

Sacred and Profane

“FATHER!”

Lydia’s voice scoured the walls of the great hall of her father’s castle fueled by two hundred years of concentrated abomination and a greater measure of rage. Her father’s servants scattered, knowing better than to confront her. Lord Desmodus would kill them for deserting, they reasoned, but Lydia was here now.

“Where is he?” she demanded of a servant. Fear moved across the sallow face of the liveried boy, and suddenly his feet dangled above the floor. He had been unable to follow Lydia as she approached him; she was too fast, but he tried his best to squeak out “his chamber” before her iron grip holding him aloft cut off all blood and he fell insensate.

Lydia went to dash his limp body against the wall, as she would, but reconsidered and laid him on a padded bench instead. She looked at him briefly and tried to find some bit of satisfaction in her concern for such a boy. She thought she almost felt it before turning to the grand stairs.

Lydia moved like liquid lightning up the stairs. Some few brave and stupid guards tried to oppose her, but she stole away their swords and spears before they knew what was happening and flung them into the walls to shatter. She was past to her father’s study door two flights above by the time they sorted themselves out.

The door was solid oak, hundreds of years old, protected from rot by the same suppuration that sustained her line. She struck the door with all her might, but even her stone fists and lightning arms were no match for the perverted strength of the king of trees corrupted.

She beat on the door repeatedly shrieking “FATHER!” The leaded glass of the lanterns shattered under such an aural beating, and birds fled for miles around. Slowly, her rage settled, and she took the silver hardware of the door with her fingers and ripped the hinges from the frame. Smoke and light wicked up from her hands where the holy metal punished her, but the pain only hardened her resolve. Her father would release Thomas, or he would pay the price.

The doors breached, she stalked into her father’s chambers, hands clawed and scorched talons extended like a raptor on the hunt.

Her voice, now fueled by simmering hatred more than burning fury, called out, “Come out ,you old worm. Look me in the eye and give your apology.”

She looked about the room. It was furnished in the oaken furniture and animal skins of Desmodus’ childhood, and she examined the feasting table and it’s obsidian pitchers and goblets. Other than those and the ever present shackles, the table was bare.

Out on the balcony, in the light of the waning crescent moon, she saw his silhouette. Her father was tall and thin, as old vampires tended to be. The suppuration made bones long and flesh hollow over time, and her father was very old.

He was standing with his back to her, ignoring her challenges. The set of his shoulders and disregard of her demands fanned her rage anew and she flew at him. "Monster!"

Lydia was fast, but Desmodus was old, he turned and looked at her as she approached, and what he held in his hand caused her to fall to her knees and skid across the floor to a stop.

Thomas.

She could tell by listening that his heart was silent and she could see by his blue lips that he was drained. She grabbed at his limp body, but her father pushed her down.

"Control thyself," he whispered before lifting a cloth to wipe his lips. "This is unseemly."

Had Lydia tears, she would have wept, but that most-human capacity had long abandoned her. She sat on the floor and shuddered at the tableau of her father holding her dead lover in his hands as casually as one might hold a glass of wine.

She sat and remembered Thomas' voice. Gentle and kind. She remembered his touch. Always asking, never demanding. His kiss was the closest she had felt to the sacred in twenty decades. "I know what you are, Lydia, and I love you," he had said that first night. More immediate thoughts abandoned her in favor of memory until her father's voice roused her.

"How long art thou going to lie there? It is getting late, and the sun rises."

Lydia looked up and realized that she must have sat for an hour or more, catatonic and unaware of what was happening around her, caressing Thomas in her mind's eye after seeing her father,. The golden rays of the sun were starting to creep down the wall. She stood and stumbled back into her father's chambers and pulled the doors closed.

"Explain thyself," he ordered. "The servants will surely speak of your behavior, and it will embarrass our family."

"Explain myself?" Lydia shook her head. "Explain yourself, worm."

"Language, child," he chided.

"Explain yourself and why you have taken Thomas," she looked around, "Where is he?"

"Who? Oh, my scraps? It is over at the table, on the tray. Why?"

Lydia rushed to the table and lifted Thomas' thinned and empty form. She smelled his hair and caressed his face.

"Lydia, what is wrong with thee? Behave thyself."

"He loved me, father."

“Yes, well, I love thee. He was simply entranced by your beauty. They are simply not the same thing.”

Lydia laid him down on a couch and crossed his arms. Thomas was no longer present. The body was empty.

“Why, father. You knew he was mine.”

“And thus mine. I own thee and what is thine. Impudent calf. It is my right to use my property as I wish.”

Lydia shot him a look of confusion, “You must have known this would hurt me. If you love me, why would you...” she gestured at Thomas’ corpse.

“To protect thee.” Desmodus approached Lydia and ran the back of his fingers down her cheek. “Thou wast too attached, and once he died, thou wouldst have hurt worse, and been vulnerable. Our enemies would have used him to get to thee.” Desmodus wagged a finger as if to demonstrate, “Just look how easy it was for me.”

Lydia flew at him again, but Desmodus grabbed her wrist and held her back like she was a child. “Lydia, I am only protecting thee, and I will never stop.”

All strength left her at that point. “Never, father? Never?”

“Never. Though I would prefer that I never have to take such measures in the future. Thou shouldst learn thy lessons quickly. The love of a human is a fool’s game. How would you two live together? What wouldst thou eat? The peasants who squat in the next shack?” Desmodus cackled at his jibe. “As if to think they would not notice the sudden decline in population? HA!”

Lydia look at her father, and hated. A peculiar warmth spread on her cheeks, and she touched her face and looked the old dirty worm who had been her father.

“What is that on your hand father?”

Desmodus looked down at the red staining his fingers. “Oh, I must have spilled.”

“I cannot stop you, can I?”

“No, thou canst not. Not ever. Lydia, Lydia, child.” Desmodus reached out to her as if to give comfort, “Understand, we...what is upon thy face?”

Lydia looked at her red-stained hands again. “I weep, father. I weep.”

Lydia straightened and looked at Desmodus, the grave worm who made her, and saw clearly. He would kill any man she ever were to love until the end of time. Every man who loved her would be punished for it. His power over her was so great that she would not be able to

oppose him. Her life was either to be alone or to be tortured and to share torture with those she loved. Her love was death and pain.

“Thou weepest? How?”

“I can stop you, you know?” Lydia turned from her father, “You are powerless.”

“Lydia, thou art being a fool. Wait...!”

But in that moment Lydia turned to the great doors and flung them open to look one last time at the sun. Its golden rays bathed her form and as the sacred light scoured her skin, sparkling motes filled the air and were blown by an unfelt wind back into the castle. The room soon looked filled with diamond dust.

Desmodus recoiled from the light, unable to speak.

She looked back over her shoulder at him, and before her body faded into coruscation and was blown away, she cried, “Never again shall you harm someone I love. I go to Thomas now weeping, if God be kind.”

And Lydia was gone.