droplet of blood that reminded me of a horrid fairy tale I had never liked.

She had noticed, I could tell, for she met my stare with her own, bold and brave.

“*It’s ok. Take it, if you like.*”

“*I cannot. I must not. I already bit you when I was weak with illness and hate myself for it. One does not drink the blood of one’s beloved.*”

To make my point, I turned my face away from her, which at least meant I did not need see the blood anymore, but meant I could still smell it nonetheless.

“*John, we must find away. If you cannot manage one single droplet of my blood, you must make me a vampire.*”
“Eliza”, I gasped. “You cannot mean this.”

“But I do! I mean it with all my heart- there is so much we have successfully managed to organise from our needs of food to who cleans up after Diana, but when I am on my period, you move to the guest bedroom and feed more than usual. It is my blood you crave. Either you take it, which should remedy our problem once and for all, you learn restraint or-“ Her pause told me all I needed to know.

“You cannot wish to be a vampire. It is terrible. You deserve better than to be a lowly creature of the night.”

My voice was barely above a whisper, which caused her to draw even closer. Eliza was driving me mad, blood and body and soul.

“I do not trust myself not to hurt you, for I have hurt so many in the past and you are what is dearest to me in this world.”

Again, I had to avert her face, this time because tears ran down my cheeks in fast-running rivulets, for I would lose her now, correct?

In that instant, she had effectively immobilised me by straddling my upper body, now pressed into the soft sofa beneath me and my hands were taken into hers, which she put around her neck. I desired to draw away, but found I could not for she held them so firmly in place, I would have feared hurting her had I struggled against her grip.

“Does it feel good? Take me, John. Do it.”

Her veins throbbed angrily beneath my palms and taunted me to get it over with.

Oh, how much I wanted to do it, wanted to rip her clothes off, take her there and then, her wrists restrained over her head in my hands so she would not be able to fight me should she have a late change of mind while I lower my teeth to her neck and bite her with her moaning below me out of pleasure and fear-

“Let go.”

I swallowed hard and suddenly found the images in my head were pale, translucent and did not appeal to me half as much as I had thought.

I did not want her to be dead and suffer. She was a flower, my English Rose, and meant to flourish, not wither.

In that moment, something inside me broke; or rather, mended, tho’ in the initial moment, it felt like breaking, a cord, long-twined by the strands of time snapped.

As if I was suddenly human again, I opened my mouth, my chest heaved forcefully and I drew in air.

My beloved, who still had me immobilised, rubbed the injured tip of her finger again to produce more of the dangerous ruby substance, which welled up in another perfect little pearl. Gently, she put her finger against my lips, applying soft pressure in order to ensure I was receiving the gift she had chosen to give to me.

The blood passed my lips, yet it did not taste divine anymore; to another vampire, it would have, but not to me. She was much more than her blood, her person much more important to me. Once, I
had almost killed her, but had I learned from this experience? I had been young and foolish, new in my existence and had not had the experience of more than two centuries.

I had lived entirely without human blood then, and thus felt a heightened need for it at any opportunity and in addition to this, I had never cared for training myself, as I would have my soldiers, to use my existence, my new capabilities and my weaknesses alike to the most.

I had vegetated in half-lucidity, blood-mad until I had captured another misfortunate squirrel or chicken and feasted on the half-satisfaction of animal blood that did at least quench my thirst for the time I was drinking.

Today was different. I could have as much human blood as I fancied and age had brought a certain wisdom.

I could be more than I had been. I could try. No; I had to be who she needed me to be, a man reliable and gentle, not an unhinged monster, for I owe my entire existence to her light, her guidance, the sacrifices she had made for me and which I would now repay her for.

“There.”

She withdrew her finger from my lips, but not without languidly tracing my bottom lip.

“See? You are no monster. You are a man- just one with a strange diet. And when you fed of me, it was because I had to save you. I made you do it, pulled your weak body up. It does not feel good, it is very painful, but to save the love of your life- you would have done the same for me had our positions been reversed.”

“You would never be such a ruthless killer.”

“Who could tell? I must admit, I don’t like the taste of blood much-“

My mind produced a picture of her dipping a finger into my wine glass and licking it clean. It was still an alluring sight that aroused me thinking back to it, but not with aggressive, destructive force. I was not a wild beast. Not with her, not anymore.

And never, never, never would I make her a vampire.

She fell asleep on my chest later that evening, warm and alive. For some time, I even forgot the heartbeat I was feeling was not mine and drifted off into a dreamless, deep sleep, content with the world.

When I awoke because my right arm had fallen asleep, I lifted the heavy, snoring, space-stealing (how could such a small body occupy so much space on a sofa chosen to accommodate a person twice her size comfortably?) woman of my dreams off me and laid her down again without waking her so I had enough time to pre-heat the electric blanket I had bought for our bed, which would keep me at a body temperature that was agreeable to us both without making me feel hot or her cold. On particularly hot summer nights, we forgo such preparations, much to my Eliza’s delight, who says that cuddling is impossible with two warm-blooded persons under such circumstances, but I am “nice and cool”, offering her comfort and sleep in my embrace.

With the most wonderful person on this earth next to me in bed soon after, I was certain, assured even more that I had to ask her The Question a second time.

And I would make it very special indeed.
I would not buy any ring (though I was well able to afford the sort of so-called “rocks” that would make others go green with envy), no: I would retrieve her first wedding ring, which upon her supposed death she had left with our younger Eliza as a token of farewell. Through her and several twists and turns of history that saw Wolford first sold out and then burnt down, the ring had made its way to Canada, boxed and stored neatly in an archive.

It would be nice, I figured, a nod to the old while making the new. In addition to this, she would need something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue for the wedding anyway and I was elated to provide the first item.

With a five hour time difference and several rather annoying incidents during the work day (Cholmondeley chewing my ear off figuratively speaking regarding his latest project, a broken-down computer and some other assorted office-madness), I only managed to contact the archive in question once, but failed to get someone on the line.

To their credit and to my misfortune, they called me back at 16:33 Canadian time while I, it being 21:33 in Exeter, was disturbed by the ring of my phone during an evening just for us two.

Quickly, I disentangled my limbs from Eliza’s and fled the room as I saw a phone number starting with +1 lighting up the screen.

“Yes? No, you cannot- listen, my name is John Graves Simcoe, heir to- of course this is not a hoax, I forbid you to- yes, if you need proof, I’ll send you a scan of my passport- no, I do not enquire, I demand as it belongs to my family, by rights. The fact that you forget this makes your position vulnerable to legal steps. And you shall hear from my lawyers.”

Voicing my anger in such a way Eliza would hopefully not notice with the TV on, I felt like being on the brink of spontaneous inhuman combustion, for I was so angry but could not let my anger show.

In the end, I did not get the ring back- not just yet, for I shall try again, and if I have to scare some modern-day Torontonians, whose forefathers didn’t even have the grace to leave the town’s name as I once proclaimed it to be, by returning to York in full regimentals and with bayonet at the ready, so be it.

“Who was that?”, my curious love naturally asked me when I returned. She might not have heard as I had insisted she continue to watch What We Do In The Shadows (I did not like the film anyway, what a horrendous portrayal of vampires in general and particularly unfunny; I’d much rather do with her what we usually did in the shadows of night rather than watching this terrible comedy anyway), but naturally, she wanted to know who it was as receiving calls so late at night was quite uncommon.

“A colleague from Virginia”, I lied, fearing the simple mention of Canada might pique her interest, “a veritable blockhead, could have writ an email.”

Having thus satisfied her, I re-joined her and was once again thankful that no blush, accelerated heartbeat or pulse could give me away.

We fell asleep together as we were and were woken by the morning sun that, still pale and not quite as dangerous as later in the day, tickled my skin. She squirmed as I shifted and demonstratively wrapped an arm around me to still my movements. Alas we couldn’t linger as both of us had invitations for the morning; in Gemma’s flat, there would be a brunch held by the mistress of the flat for her closest female friends whereas I had another engagement at a jeweller’s.
I did not find a ring befitting her, no antique or modern piece could do her justice, much to my
dismay.

It being Saturday however, I ran into Linda who was flanked on either side by Miss Isabel and
Miss Melissa.

“John”, Miss Isabel piped in her clarion-clear voice and left her mother’s hand to run to me. Linda
waved and came over to me to collect her daughter again.

We chit-chatted some time and talked about what to give Francesca for her birthday (which I had
couraged her to keep celebrating as it would give her a sense of normalcy and there was no
reason why one should not celebrate existing for thirty-three years and being a person graced with
both intelligence beyond measure and near-celestial looks (the only celestial beauty there is is Eliza
of course)).

We had not decided on anything yet and I, defeated in my quest, decided to join Linda and the girls
at a café where the two fought with their mother to order ice cream.

Linda took the stance that 11 am was too early for sweets and besides, had the two not fought
terribly yesterday and did such bad behaviour deserve a treat?

“What do you want?”, I asked the girls and produced my wallet when a waiter came to take our
order. The girls looked at each other in disbelief and then squealed with delight before ordering
some monstrous creations of ice-cream, chocolate-sauce, whipped cream and whatnot.

“You do realise you undermine my authority?”, Linda said dryly, not at all as amused as her
children.

“As long as you do not undermine mine- it was I who taught them to eat prettily. You modern
people.-“

Linda bestowed me with a glance almost as lethal as silver before turning once more to her
daughters to oversee they would behave. They did, very nicely even and were soon engrossed in a
conversations among themselves about a TV series they apparently enjoyed watching.

“You are a woman, Linda”, I started clumsily and in a low voice so the children wouldn’t hear,
“how does one make one’s intentions known in a manner that will impress and express one’s true
love and genuine adoration for one’s beloved?”

Her brows knitted before she understood. Modern people.

“You mean you want to propose to Elizabeth?”

I nodded.

“Be yourself. Do something she likes, take her out to a fancy restaurant, have a moonshine picnic
for desert- I don’t know. Do you have a ring already?”

“I must admit, no. None of those in the shop would do.”

“It needn’t be the biggest stone”, she advised me and went on, “pick something with meaning she
wants to wear. Besides, if you go for really expensive, she mightn’t want to wear the ring often as
she might fear damaging it or getting mugged with a small fortune worth of diamonds on her hand.
Something simple, yet unique I’d say. I don’t know her enough to say anything definitive about her
taste I'm afraid.”
“You are not married to Elizabeth, John? I always thought you were.”

Miss Melissa looked somewhat disappointed.

“No, we aren’t married.”

“Then you should be. She is a princess, have you forgotten?”

“Shut up Millie, we’re not supposed to say!”

Miss Isabel’s elbow met her younger sister’s ribs with intentional force. The time would come
when the children would grow and be old enough to be trusted with a truth their parents already
knew, but presently, they being still so very young, we would let them believe in the fairy tale we
had constructed for them.

“It’s alright”, I assured them, “maybe soon, we will be married- who knows?” and smiled at the
two girls whose ice cream melted in the sun as they had forgotten it over the conversation.

“Will you invite us then?”, the elder one demanded to know, to which I replied with a firm yes.
Should all things fall into place and my Eliza be content with this idea, I had singled out her flower
girls already. In any case, as our wedding party would be small given we had both not attached
ourselves to many people and those few closest to us were Francesca and the Coopers given the
recent history we all share, which would not amount to a party larger than thirty and it would be a
joy and an honour to have the two girls in attendance, who reminded me of my own all these years
ago.

Eliza and I had not long before spoken of our children- and of children in general. She had not had
any since our separation in 1806 and both of us had agreed that we did not want any more. We had
had eleven beautiful, clever wonderful, perfect children and it would feel like an attempt at
recreation or resurrection were we to become parents again.

While my beloved had been very, very reluctant to talk about this topic and throughout had absent-
mindedly folded her arms over her stomach, we had been candid with one another.

The risks of a hypothetical child suffering as little Katherine and John did, who had been most
misfortunate to be born with their father’s dead blood in a living body was too high and then, there
were the children we already had.

Conversations such as this one had made me hopeful her vision of the future would include me,
and permanently. The fact that we could speak of such sensitive topics now and had visited the
approximate burial site of our son had only further cemented our relationship once more and even if
we were, as Eliza once had said, not the same people anymore we had been when we had fallen in
love in the spring of 1782, I loved her all the same. She was still the most perfect woman and the
only person with whom I could picture spending eternity with.

When the girls had finished their ice cream, I implored them not to speak of anything they might
have heard as I wanted to surprise Eliza and promised them they would be the first to know her
answer.

“Before everyone else?”, Miss Isabel, already a little mistrusting and sometimes a rather
endearingly owlish little adult asked, wary of the words of grown-ups.

“Of course”, I managed to persuade her, “who else?”, which made her smile.

We separated after that as Linda and the children wanted to visit their grandmother, leaving me
once again to scouring the streets for another jeweller to ransack for the ring I needed.

The last stop on my way was a dealer in antique jewellery. I did not hold much hope on finding what I was looking for and indeed did not at first; there were very pretty ones indeed, trinkets I would gladly buy her for any other occasion, but there was none I thought would be just right for the purpose I intended it to serve.

At last, having resigned to the fact that I would have to seek further and perhaps even internationally, my eyes espied an object in a vitrine that aroused my curiosity: a ring consisting of a heart-shaped emerald with a crown on top of it and held on either side by two hands.

Over time, the emerald had cracked in the middle, leaving a spider web-thin line behind. To me, it looked more alluring that way as if it had been whole still; and the ring itself too looked like its previous wearer had loved and worn it rather than having kept it somewhere safe for her eyes only.

The jeweller was perplexed after my demand for pearls, diamonds and only the most pristine stones to be ordered to show me a piece such as this, which he lamented could be sold for far more were the stone still intact.

Rings such as this piece, named after the village of Claddagh in Co. Galway, became very popular during the 19th century, at which time they received their name, as wedding-, posy- or engagement rings to gift to She Who Owns His Heart.

While I would never invest in the cheap kitsch they sell to tourists over yonder every year, this particular confection of gold and emerald was perfect.

Without much ado, I bought it and enjoyed my triumph- that was until I was home again, where to my horror I found my wedding-themed publications neatly stacked on the living room table with one opened on the page where I had left off. Almost instantly I remarked upon her hand on the paper and read as she commented what I had writ and added her results to my answers:

1. Let’s start off easy: how old is your partner and when is their birthday?
   
   256, 22/09/1762 267 25/02/1752 VERY OLD

2. Do they have any siblings?

   Mary Anne Burges (dead), probably Gemma Haynes <- these are called best friends!! – None, formerly two older brothers and one younger brother

3. What’s their favourite colour?

   red  Green, obviously.

4. Their favourite song?
I don’t know either, but may I assume you still enjoy humming “The British Grenadiers”?

5. What historical figure do you think your partner would like to meet* and why?

*already met her/him

Elizabeth Posthuma Gwillim Simcoe

Lieut. Gen. John Graves Simcoe <3

She is my everything

I love him even though he is VERY OLD

The terrible feeling of having been found out washed over me. What was I to do? Confess? Propose tonight?

No; I would not- as she had proven so playful here, I would be playful, too.

The first step of my operation was to get rid of the evidence, which I drove to the next public bin.

Secondly, I would not speak to her about my findings and pretend that she had never found the magazines and presented them to me in such a fashion.

Thirdly, I had a plan now. A good one.

A week later (and a week full with anticipation and nervousness on my part and one of quiet anticipation and waiting on hers it had been), I ambushed Eliza early in the morning and told her to dress elegantly and bring a second set of more sportive clothing and strong boots, we would go on a trip.

“Without breakfast?”, she inquired, intent to have her coffee and croissant now, to which I, having secretly fed before she had been awake, only nodded cheerily and awaited her downstairs three quarters of an hour later, dressed in a beautiful pale blue lace dress that accentuated her shoulders perfectly with a bag under her arm, which I of course carried to the car for her.

It would be perfect. She would suspect everything, but not what was to happen. My love had started the game that was now afoot and I enjoyed this sweetest of tactical manoeuvres to no end.

The plan was that at all costs, she ought to expect my proposal at any given time- only she wouldn’t get it then, but at a wholly different time the same day when she wouldn’t expect it at all. Many years ago, I had been the master of surprise attacks and I still was. The tactician to outwit me has not been born since 1752 and I don’t hold much hope they will be any time soon.

In order to make the day extra special and to heighten her suspicions, I had even adjusted the musical entertainment to her taste: since having found out rather early in our renewed relationship, when she’d kidnapped me to reveal her true identity to me at Wolford to be precise, that she had a predilection for musicals, I had downloaded Dance of the Vampires in both English and German.

Her face when she realised she was being entertained thusly during our car journey was priceless.

“I can offer you the German original version, too if you’d like”, I chimed in the most insincere tone
I could muster, “I didn’t know which one you’d prefer-“

“John?”

“Yes, my love?”

“You normally despise everything with vampires in it.”

“I do, in fact, but we must all be able to muster a certain degree of self-ironic introspection, correct?”

Her brows knitted most adorably, a failsafe indicator she was smelling an irregularity, expecting something to happen- *something* that would not happen just yet.

In all honesty, the musical was not my taste at all, but one must sometimes suffer for the greater good of a perfect plan.

The road I had chosen led us to a picturesque hotel not too far away, an old mansion dating back to Tudor-times now converted to a luxury retreat with an excellent, or so I had been led to believe by the reviews, and very expensive cuisine.

My love was served breakfast there, a sumptuous affair served on an étagère with everything on it a human breakfaster could only wish for from fruit to cold cuts, salmon and eggs.

“I still find it odd to eat while you just sit with me”, she confided in me while lowering the fork with which she had annihilated some scrambled eggs with truffles.

“We don’t need to at home. Besides, I have this”, I smiled and lifted my glass of champagne to her. The Lord be praised for having left me alcoholic beverages.

“It’s not the same”, she wished to protest, but I had other plans and, uncaring about the polite surroundings I would otherwise have given great thought to, silenced my love with a strawberry, which made for a most delightful sight, prompting me to tell her that in cases such as this, one would devour more with the eye than one ever could with one’s mouth.

After breakfast, we changed into more sportive attire on the way somewhere; we had stopped by a little forest and would almost have loved each other then and there had not the sight of the nearby street counselled us otherwise.

It was torture not to be allowed to look at my beloved while she stood there and it cost me all the strength Orpheus had lacked when he had tried to win his Eurydice back from the dead. I knew better however and did not turn around- I am a gentleman, after all.

The day was beautiful, not too sunny, not too dark and the temperatures agreeable. We would have a lot of fun, I figured as I drove the car down a long driveway to a stable I had beforehand singled out and booked two horses at. Horse riding had in the old days been a past time we both enjoyed very much and with much fondness I still think back to these days, of racing with her (requiring a smaller, lighter horse and weighing much less than me however, it was always clear who would win) up and down the Blackdown Hills or wherever our adventures would take us.

“We’re going riding?”, she asked at last, a smile on her lips.

“I haven’t done it in a long time. Have you?”

“Once or twice. I took Gemma a few months back because she never did, but I am not as fit as I
have been- you know”, she evaded talk of the past.

“Excellent. I was afraid I would make a fool of myself”, I grinned as I saddled the two horses we had been assigned and helped my love mount before getting the small ladder used as mounting block for myself.

The day was perfect. We managed to follow a trail for several miles on a beautiful and scenic route before arriving in a small village where we could indeed leave the horses outside a pub that evidently expected riders from the nearby route to stop and rest for a while and my dearest could take some refreshments before we continued on back to the stable. My horse, a skewbald called, very imaginatively, Skewball, a sure-footed and broadly-built animal that could probably carry Henry VIII in full armour, was quite a handful and did not always cooperate as I wished, whereas Eliza’s grey mare a few sizes smaller than my horse seemed more in tune with her rider and the two outran us in several little races that were possibly forbidden now by councils and other law-making bodies, but we did not give a care for anything in the world; not now that we were so happy and either racing the wind or trotting leisurely through the landscape while holding hands.

At last, the evening came and we returned the horses to the stable before heading home at dusk.

“What a beautiful day it has been.”

Contently I took note of the happiness in her hazel eyes and the healthy flush on her cheeks that was however marred somewhat by an undertone meant to veil slight disappointment.

“Indeed”, I answered, pretending I had not noticed and gave her a kiss before starting the engine.

She did look very expectant, but she would have to wait.

Home again, I raced upstairs to prepare a bath for her and then retired to the living room, where a missed call from Francesca and an indignant Diana, who complained about my absence in plaintive and reproachful meows as she settled down beside me to be stroked.

I only sat beside her for five or so minutes when I was certain I heard Eliza step into the tub.

With the ring in the pocket of my trousers, I made my way to the bathroom and entered under the pretence I was looking for some cleaning agent we usually kept in a cupboard under the sink for Diana had bopped her nose against a downstairs window, which had left an unsightly stain.

Suddenly, nervousness overcame me: so far, everything had worked. Now would be the time for the grand finale.

“As I am here already”, I remarked seemingly in passing, “may I assist you with your hair?”

“Gladly, please. Here”, she handed me a bottle of shampoo, “that’s sweet of you.”

My supposed sweetness was eclipsed by hers for she made the bonniest of sights; her body which I could only see in shadowy outlines beneath the water, her breasts half-submerged and covered in foam and long, dark hair framing her face made her look like a mermaid from an ancient tale.

There was no time for me to admire her beauty however. With trembling fingers, I rinsed her hair and then shampooed it, massaging her scalp.

The lady purred much more rewardingly than my blasted cat and grinded her head against my hands in order to encourage me to continue as I ran my hands through her dark foamy tresses.
Now was the time.

“There’s something in your hair”, I remarked and gently tugged at a strand as if to pretend trying to loosen a knot.

“Mhm, just tug, I don’t mind.” “How curious…”

While I continued to pretend disentangling her hair with one hand, I reached into my pocket with the other to produce the ring and quickly passed it into the hand still in her hair.

“Look what I found in your hair!” With the ring in hand, I walked over to the side of the tub to show my supposed find to her and went on one knee, grinning broadly for my plan had worked so well and because if I hadn’t grinned and pretended to fortitude, I am certain I would have fainted with nervousness.

Eliza could not believe it at first, her mouth fell open and she gasped before her face took an overjoyed expression and she extended her hand to me to put it on her finger.

“You- you terrible, terrible man”, she exclaimed and meant it whole-heartedly, “You made me believe for a whole week-“

I raised an eyebrow. “You wouldn’t have known had you not sniffed through my things.”

“Sniffed? I beg you. If you are too clumsy to hide things and I happen to be cleaning the living room, you are at fault. But you had me, you really had me there.”

Her happiness was genuine and made me dizzy with happiness, too when I watched her inspect the ring, hoping she would like it.

“The ring is beautiful.”

“It is quite old, representing our history. The ring itself in its shape represents eternal love between two people and the fact that the stone is cracked made it even more meaningful to me, for it aptly resembles our relationship: we cannot mend what has happened, are imperfect, but that doesn’t matter. We are still only whole together, not as halves”, I closed and hoped she felt the same.

A few silver tears of emotion had gathered in her eyes when she praised me for having spoken so well and true.

“Say it, then”, I begged her, “tell me.”

“I do.”

And with that, she pulled me, now standing again, down into the tub fully dressed. What a mess we made, both of history that had long torn us apart and pronounced us dead and the bathroom.

Chapter End Notes

Francis Gwillim Simcoe died in the Battle of Badajoz in 1812. With Francis, Elizabeth was to lose together with her husband, her aunt and her best friend four of the people
she was closest to in only seven years between 1806 and 1813. It must have been even more painful for her as Francis had always been very attached to her and appears to have been the child she was closest to whereas Francis and his father seem to have had a difficult relationship.

"Fanny Hill or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure", a Georgian pretty pornographic novel, has often been re-issued and illustrated throughout history. Simcoe owns several copies, making David's reasoning he may enjoy "wig porn" not sound too outlandish.

The Archives of Ontario do in fact own a ring said to be Elizabeth's wedding ring. I've read about one time when Colonel and Mrs Simcoe just saddled their horses and were not return home for the rest of the week. Elizabeth recounted their adventure in letters. They were both excellent riders with Elizabeth probably being the more adventurous of the two. She continued on on thin ice in Canada where her husband and his horse could not go, loved to jump her horse over obstacles at any given opportunity and from what I gather had a distinct predilection for speed. Even later in life, she would still go riding, often accompanied by one of her daughters or a grandchild. An excursion such as this would still have been right up her alley in the 21st century.

Mounting block: Simcoe doesn't need a mounting block of course, but it is healthier for your four-legged partner's back if you use one and on the human end of things it is far more comfortable than pulling yourself up. Also, in this version of events and contrary to TURN, Simcoe has a horse matching his size.

The names and colours of both horses are plucked from a song popular in Georgian Dublin called "Skewball" or "The Plains of Kildare", in which "the gallant racing pony" Skewball and his owner are challenged by Mrs Gore to race against her grey mare Miss Griesel on the plains of Kildare. Skewball and his rider are so far ahead of their challengers that Skewball has time to ask his rider how far behind the others are and after their victory "horse and rider both called for sherry, wine and brandy". Seriously now, don't give your horse alcohol even if they are very articulate and ask very nicely.
The Corpse's Bride

Chapter Notes

So, this is the last chapter. As I publish this, for some of you it'll still be the 4th of November - the 212th anniversary of the day, according to the events of this story, the grieving Elizabeth buried an empty coffin...

I'm really happy and grateful for everyone who enjoyed this little story and went on its journey with me. This chapter marks the end of it and I can only say that the past year with a moody 18th century vampire and his not quite so dead wife has been a lot of fun. Thank you so much!

To all you whom I still owe a comment, I promise I'll be back tomorrow night.

We only left the tub when the water cooled and I espied the first hint of horripilation on her skin. By then, my clothes lay ruined, scattered around the tub, all drenched and probably beyond future rescue, but I did not care at all, cared not for anything in that moment.

I picked up my Eliza in my arms, wrapped in an extra-big towel, and carried her to my, now our, bedroom, where she insisted we continue where we had left off in the bath.

On an ordinary day, the state of the bathroom would have horrified me to such a degree I would have cleaned it immediately; but in such perfect happiness as I was then, my proposal accepted, my darling by my side, I postponed it. Nobody, me and my Eliza aside, would see or care before the next day anyway.

Sleep we did not very much that night; moments of passion aside, we talked a lot, breathless and blissful, about what we would soon have again.

“Promise me this time is forever”, Eliza sighed, tired at last in the early hours of the morning, and wrapped her arms around me as good as their shortness allowed taking into account my much larger frame.

“Forever and always. Nothing can separate us more.”

“Good, I am not willing to go on another two hundred years-long scavenger hunt for you.”

“My goddess hath track’d down the beast and subdued it”, I quipped and smiled adoringly at the woman who had been my wife and who would soon be again.

“Not entirely”, she remarked, “or else you would not object to my choices of TV programmes.”

Sighing, I admitted defeat - if it pleased my Queen, it was the right thing to do.

Contented with having won this battle without a real fight, my love at last fell asleep and I soon joined her in the land of dreams.

In the morning, I awoke to the sight of her still asleep, her face framed by a halo of dark hair, the beauteous look of Life on her features, the slow heaving and falling of her ribcage, her regular
breaths and rosy cheeks that I, dead, could never have.

Sometimes I am very grateful I am the early riser of us two, mostly because the dead do not really require sleep or the sleep-like state we fall into, as we cannot die from lack of it, for this means my love needs not to see my reclining form so often which is all too much reminiscent of a corpse laid out for viewing: while in the day, I have the power to appear living through breathing and even feigning a heartbeat I do not have biological use of (and failed in the past; though I had tried hard when we had been first wed, but as Eliza had informed me on the night of our reunion without much success), all those conscious decisions mean nothing during the nightly reign of the subconscious and the mask of liveliness falls, leaving me a pallid, undead and undying slab of meat in bed next to her.

Tho’ she informed me that she did not know me otherwise, I still felt a little bad for her, thinking she deserved better, a man warm and living, the which she ruled out without exception.

“I’ve been with other men over time, living men. Their bodies were warm, but my heart was not. And when I left, sometimes after a night or when things ultimately drifted apart after weeks or months even, I felt no remorse, no yearning for them, no bitter-sweet aftershocks of love lost. I had lived with them knowing we would be companions for a while, but only for a part of the journey, that no living man, who would grow old and die, could be with me until the end of time or ever replace the one I loved first, to whom my nineteen-year-old self had lost her heart and whom my one hundred and ninety-nine-year-old self still missed.”

I recalled this part of our conversation the night before when I watched her lying there, comfortably wrapped up in her blanket beside me, her face pressed into my shoulder.

Never would I ever have thought we would one day have this again, be together like this.

“Morning”, she mumbled at last, her eyes as yet unaccustomed to the brightness of the new dawn, the first of a new era.

“Good morning, my love”, I exclaimed loudly and with great energy and zeal set myself to work with the design of sweetening the arduous process of waking up by disappearing beneath the blanket and enlivening her spirits with kisses she certainly hadn’t expected.

The darling hands that came to claw at my hair, shoulders and neck told me I was quite effective—after all, I have no need to ever stop for air.

I did not stop even after she had given a cry of honest pleasure and at last, when I finally felt it was time to desert my strategic place between her thighs, climbed up to the head of the bed again and drew the shuddering, pleasure-lost form of my future wife of the past into my arms, as satisfied as she with the effect I had had.

“You terrible man”, she greeted me, “you know you turn me rather off regular alarm clocks?”

“I thought it should be every man’s pleasure to please his future wife in all aspects of married life. Speaking of which, I shall prepare the bathroom for use.”

“I don’t care- stay a while longer.”

These words had a profound effect on me, for they reminded me of the last morning we had had together in our old life.

Eliza had not made it a secret she did not want me to go to Portugal and had, then believing me only sickly at all times, not dead, consolidated her uneasiness by saying I should not ruin my health
by embarking on a trip that could consume my health entirely.

And she had been right, in a way. What she had tried to describe through euphemisms for death had come to pass, I had not returned home and was gone from her, though not for reasons of human health failing completely.

So I stayed.

The debauched woman I was soon to call my wife again and I proceeded to not leave bed until the early afternoon when at last Diana, who returned with a lot of cattish pomp and circumstance (meaning a semi-dead mouse squealing for mercy and bleeding onto the floor between her teeth) entered the room to drop said unfortunate animal at the foot of the bed with a look in her eyes I could not describe differently than as deep satisfaction at watching me, starkly naked, jump up to get a broom and a few other things to clean up and hunt the little thing still running about.

“You remember the kitten I adopted at Kingston? The white and grey one? I recall writing of him that he had some almost human streaks, but Diana takes it to a whole new level. I think she is jealous and wants your attention.”

A pair of amber eyes attempting to set Elizabeth ablaze with their disconcerting stare told me she was right in her assessment.

“Silly cat”, she scolded (who then replied with a meow at sensing she was being spoken to), he’s my pet, not yours.”

“Your pet?”, I echoed, amused. “I do not recall doing tricks on command.”

“But you are. I always ask you to open tins for me when I’m cooking, too.”

“So my new rank is Tin-Opener General or General Tin-Opener to my wife and cat. Which one?”

“I still prefer fiancé.”

Her smile made my heart burst with love and I hurried to catch and kill the fatally injured mouse in an act of mercy before disposing of it and cleaning up with Diana watching on, visibly content with her trick, and Eliza, now wrapped in my best banyan, by my side.

Over a cup of coffee and blood respectively, we set about planning the affair. We were more pragmatic than we had been many years ago and we had both very soon come to the understanding that neither of us wanted a pompous feast. We had had that before but now, we would opt for something small and intimate, a gathering of only a select few- which also had the advantage that we would not draw too much attention to us.

After two days of talks, we knew we wanted a) to be wed in the same church we had been married in for the first time, b) on the same date as before, c) only a small feast, to be held afterwards somewhere.

So far, so good. With the date and the church as nods to our past, I set to work to organise. With a little luck and a few well-placed calls, we had the church on our preferred date, leaving only a suitable location for later to be found. Alas, in the coming weeks neither of us was much in luck: the wedding being scheduled for the day before New Years’ Eve, many businesses were too busy preparing the coming day to house a wedding on such short notice or already had other engagements and festivities to prepare.

“What if we do it here?”, I asked Eliza.
“You mean-“

“I do. Remember, the last time, we ate at home also.”

“But this is not the Fort”, she objected, “not as grand or stately as Uncle Samuel’s home.”

“It is not, but we shall have much fewer guests. We will not invite half the army, all the Thomas’, Samuels, Johns and Richards Graves’ and your aunt’s fifty best friends for a start.”

“But who will cook? I recall we had a cook at the Fort, a luxury we don’t have here.”

“No, but maybe we could order? I have a- ah, well, friend who is eternally indebted to me for reasons I don’t wish to go into. He owns a restaurant, Italian, from whence I ordered your pizza the first time you visited me, and will find a way to deliver what I ask of him.”

Niccolo, though unwilling, could be persuaded to drive over and warm up what he had cooked in our kitchen while we would receive our guests in the living room. He would send two people, fully sufficient for the small number of guests we would have.

After long and careful deliberation, we decided we would only invite the four Coopers, Gemma, Francesca and, at Eliza’s special request, Mr and Mrs Flamel, for she owed them a lot and would be eternally grateful for the help and friendship they had given her over the years.

The invitations were designed by her, emblazoned with small sketch on the front of the card showing two hands entwined with a scenery in the background that reminded me of her sketches of the St Lawrence river in Upper Canada.

Inside, she had writ in black ink and with calligraphic precision the date and time of our marriage with the plea not to give us any presents for the greatest present we could each receive we would give to each other by pledging our souls to another on this special day. If anyone wanted to give us anything, we advised to spend it usefully instead, either for personal purposes more pressing than wedding gifts or to give to charity.

Eliza joked that we were trying to minimise the chance of being given a set of silver cutlery or something equally precarious (and frankly very rude) to give to an un-dead.

But before we would send the invitations out by post, we would tell everyone save the Flamels, at the time of New Haven, USA, in person, for Eliza and I both wanted to see people’s faces at receiving the news.

So, we invited them all for dinner, without the knowledge everybody else was invited as well, causing Francesca, the Coopers and Gemma to find themselves congregated around our table a week later without any idea why they had been invited.

My beloved had cooked a meal for the human guests, and I in the meantime I had been commanded to set the table in a formal fashion, with white table linen and the good crystal and silverware of actual silver and to select a fine wine which would aid to wash the news of our engagement down rather pleasantly.

Miss Gemma, not knowing (yet, I assumed, though we have to be careful to whom we reveal our existence outside the realms of ordinary humans) who and what we truly were, would probably not react in the same way as the Coopers or Francesca would, whose understanding of our continued existence for two hundred years in cold, terrible separation would likely influence their thoughts on our marriage.
Miss Isabel and Miss Melissa were simply merry and content to spend time at our house, for as they had discovered the last times Eliza and I had been asked to watch them, it held many curious items, things they were not allowed to touch at home or did not even have there.

Last time, which we kept a secret from David and Linda, Miss Isabel, having ventured into my closet, had found my uniform coat and donned it, alongside the sword I until then had simply kept in the cupboard without thinking twice about it.

Brandishing it, she had not only left an unfortunate cut in the wallpaper, but also posed a danger to herself and everyone else, wherefore I suggested I would rather show her the proper use of such a martial weapon outside, which Eliza was not at all pleased with, even when I suggested we could revert to sticks for training purposes before Miss Isabel was old enough for a real sword.

In the meantime, her little sister had, Eliza having been occupied in the kitchen and thinking I had both children with me, retired to my office, where the sly little one had found ink and pen of the historic variety, and made quite a mess. We were quite busy cleaning afterwards, but the children, exerted from sword-brandishing and producing Jackson Pollock-like art thought the day was a roaring success.

When their parents came to collect them later that evening, they quietly sat around the kitchen table where my dearest, most excellent wife had put a vase of flowers she and the girls were sketching.

David and Linda had been most impressed with the tableau we had created for them and said that we would make them into little ladies, and we had agreed- and exchanged knowing glances with the girls, who only nodded and behaved very prettily, even going so far in their act as to curtsey when they said goodbye.

The same little sprites now were the first to speak with Miss Melissa, the younger of the two asking:

“Why are we having a party, John?”

“A party?”, I echoed, “sometimes it is just very much fun to have a party, isn’t it?”

“But”, Miss Isabel added with all the gravitas she could muster, “you usually have a party when it’s someone’s special day.”

“Every day is a special day for someone”, I chimed and offered both girls lemonade, which they accepted with a frown that told me they were most malcontent with my answer.

“Is it a surprise?”, Miss Melissa prodded further.

“Yes, what’s the matter? Spit it out, John. Whenever we meet in plenum in this house, some bombshell is about to drop.”

Now their father, the person from whom they had likely inherited their inquisitiveness, had joined the conversation.

“More wine?”, I offered sweetly and purposefully took his doubtful mien for a yes. “Eliza has cooked a wonderful coq au vin, you will be hungry-“

“Joh-on”, now said Linda, “my hubby has a point.”

“Well, but there is no point in asking.”

“When your voice does that weird little pitch, you can always tell you’re up to something”, David then stated, accompanied by Francesca nodding and a suspicious “m-hm”.

"
“I might be, I might be not but the weather is fine today. Allow me to borrow your daughters for a minute?”

Miss Isabel and Miss Melissa jumped from their chairs without waiting for their parents’ permission and followed me and Eliza to my office. I took great care to slam the door audibly.

“I told you you would be the first to know”, I beamed at the two girls in front of us, whose faces lit up with excitement.

There were no more words needed, they understood right away.

"Yes!" the girls exclaimed in unison before first hugging each other while hopping up and down (a most adorable sight to behold) before turning to Eliza and me to congratulate us.

"See, I told you so!", Miss Melissa informed me with a very important little nod. "She is a princess, you know."

"Princesses needn't marry", Eliza added for educational effect. "But if she finds a person who loves her with all their heart, she might accept them."

"I am glad you did. Do I meet royal standards?"

"Certainly."

We kissed, much to the delight of the girls who likely pictured us in our historic accoutrements we had worn the previous Halloween looking like the princess and prince from a fairytale.

"There is one thing I need to ask you two- would you be my flower girls?"

"Of course, Eliza", Miss Isabel affirmed enthusiastically on her behalf and on that of her sister. Although my general understanding had been thus far that my darling did not want an elaborate Mischanza, I was glad she had selected to keep this traditional element in particular.

Miss Isabel and Miss Melissa could barely be contained, and seeing them so, excitedly telling each other they would officiate at a real princess' wedding was the drollest thing one could ever imagine.

"Now, now", I then tried to calm the enlivened spirits, "we must tell your parents, too, must we not? But keep quiet for the moment, I do quite enjoy letting your father guess for a little longer."

"Me, too" Miss Isabel confessed with a devilish grin and I was once more reminded why I liked the little girl.

The four of us re-entered the dining room under the girls' suppressed giggles and our own attempts to look solemn, which did not go unnoticed by Mr and Mrs Cooper, who gave us suspicious glances as they mentally tried to prepare themselves for whatever trick we were trying to play. Francesca, playing with a napkin folded into a work of origami, raised an eyebrow but kept composure, knowing I was intent on receiving reactions from them, a joy she would not grant me as punishment for being momentarily left out of the secret knowledge Miss Isabel and Miss Melissa shared already.

"Do you want to tell them?", I asked my future wife of the past.

"I leave it to you, if you like", she replied and so we passed the ball between us several times until we sensed that we had personally shot all the nerves there were to shoot in our guests. Aiding us were the girls, who grinned at their parents and reminded them they had been selected to know
Clearing her throat, Eliza at last took it upon herself to relieve our guests of the persistent tension and state of unknowing:

"John and I are getting married."

"Again?", Dave exclaimed, but joyously, which earned him a strict glance from Linda, which was meant to communicate to him to leave all hints of our former involvement out of his current speech as the girls were not yet to find out about our nature as long as they were so young and even my soon to be wife’s friend did not know either.

"Congratulations to you both!"

Francesca squealed joyfully as she first hugged my bride and then me. I could however detect a hint of melancholy in her features, brought on by our happiness, for the wound struck by her death at the hands of the false Benedict Arnold was still fresh enough to cause her pain at times.

"I am sorry Francesca", I murmured into her ear, so lowly none of the humans in attendance would hear, which was no great feat anyway seeing as Elizabeth’s closest friend was very vocal in her effectuations of felicitations to her friend.

"Don't be", Francesca replied, "it is not your fault. besides, it is good to see happiness, so old and so young at the same time. Gives you hope."

“You shall find happiness, too, I am sure of it.”

“But I am happy. Happy that I am here- and to attend the wedding.”

“Speaking of which”, I now said to the entire room, “Eliza and I will be wed the 30th of December 2018 in Buckerell parish church at two in the afternoon. You lot save the date.”

Notes were made on paper and on mobile phones.

We passed a pleasant evening, which lasted quite long. Just before the Coopers departed, a little earlier than Francesca and Gemma due to their quite young children needing to go to bed, I took David aside: “And you shall be my best man.”

He only grinned, saying: “I am the best of men, trust me.”

The weeks flew past as the wedding approached with Eliza departing alone quite often to have her dress, which as I understood, was not of the off-the-rack variety, fitted, often with Gemma, Linda and the girls in attendance to offer support and to have the girls’ matching white dresses with rose-coloured sashes bound at the back into a bow as was the fashion for children back in our time (and which looked so much more elegant than the outfits we had found browsing the internet) fitted, too.

Naturally, my presence was neither required nor wanted as the groom is not supposed to see the dress before the big day and so, I went out alone to select my attire for the day, a grey ditto suit with a dark green tie, which I liked a lot. It was formal, but not stiffly so despite the tie pin and
cufflinks, and I knew my love would like it.

We opted for plain rings of gold, selected together when for once I was allowed to pick her up at the small tailor’s shop after a sitting. Our choice was unassuming yet elegant, and I was somewhat nervous, as in the 18th century, it had only been customary for the woman to wear a ring whereas her husband would not, but David assured me I would get used to it.

Afterwards we went to pick flowers at the same shop I had always bought the wreaths and bouquets for her grave when I had thought her dead.

Miss George, the proprietor’s daughter, now no more purple, but pink-haired, greeted me before returning to the flowers in her hand, putting them into a bucket of water. Suddenly, she looked up, apparently then only realising I had not come alone.

“Mr Coe?”, she asked.

“The very same”, I bowed somewhat ironically, though in good spirits.

“Is that your Mrs?”

I looked at Eliza, who nodded.

“She is.”

“He’s talking about you all the time”, Miss George said while instinctively moving towards a vase of very big, red roses, “about how much he’s in love with you and that you’re the best person in the world and stuff.”

“He is my everything, too”, Eliza replied, smiling under her sunglasses.

As Flamel’s dram had left her looking somewhat younger than she intended, she sometimes opted for sunglasses to obscure her face somewhat and as is her wont, wore an elegant face of makeup with red lipstick and immaculately drawn lines of eyeliner, not too short, not too long as would appear amateurish or very schoolgirl-like, just perfect, tho’ invisible underneath the dark-tinted sunglasses.

That day, she wore a red trench coat over a black dress and golden jewellery with her habitual heeled shoes. In combination, these items made for a stunning look that easily put the royal duchesses so revered these days to shame.

I was under the impression Miss George was as blinded by the bright sun of my Eliza’s appearance as I, and somewhat intimidated also at seeing the sublime Goddess standing in her shop.

Miss George asked Eliza what else she wanted with her roses and handed her a pretty bouquet, which I paid leaving a generous tip before we went about the business we had originally come for. In the end, our choice for decorating church and home were white roses and Christmas roses as their elegance and colour reflected the occasion splendidly.

We were very, very busy at all times, so busy in fact, we in the weeks running up to the wedding as suddenly October was gone from us, November sped by like a high-speed train and the year turned into its last month, did not have much time for each other apart from going to bed and reading together as often as we could.

My love once said that she did not recall our last wedding being so stressful, to which I only replied that neither of us had much to do for there had been servants and above all, Margaret Graves who
had ruled over the household as she pleased and thus also taken the liberty to organise the majority of the wedding.

Even though our circle was very small, it was still meant to be a beautiful occasion all present should like to think back to and I intent on making it perfect.

Only Christmas offered a brief respite but also reminded us we were just one week shy of our wedding and our hen- and stag dos respectively to be held three days later.

Eliza’s choice was a quiet evening with Gemma in order to tell her what she hadn’t done before, which was absolutely necessary, given she was her friend and would be a welcome guest in our home.

I had opted against doing anything- should David, in his position as my best man, should come over if he felt like it. However, I had underestimated him greatly. On the same night Gemma and Eliza went out (not ten minutes since they had left the house had passed) and I had just contentedly withdrawn to the sofa, watching the news with a purring cat sitting on my lap, the doorbell rang and David Cooper’s bearded face greeted me, grinning mischievously.

“Up and out you get, John. Who knows when, or rather if, you’ll ever be allowed to go out again, eh?”, he winked and pressed me much to join him.

Seeing him in such a state of great anticipation, I had not the heart to tell him no and since I thought that my parched mouth could do with an alcoholic beverage anyway, I decided to try what he proposed, a proper stag party- of two people.

Surely, it could not go wrong, could it?

Of course, it could.

It started with me and David imbibing immoderate amounts of spirits in a silly drinking game forcing us to drink whenever the other used one of a set of words we agreed upon beforehand- upon David’s suggestion, these included the, and, wedding and for some reason unknown to me knickers.

We soon were quite inebriated, which raised his spirits and dampened mine, causing me to become pensive and rather anxious regarding the wedding. Would everything go as planned? Would Eliza be happy with it? Would she still love me in a year’s time when she would finally realise I am old and boring?

“Shut it Farinelli, you’re well past the point of needing to fret. Come on, you’ve charmed a beautiful woman into making the same mistake twice, eh?”, David tried to make light of the situation and nudged me between the ribs, though I only took note of the rather rude slight his diction had contained.

“If I am so good a singer as you imply, I should sing Köchel catalogue number 231 for you”, I riposted, satisfied when the coin did not drop. Modern people and their sloppy education.

“And, as the existence of eleven children gives undeniable evidence for, I have not been castrated.”

“Oh well, enjoy yourself then, Mr Manly Man, who knows how long it lasts- she’s got you by the balls now.”

He laughed and chugged his beer in one unsightly gulp before frantically ordering another one. God, I regretted having attempted anything such as a stag-do and rather wished myself to be shut
up in a tomb with Abraham Woodhull lecturing me about the art of espionage than sitting in a run-
down pub praying closing time was near.

“Listen up, good people of Exeter”, came oh-so-dear David’s drunken bellow, “John here-“ (at that
he pointed at me in a quite uncouth fashion) “is getting married! Married, folks!”

A line of congratulants formed with lots of strange, unwashed men patting my shoulder or howling
most wildly, which I did not appreciate at all- the bottle of whiskey we got on the house as the bar
tender assured us however to mark this celebration, I did and David and I made quick work of it.

The pub grew emptier by the hour until we, apart from a few late-night billiard players who had
ordered their last pint hours ago, were almost utterly alone.

We were finished drinking and had gone rather quiet; there was nothing I longed for more than my
bed and my future wife when wicked David spoke again.

“Mate, like, do you have a good story? Like screwing up history big time? You can’t tell me you
didn’t accidentally invent the ball-point pen or undies with flies?”

“I haven’t.”

“Ah, come on”, he slurred.

“Or does Ann-Liza? Like, you two are here sooooo long. You must’ve met some great people over
time, fun guys and girls…”

He flashed me a lewd grin.

“You are quite rude.”

“Stuck up, are we? Come on, I’m sure Ann-Liza is like the most hardcore woman ever, like, she
probably sliced off Napoleon’s Bonaparte or something. I bet you’ve got some wild stories as well.
Storyyy, pleaaaaase…”

“But nothing rude.”

“Ok”, he answered demurely and somewhat disappointedly and emptied the bottom of our whiskey
bottle.

It was not that I did not have any stories worth telling and the alcohol had loosened my tongue
considerably.

“I mean… It was 1815 and I stayed at Torquay, because my little Harriet was visiting friends there
and I desired to keep an eye on her as she was travelling all by herself… I happened upon a young
lady of scarce eighteen years, pregnant by the smell of her whom I assisted in ridding herself of a
beggarly fellow accosting her in the street. To shew her gratitude, she invited me to her abode,
whence she lived in sin with an unsavoury character, a certain Mr Shelley. He at present not being
home, she offered me some port, which I accepted, but was intent to leave again soon to look for
my daughter and prevent myself from forming any attachment to a young person in age not far
exceeding my own son Henry, for whom I had felt a natural protectiveness when the stranger in the
street had importuned her. When I told her important business demanded me to leave, she leapt
to her feet with the vigour of youth that was not eclipsed by her condition and imploringly laid her
hand on mine in an attempt to bid me stay, yet recoiled the second after she had touched my skin-
‘but oh! You are so cold!’ she exclaimed and stepped back, balancing herself against the sofa, ‘are
you sick? Should I fetch a physician? But no, you cannot be sick- you shew no other sign of illness,
and so cold is your skin I can scarce believe it is that of a human being-‘I could not bear viewing her so distressed and sat her down, fearing the child might come to harm were she to faint, an opportunity her curious mind eagerly seized to explore the matter further. She felt both my wrists, my neck and at last my chest, where she found my heart un-beating, for tho’ I can pretend and make it quiver at will to feign liveliness, what reason had I after the loss of my Eliza? The fair young person then held me captive by remaining in that pose, her hand on my heart, and looked at me with round, brown eyes asking ‘sir, if your heart does not beat, then you do not live and if you do not live, then what are you?’

‘I cannot tell you’, I replied, ‘for the secret is far too dreadful for so young a mind to learn.’

‘No!’ she then exclaimed with fervour, ‘you must tell me, sir- no, indeed, you need not. But if I take a guess and ask you if it is true, you must tell me the truth if you are an honest man.’

‘I am no man at all’, I told her, ‘for that would mean I am human.’

She paused a while and then said: ‘Very well, allow me to know your age?’

‘Sixty-four’, I replied honestly, wishing I would look my age and grow old and die one day very old, hours after my Eliza’s demise so she would not suffer the pain I viewed her suffering, rather than sitting here with this young lady, who furrowed her brow: ‘A young age for someone of your kind. I have read Die Braut von Corinth and similar works, you must know.’

‘I am not someone, I am something. A creature does not deserve the same honorific as a man’, I corrected her.

She looked at me most piteously- ‘but you are sentient and capable of thought as humans are and were, if I am not mistaken, one of our race once.’

‘Sentience does not excuse my nature or raise me above such other creatures as hounds and wolves, hungry to kill and neither does it make me liked or likeable by common men.’

‘You must be very lonely’, she said in a brittle little voice that almost tore my heart out (not that it would have mattered, for my existence would have continued).

‘You need not concern yourself with such matters. I shall prevail and will long after I leave this house. You will die one day, and I will not. I shall not be granted this favour God has given the living. My wife thinks me dead for good and has no desire to ever search for male company again; my children are raised without their father and I live with the knowledge that one day, they, whom I can only observe from afar, shall die and I must watch on.’

The young lady’s face revealed to me her pity and the hand that had transported her pulse into the cavern of my chest retreated to grasp my hand in a gesture of most innocent compassion.

‘You must promise me to cease thinking so’, she ordered me, ‘there are sure to be many who would envy you.’

‘Only fools would appreciate the abortive existence of a fiendish creature’, I told her and bade her release me.

‘Say, are you not hungry for my blood?’, she next enquired. Although she was quite appetizing, her being with child kept me from biting her, for how long however I could not tell.

‘Yes’, I answered, ‘which is why I must be shunned and vegetate unloved’, awaiting her to claw at my face with her fingernails in order to be rid of me, but no such assault came.
Instead, she studied me intently and wept a few drops of bitter tears, lamenting my condition.

I admonished her, saying it was not good for the child, and she agreed, saying she was tired. Since her lothario was not home and the couple not wealthy enough to maintain a permanent housekeeper who could have assisted, I took it upon me to carry her upstairs and laid her on her bed, draping the blanket over her as I had done with my own daughters so many times.”

I closed, somewhat affected by this old tale, of which I had not thought in a long while.

“Shit”, my thoughts were disrupted by one of David’s, spoken aloud, “You’re Frankenstein’s Monster, are you?”

“Correct. Though young Mary added the aspect of being patched together of multiple corpses- one apparently wasn’t scary enough.”

“Man, that’s so sad.”

David proceeded to hug me and wept tears of true sadness, which I told him not to do and ordered another round to make him happy again, feeling somewhat guilty for having made him so sad. From then on all is a blur, which culminated in the two of us waking up on the floor of my living room, blankets thrown over us that we had certainly not fetched for ourselves.

“Good morning”, Eliza had chimed, “rough night, was it?”

Neither of us was able to answer coherently before not pain killers had annihilated the throbbing headache. As soon as I was able to think and speak again, my first vow was to pledge never to drink so much again as I had the previous day.

“Noble words”, Eliza had chuckled and allowed me to lay my head in her lap as we sat next to each other on the sofa only moments after David had gone, winking at me and telling me this had been one of the greatest nights he had ever had.

“How did Gemma fare?”, at last I asked my future wife.

“Telling her was a wild ride, really. It was good I invited Francesca on short notice, she helped a lot. In essence, Gemma doesn’t really know yet what to think but, as she says she’s open to ‘all kinds of new stuff’, so I guess you’ll charm her at some point.”

“I only want to charm you, everybody else doesn’t count.”

“If that is true, you’ll get sober properly and presentable for the wedding”, she advised me, “I am going to have the most handsome of husbands and I intend to show it to the world.”

As expected, the aftereffects of my stag party haunted me well into the next day but were gone by the 30th.

Eliza had moved into her old flat with Gemma for the night, who would accompany her to Church also and pick up Francesca, who lived relatively close by.

The arrangement was made to prevent me from seeing her in her dress and of course to increase the longing for another that was supposed to culminate in the wedding night.

By the time I arrived at church (early and on my insistence alone), I was the only one there and already shaking.

Nobody ever told me, not even my godfather who had had two wives, that marrying a second time
is just as nerve-racking as the first.

Luckily our guests, who soon arrived, distracted me and I busied myself talking to them in order to momentarily quit fretting and longing for my love.

But she just would not arrive, even when our guests were already seated in the pews and I had already nervously taken my place at the altar.

Five minutes.

Seven minutes.

The bride is always a little late, they say, be it because of last minute issues with her attire or because it is fashionable and a means to secure her grand entrance. My poor heart suffered greatly in these endless minutes that almost weighed as heavy as another two hundred years without her, worrying she might have made up her mind, even if my brain scolded my heart for such silly, disloyal thoughts. She would come.

And she did.

The creaking of the church door at last chased all my doubts away. She was here, and within seconds, I would see her for the first time.

Naturally I did not turn around, as this would have been very tasteless. The wait to be allowed to lay eyes on her as she walked herself down the aisle with sure steps somehow managed to appear even longer to me than the entire wait for her to arrive.

Finally, the moment arrived and I am not exaggerating when I say I shall always cherish this memory among my dearest.

The dress had of course been kept secret to me, as it had been the first time, and so, seeing Elizabeth in it for the first time, was a sight that propelled me into the heights of most profound joy; I had suppressed tears in front of our guests in 1782, now they fell freely; my Eliza was Beauty Personified, to such a degree even Venus would have to have conceded and knelt to hand my darling the apple of discord.

On our first wedding day, she had been enwrapped in silks elaborately embroidered and with costly lace trimmings, her hair arranged into a mass of dark curls cleverly pinned to her head, lightly powdered- now, she had made the choice for an entirely different apparel.

My darling wore a cream-coloured dress, quite simple in its cut with a square neckline and ending at knee-length, with peplums at the side and a short jacket against the December cold with a row of ornamental buttons on either side, of the same colour and on her head, resting on a wavy bun, a matching pillbox hat with a small net-like veil that did only cover the area below her eyes in a delicate adumbration of tradition.

I had loved and adored her in her attire of our first wedding day and loved her just the same seeing her like this, a look of elegance and beauty shaped by timelessness and a mind unwilling to submit to current fads of bridal fashion, which, as my reading before my engagement, were about “beach looks”, “tattoo lace” and so-called ball-gown styles that no woman who had ever attended a real ball would have worn for reasons of tastelessness- what lady of taste and connexions would dare to be seen attired in rhinestones, cheap lace made by a machine, not a craftswoman, and tulle?

Our guests, equally stunned by the vision floating down the aisle of Buckerell Parish Church, looked on in awe as Eliza, so small in size and yet resplendent as a thousand suns, walked toward
She smiled at me and I wanted to weep with joy, kiss her right then and there and never let her go again even before our vows were made.

The ceremony was very solemn and beautiful and with us were both the past and the future, sitting in the pews and buried beneath the church floor.

Only the name *Anna* used to address my bride as we exchanged our vows reminded us of the past months, the pain, the sadness, the terror and unimaginable horrors we went through, all who were gathered here with us, but not in a negative way. For Anna, fighting for and with me during these dark times had saved me, had brought back my Elizabeth, the one whose trembling fingers now put a ring on my equally shaky hand.

As we, after the conclusion of the service, left the church, my again-wife glanced up and smiled at a white marble monument erected there for her uncle, my godfather, which had been designed by Miss Burges, her best friend in days long gone by.

“They’re here with us”, she whispered through a veil of tears she tried to blot away without blemishing her makeup, “I can feel it”.

And I felt it, too.

They were all there with us, sitting in the pews that appeared empty to our small company of guests, but were actually filled: Miss Burges and her ward Julia, who grown into somewhat of a family member, too and had lived to become the wife of the sixth Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada; the Graves’, Admiral and Mrs Graves, the former most content and suppressing tears of joy, the latter attempting to appear entirely calm and untouched by the ceremony and the fact that I had for a second time, as she would put it, “seduced” her niece against all odds and most importantly, our children, young ladies and gentlemen dressed in the fashion of the early 19th century whose faces showed naught but pristine happiness.

I wish I could say we would have been a family like that, but alas, we had never been; Admiral Graves had died a month shy of our third child Harriet’s birth and Margaret, the Old Bat, had done everything she could to rid herself of me as she could never overcome her disapproval of me as Elizabeth’s husband- not to mention little John and Katherine, who had been taken from this life too early under tragic circumstances, but were there with us, too, youthful, grown and happy.

For one moment, even though we had never been, we were. Would that I could have taken them into my arms and embraced them all at once, telling them how wonderful it was to be reunited with them all again (even the Old Bat, whom Eliza surely missed a little, given she was her mother’s sister and had helped raising her), but of course, such things cannot be.

The dead are dead, but this moment, like a fleeting ray of sunshine illuminating an otherwise cold and grey winter day, the moment of feeling embraced by their light and warmth that assured me they were happy to see us wed here again, before the vision faded, and the church was again as it looked to our handful of guests.

This moment, so very short and bitter-sweet, taught me something quite important. I recall Hewlett using similar words when he stood over me and watched me die (not without satisfaction on his face), but I took them for cynical mockery of my person.

-And I doubt that at the time, Hewlett truly understood, too.
Like nature, all life, or rather *existing* in my case, is a circle of creation and destruction.

It does not solely refer to the continuation of Life in general, of life and death coming and going, summer leaves falling in autumn to regrow in spring, all creation and destruction is united within *us*- we create, we destroy, we *exist*. We are created and destroyed over and over again, shaped, by the people we meet and experiences we make, constantly looking with one eye towards the future and to the past with the other.

And it is good. Life is good if we only make an effort to have it be so, to ourselves and to others, through *creating* happy memories, art, poetry, science, scholarly works, and *destructing*—unhealthy relationships, doubts, malignant powers and dark thoughts.

All this wisdom which I had been obscured to me for so long suddenly washed over me in that moment with crystal-like clarity, my Eliza there with me as time itself appeared to stand still for the moment of my realisation before slowly resuming its regular pace again and I remarked upon the music played by the organist as we walked out of the church, now wed again.

“Mrs Simcoe”, I addressed her, content and happy. I never thought I would do so again.

“Governor, husband mine.”

Our well-wishers congregated outside to take pictures, a task David and Gemma had gladly volunteered for. Miss Gemma’s pictures were more of the artistic sort (and later won her a significant number of so-called “likes” on her Instagram-account) whereas David let us all pose for more conservative portraits, on which he also appeared, thanks to a timer and tripod.

“So you are the man Elizabeth searched for all the time”, an old man, doubtlessly Nicholas Flamel, approached me.

“I am”, I nodded, and received the congratulations from his wife Perenelle also, whose matching purple skirt, blazer and hat made for a striking ensemble.

I also figured that the hat pin, one striking specimen likely from the early 1900s, could do more than holding her headgear on top of the iron-grey mass of elaborately pinned back tresses.

“You must come visit us in New Haven”, she announced while taking and shaking my hand with such strength as I would have much rather ascribed to a man in his twenties or thirties. “And make our Eliza happy this time, will you?”

“I shall do my best”, I smiled curtly and my attention was drawn to her husband again, who, like his wife, advised me to be a good husband unto the woman they had come to love like a close friend, a daughter almost and also extended an invitation to us.

The Misses Cooper, who had not yet exhausted their rose petals, started to throw them into the air to create a romantic rainfall of roses when I, for our cheering guests, took Eliza in a firm embrace and kissed her passionately.

When we, or rather the humans of our company, started feeling cold, we retreated to the blessed heating system of our cars to drive home, where Niccolo’s men, under Diana’s watchful eyes, had laid out tableware and prepared a light meal for everyone.

Finally congregated around the table with a young Cooper on either side of us, the lively chatter of our guests ceased and all looked at us in anticipation.

Knowing it was expected of the groom, I was intent to rise and make a speech, but Eliza put her
hand, now bearing a ring, on my arm and bade me not to.

In her eyes I could read that she thought we should not further belabour tales of the past or the future, not give ourselves and each other more pain by elaborating too heavily on how we had come to be wed on this day, in this year.

Instead, she rose with more grace than anybody else I ever saw and said simply, “To all of you who are with us on this special day and to absent friends.”

The toast was reciprocated, simple, a nod to our past and to our future that respectfully honoured the dead and the living alike.

After the food I could not touch but was told had been quite pleasing, more wine was had and merriment ensued among our small, intimate circle. Even Miss Gemma, who had been told the truth on Eliza’s hen night, laughed merrily and almost snorted red wine back into her glass as Mr Flamel made a joke she found amusing.

By ten in the evening, Diana had decided she was part of the proceedings, too and had immediately been festively attired by the young Coopers using the table decoration, giving her a collar of white ribbon and flowers. She was not content being treated so, or perhaps had hoped that on a feast day, she would be given a special place at the table with special treats of sea food, but could be appeased with some salmon- of course I had not forgotten her and merely had lacked the time to feed her immediately after our return from church.

“You have the prettiest cat in the world now, John”, Miss Isabel informed me and laughed as Diana walked over to the sofa to take her place in the middle of it as if it were a throne.

“I might, but that’s not important. I have the prettiest wife in the world”, I grinned at Eliza who rolled her eyes and, under clapping and much amusement at my terribly dramatic and overly-sweet declaration, leaned in for another kiss.

“Dance, dance, dance”, they soon started to chant in a chorus, Linda clapping, Mrs Flamel putting her foot to the floor as if she were dancing an estampie.

Sighing theatrically, I rose to bow and offered my hand to my love, who acknowledged my request for the first dance of the evening with a polite nod and we then proceeded to strut into the living room, where we were followed by our guests.

Linda and Dave made quick work of pulling the sofa to the wall to grant us all more space, allowing our guests to congregate in a semi-circle around us.

“One needs music”, I declared, “or else you will find this demonstration not exactly to your satisfaction.”

“Wait a sec”, Gemma demanded and made quick work of connecting her mobile phone to my sound system.

“Any preferences?”

Eliza shrugged and suddenly looked a little insecure. “None of these songs they play at all the weddings, please. No pop song from the last, well, from this or the last century.”

From the corner of my eye I espied Miss Melissa, who, as I recalled now, attended dance classes run up to Eliza’s close friend, who through holding the phone appeared to be mistress of the music, and whispered in her ear.
Murmurs of deliberation were heard, but I kept myself from listening into them. A part of me wanted the surprise.

“Good choice!”, Gemma exclaimed and high-fived the little girl.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Mr and Mrs Simcoe!”, she then announced our dance.

Knowing my friends, I would have thought they’d make us dance a minuet, solely to satisfy their curiosity of catching a glimpse of our former selves, but no such thing happened.

Instead, the first bars of *The Blue Danube* gently nudged us into motion. The Viennese waltz was a dance well-known to both of us, though my Eliza will always be my superior in matters of dancing.

We never danced it together, though, and it was quite exciting to do so.

“You must have impressed the ladies well”, my darling teased as we twirled through the room.

“Well, as Baron Eastwell, my pseudonym at the time, I dwelt in Vienna for a while- and I cannot say I lacked the attention of ladies”, I teased her.

“Pretentious as always. I recall your bitterness at being denied the title of Lord Simcoe.”

“I don’t have need of being a lord when I have the most wonderful lady by my side who makes me feel like the king of the world, so happy am I.”

Both of us suppressed tears of great emotion and joy until our dance drew to our close. From then on, less formal music was played and all made themselves comfortable talking, drinking and laughing until late into the night.

When at last, our guests left, Mr Flamel turned to me and bade me wait a moment. He went to his rental car he had parked around the corner and returned with a gift basket.

“I was asked to give this to you. A friend in America ordered it and asked me to pick it up and give to you in his- their name.”

Frowning and wary, I accepted the basket, a tasteful arrangement of wine bottles with an element that immediately sent a shiver down my spine- an apple resided in their midst, red and quite appealing to those partial to this particular fruit with a card of thick, cream-coloured paper taped to it.

Immediately, I ripped off the card and opened the envelope. All it said was:

> With the most heartfelt felicitations on the occasion of the marriage of Mr and Mrs Simcoe,

> A+E Hewlett

With wild eyes, ire and confusion, I looked at Flamel, ready to prove to him he was not immortal at all.

“I might have told a few friends a little too enthusiastically about the wedding-invitation we received”, he defended himself sheepishly and was awarded a scolding glance from Mrs Flamel.

Eliza joined us, eager to learn what the confusion was about, held the apple in her hand, read the card and laughed.
-And I laughed, too.

Thus, I draw my narration to a conclusion, though our story is not concluded yet as the world knows no such thing as happily-ever-after-s. We have fought in the meantime betwixt now and our wedding, have disagreed, but laughed and above all, loved also.

Eliza suggested to plant a tree from the apple seeds in Hewlett’s apple and when it is grown enough to bear fruit, to arrange for a basket of them to be sent to Mr and Mrs Hewlett. They certainly will appreciate the reciprocation of their fine-tuned allusion to history and the offering of mutual peace that shall also lie therein.

The Misses Cooper shall grow up and one day, they will ask us questions and one day and perhaps most sadly, those who are living must eventually die.

We shall see all these days, and we shall be happy and mourn with those we have gathered around us as our friends, be with them on good and bad days, but most importantly, we have each other.

My account of my previous life and how we, my wife and I, found each other again after more than two hundred years, shall thus be concluded today, on the 4th of November 2019, which marks the 213th anniversary of an empty coffin having been lowered into a mock-grave.

This empty coffin was buried with two equally empty hearts, heavy as the stones put into the wooden box to make it appear filled.

Now, these hearts, tho’ one of them is quite dead, quiver again with the delights of love and friendship of such a quality as can only be found in one’s soul mate.

Together, our hands entwined once more, through a love forged in the past, we look at the future with gladness and joy, holding on firmly to another in days of sunshine and of shadow, both of which are sure to come our way.

Omnia vincit amor— even death.

Chapter End Notes

The title is of course a pun on Tim Burton's "The Corpse Bride" (2005).

Their dispute about what should (not) be on TV was inspired by the fact that historically, there was a quarrel between them once because Elizabeth wanted to attend a play put on by officers, which John thought ought not to be encouraged as it supposedly was unbefitting their rank. Elizabeth went anyway and left her husband to sulk at home.

Elizabeth's Canadian kitten is immortalised in her diary: Tues. 13th (August 1793) (...) I brought a favourite white cat, with grey spots, with me from Niagara. He is a native of Kingston. His sense and attachment are such that those who believe in transmigration would think his soul once animated a reasoning being. He was undaunted on board the ship, sits composedly as sentinel at my door, amid the beat of drums and
the crash of falling trees, and visits the tent with as little fear as a dog would do. (...)

Farinelli (1705-1782): famous castrato singer.

Köchel catalogue 231: Look it up, learn some (rude) German you probably wouldn't have expected from someone like Mozart.

Napoleon's Bonaparte: I think I really don't need to explain that one...

The idea that Simcoe played a part in the creation of Frankenstein's monster hit mit after a stay at a Swiss lake. What worked for Mary Shelley works for me, I suppose.

Estampie: medieval dance still popular during Perenelle's youth, meaning "stamp dance".

Wow, this is it. I think I actually wrote fluff. Thank you so much again for your continued support and interest in this story, it was so much fun.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!