

A Caution

What you are about to read demands a preface. A warning, perhaps, or at the very least, an introduction to the world into which you now step. Beyond this page lie the unedited, unfiltered, and, most crucially, uncensored words of the late Vattica Wilde.

Before we descend too far, it is important that we offer context- not only of the man, but of the reason this manuscript has found its way to you.

Vattica Wilde was a French British author of rare promise. A weaver of language, devoted entirely to his craft. You may know his name from the once-acclaimed novel *The Brothers of Gold*, a stirring tale of kinship and survival amidst the soot and blood of 18th-century France. A work that left London enraptured, not only for its poetry, but for the shocking realization that it was (at least in part) true. Wilde had lived it. Or survived it.

It is known that in *The Brothers of Gold*, one of the siblings does not endure. The tale is steeped in agony, hunger, and human desperation, and readers found beauty in the ache. Horror in the truth. But Wilde, it seemed, was left with little more than a wound that would never quite close.

What followed that triumph was a steep and steady fall.

Subsequent works failed to captivate. Publishers turned their backs. The public, ever fickle, turned to newer names, fresher voices. And Wilde- once the darling of literary London- became a

footnote, a has-been, a man obsessed with recapturing a candle once held to the world.

Which brings us here.

What follows is not a novel, but a journal. Discovered in its entirety under unsettling circumstances, which we shall detail in the postscripts. These are Vattica Wilde's final writings, presented as they were found, with minimal interference. In places, you will encounter facsimiles of pages that could not be translated or transcribed without losing something... vital. Something true.

We must be clear: this is not a story of redemption.

There is no love here. No light at the end.

This is the unraveling of a man. Whether by madness or by something else entirely, we leave to you.

You may consider these pages as a spiritual document. Or as the ravings of a deluded mind. But know this: the horrors detailed herein are no mere invention of literary craft. Something happened within the walls of that manor. Something only Wilde ever truly saw.

And whether he glimpsed the divine, the damned, or only himself, we cannot say.

But he wrote. God, he wrote.

This is, as he so feverishly insisted, his magnum opus.

— Benedict Lowre

Hillsather Publishing House

ENTRY I: The Literary Plague

15th of February, London, This Bleak Morning

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The morning arrived draped in mist, as though Heaven itself sought to obscure the city from God's own gaze. London, that ever-choking behemoth of soot and sorrow, wheezed into life with its usual cacophony of street hawkers, carriage wheels, and the incessant whimpering of hungry dogs. My breakfast, if one could call it that, consisted of half a biscuit and a pot of tea gone bitter with reboiling. I had not the stomach to stomach it.

No sooner had I seated myself by the window of my modest quarters—if such a title befits the draughty alcove I rent above a chandler's shop— than a letter slid itself beneath the door like a snake slithering into my life. The envelope bore no fanfare, no embossed crest of a reputable publisher, but I knew its intent before I broke its seal. Even in its silence, the letter mocked me. I could smell its insolence.

With trembling fingers I opened it. Its content was no more than I anticipated. Another rejection, penned in language that attempted civility but betrayed its author's disdain with every stroke. "*We thank you for your submission, Mr. Wilde, but regret to inform you that it does not suit our current publishing direction.*" The nerve! The audacity! As though I, Vattica Wilde, one-time darling of the literary salons, had submitted an amateur's scribble! It is as though they now fancy

themselves arbiters of taste, while I, the true craftsman of narrative, am deemed unworthy. *Regret!* What know they of regret? They sit in their warm offices with their quills and ledgers, sorting through manuscripts like fishwives sifting through spoiled cod. They have become gluttons of mediocrity, vomiting out the same paltry stories into the public's eager mouth, all while sneering at anything bearing the scent of originality.

They claim my work lacks “modern appeal.” I ask, what is modern appeal if not another phrase for intellectual cowardice? I gave them a tale filled with fire and blood, and they craved lukewarm broth! The very same structures, the same artifice and cadence that once birthed *The Brothers of Gold*— the novel that made London weep and women swoon in tea parlours— are now considered “too overwrought,” “too lyrical,” “too dense.” They would rather publish the empty scribblings of a foppish dandy writing about spoiled heiresses in garden parties!

My former publisher, Wexley & Sons, has dropped me as one might drop a spoiled fruit— too soon and with great disdain. Their letter of dismissal was curt, almost offended in its brevity. “We must regrettably cease our professional relationship, effective immediately.” No explanation. No farewell. No fond remembrance of the revenues I once brought them, nor the accolades they so proudly printed upon their catalogues.

Was I not once the voice of a generation? Did I not dine with critics who toasted to my genius with vintage port and whispered my name with reverence? And now? Now I am cast aside like a molted skin, irrelevant to a world that has fattened itself on frivolity. Even my

so-called acquaintances have begun to drift, like smoke in the winter air. One by one, their invitations dwindling, their correspondence becoming dry, infrequent, brittle with pleasantry. I am becoming a ghost, haunting the very streets I once graced.

There are days I wonder if it is *I* who have changed. Perhaps the city is the same, and it is my own mind that has rotted beneath the weight of unmet expectations and unfulfilled promise. I stare for hours at the blank pages stacked upon my desk, and they, like cruel mirrors, reflect not inspiration but absence— an echoing void where once there resided lightning. The muses, it seems, have abandoned me.

The rent is due in a week. The firewood dwindles. My ink is thick with cold. And still, I write. I write because I must, though I feel each word drips not from my pen but from some cracked portion of my soul. I write as the condemned man chants his final prayer. Not in hope, but from sheer compulsion.

And then there is the dripping.

Yes. The dripping.

It began three nights ago. A steady, rhythmic tapping that seems to originate from somewhere within the wall behind my bed. I have examined the plaster, searched for leaks, checked the eaves. Nothing. No sign of moisture, no loose pipe, no nest of rodents gnawing at the timbers. And yet, each night, just as the lamps are dimmed and the air turns still, the sound begins.

Drip. Drip. Drip.

Not constant, not rushed. But deliberate. Measured. As though something thinks before each drop. I attempted to ignore it at first. A trick of the house, I thought. A symptom of age and winter damp. But now it finds its way into my dreams. I awaken with the sound pressing against my skull, a metronome for some infernal composition. I rise, check the room, find nothing... and lie awake till morning, staring at the ceiling as my thoughts rot like meat.

Perhaps it is a sign. A portent. A whisper from some hidden place beneath my floorboards. Or perhaps I am merely slipping, like my career, like the city's fog, into obscurity.

Regardless, I feel something must change.

I am not a man content to be forgotten. If London has no place for Vattica Wilde, then let the provinces tremble. Let the moors echo with prose. I have heard rumours— strange, vague mutterings— of a manor far from the smoke, empty for years, owned by no one and yet always spoken of as though it waits. I shall make enquiries. I need quiet. Solitude. A place where the muses might once again alight upon my shoulder, if only to whisper farewell.

Should I find this house, I shall write there. I shall *resurrect myself*. Or die trying.

But for now, the ink runs dry, and the room grows cold.

And still...

Drip.

Drip.

Drip.

— *V. Wilde*