

Luna Sanguis

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A CRUSHING CLOAK OF silence bore down, heavy and cloying like death itself. The faintest churning of her stomach would surely alert the intruders. Beneath the rosewood dining table the young woman shivered and wished she could curl up under warm bed covers for safety. The coldness of her fear tightened her skin to goose bumps. Oh how much she wanted to cry out but terror held her tongue.

A shattering roar echoed within her like distant thunder on the horizon. The explosion of sound ripped across her mind, a savage wind through leafless trees.

Her nostrils wrinkled with the stench of something bitter and metallic. It triggered her taste buds with a memory of something wholesome. Muffled screams and more explosions stabbed her mind with visions of death.

Blurred images slowly came into focus as her trembling hands uncovered her eyes. She almost gasped in shock, biting her hand to remain silent. Ribbons of grey smoke swirled from the bloody hole in a man's chest. His lifeless eyes stared into her terrified soul, his dark, rich blood pooling on the floor around his outstretched arm.

The sickening aroma of his essence was instantly frightening. The scent teased her hunger and fear. Her tears blurred the scene, running down her cheeks to moisten her parched lips. Where was she? Her mind drew a blank so complete she thought she might be dead. Is this what death feels like? A cold numbing dread infected her senses with confusion.

A scream of darkness so vile and stomach-churning penetrated her thoughts like a skewer through raw meat. Rigid with shock, she put her hands to her ears and stopped breathing, the scream becoming a torrent of agonized screeching ravens from hell. Her hands could not block out the black storm of hate penetrating her quivering soul.

Plaintive whimpering, as if from a dying animal, attracted her attention. Forcing air into her lungs, she tried not to gag on the putrid stench of death. The acrid taste of pervading terror filled her mind like bitter, sour wine and something else, something she could not quite grasp. She knew the woman making the sick, cat-like sound was dying, but her identity had been erased. Looking up, she found herself hiding underneath the dining table and touched the rough wood. Solid, ridged, hard, the feeling reassured her of reality. Relief flooded her. She was not in the realm of the dead.

Frantic movement caught her attention. The woman's legs kicked in agony. A man in dark trousers and another woman with bare feet displaying black-lacquered toenails fought with the woman. Bright red blood dripped from the chair the woman was sitting on.

The victim cried out. "No Sebastian!"

Who was Sebastian? Heart-stopping fear ripped her mind apart and left an empty cauldron of oblivion. The metallic screeching of swordplay sent shivers down her back. She hugged herself to stop the cold creeping into her bones, pulling her knees up to her chin, stretching her dress. Her powerful mind shut out the cries of death and hatred. The silence comforted her. She listened to her stomach churn with the need to convulse its contents.

Men's legs rushed towards her. A heavy thud rocked the table. A crescendo of clattering cutlery almost forced a scream from her quivering lips. She brushed away her hair obscuring her vision.

The frightened woman flinched as more cutlery and dinner plates crashed to the wooden floor. With utter dread, she stared at the blood-red contents of a spilled bottle of wine slowly spreading towards her.

She recognized the long black coat covering the black leather trousers worn by *Him*, but she could not remember his name. Her mind tuned into *His* terrible thoughts of murder and hatred. A vitriol so complete it devoured all in its path. She crawled on hands and knees to get away from those legs. Her instincts told her she must escape *Him* again.

The sound of splintering wood! She looked up, biting her hand to prevent a scream giving her away as the tip of *His* sword sliced through the table, stopping less than an inch from her eye. Gore dripped from the tip of *His* blade and ran down her face. The awful screams subsided to mere whimpers. The room fell ominously silent amplifying those dreadful sucking, gurgling sounds of insatiable hunger. The thought of those carnal sounds consuming her flesh brought a new level of terror.

Scrambling on all fours to the edge of the table, a faint rustling sound diverted her attention. She dared to look back. To her utter horror, a pale hand with black fingernails lifted the tablecloth. A leering white face, smeared with gore took her breath away. Her heart almost stopped. It was *Him!* The mouth grinned, revealing oversized canine teeth stained red.

“There you are!” The mouth laughed.

She scurried from beneath the table and rushed through the shattered French doors. Her trembling legs, weak with terror, carried her across a vast lawn to the surrounding woods. Dawn’s cold rain slashed across her tearful face. Lightning crackled from brooding clouds, followed by a thunderous reply. She kicked off her elegant shoes and raced bare foot through the undergrowth. Branches whipped at her face and legs slicing thin scratches. Her beautiful dress – now hanging by a single strap, left thin tatters upon every thorn. The all-consuming blackness of *His* evil pursued her ever closer. Don’t stop! She resisted the urge to look behind, for to do so would be fatal. She ran and ran until her heart pounded to escape her chest.

She sensed *his* wicked thoughts hunting her. *He* was so close she could almost hear his blood pumping through his festering heart. The sounds of *him* stumbling and cursing spurred her on into the encroaching light of dawn.

“You won’t get far my Delicate Rose.” *His* cruel laughter tormented her.

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Delicate Rose clambered down a steep embankment of wet grass. She slipped and fell into a filthy ditch of muddy water with a skin of floating debris. Crawling from the muck, she heard a strange sound, like a growling dog. She paused half out of the ditch, listening to the sound growing louder.

It seemed an eternity from one thudding heartbeat to the next. In that interminable moment the shock of recognition crashed headlong into her – an approaching car – *His* car. Transfixed with indecision, the sudden glare of headlamps snapped her from her terror. She slipped back into the ditch, forgetting to take a deep breath in her panic.

She dared to open her eyes. Through the filthy water she caught a glimpse of a hideous creature, smoking black with glowing red eyes like hot coals. The demonic figure removed something from its black cloak. Bubbles of precious air escaped with her water-logged scream.

It was *Him* and his precious blade of death. The deadly steel plunged into the water close to her face. Again, the blade swished through the muck, this time skimming across her thigh, leaving a fine scratch. She held her breath as waves of hatred washed over her, clearly sensing *His* frustration as he returned to the car.

From under the water she heard the car's angry growl and felt the ripples of its power. She waited until her lungs were about to collapse before risking a gulp of air. A large rat crawled over face. Her scream was filled with stagnant water. Coughing the filth from her lungs, she dragged her shivering body from the ditch. Her convulsing stomach forced her to her knees, coughing up more muddy water.

She looked down the narrow country lane to see nothing. The car's growling menace diminished in the distance. All was silent. She got up and stumbled away in the opposite direction, trying to remember who or where she was. What was her name? She knew nothing.