

Only the Very Best by Len Hazell

Until I met Darius I had never even considered the possibility of a fat vampire.

However there he stood, rotund and rubicund, and amiable smile across his face and the true good nature of a bon viveur, or perhaps I should say "non viveur".

Since my, er shall we say conversion, most of the other blood folk I had encountered had been somewhat common types. Either scuttling about in the night, feeding on the dregs of society and urban fauna or the young ones frequenting the so called "Goth Bars" dressing all in black with silver accoutrements and accessories mostly feeding on one another; I'd have to say, if pushed, most were not decent sorts and not the sort one would choose to associate with.

Darius was quite unlike these, moderns. Darius was quite definitely old school. Looking on the face of it, a portly gentleman of the city, he wore tailored suits to fit his Rubenesque figure. He was never without a hat when outside and never without his comforts when in.

We met when he simply approached me on the street.

I had been of the rakehell, as he liked to call it, for only a few months but already things were looking bad for me.

Believing me dead, greed distant relatives had sold my house and so forcing me to quit before new tenants arrived and frankly, I had lost everything. I had taken to wandering the streets of the city seeking out places to rest privately during the day.

Here I had encountered the wretches that it seemed likely I would soon be joining in their misery. Some had attacked me; some of the younger ones tried to rob me but most just skittered away in fright.

Darius must have seen something of my breeding and potential. His large black limousine pulled up ahead of me, with the assistance of two servants he climbed out of the back door, adjusted his hat and coat, and strode straight up to me.

For a moment, I too was overwhelmed with the impulse to flee. It is in the nature of the Strigoi to avoid our own kind, we are so naturally predatory and dangerous that we at once recognise one another and therefore the flight or fight response tends always to be the first response.

"My dear boy," he huffed in a voice that reminded me of Sidney Greenstreet, or Orson wells with a sore throat, "My dear, dear chap, what has happened to you?"

I pulled myself together and standing up straight, attempting some effort at pride I asked, "Do I know you sir, I don't believe I have had the pleasure."

He appraised me for a moment.

"Cut glass diction, a Savile Row suit, obvious manners and even if somewhat battered, Gucci shoes and ah yes, the remnants of an Eton Tie, if I am not mistaken?"

"You are not mistaken. Winthrop class of '94" I introduced myself.

He pulled off the right hand his kid leather glove and shook my proffered

salutation.

"Darius, class of '24, 1824 that is. My dear fellow how came you here in such reduced circumstances, did not your sponsor prepare you for the crossing over?"

"Sponsor?" I was confused, "What sponsor?"

"He who granted you he dark gift, old boy, your mentor? Your master? You will not tell me you found your way to immortality by happenstance?" Darius appeared genuinely shocked and concerned, as I must have made it apparent I had not the faintest idea about anything to which he referred.

"I was bitten," I explained, "by a vagrant one evening, I became ill and died, next thing I know I woke up inside my coffin in the family crypt, I escaped, realised what I had become and I have been wandering ever since."

"You poor, poor chap." Boomed Darius clapping a large hand down on my shoulder, "Tragic, that is tragic. Have you dined this evening?"

I shook my head, I still found acquiring prey difficult at that time.

"In that case I demand you accompany me to my house for supper, I will brook no denial, you must come along with me now."

He was a powerful vampire and no mistake and I was weak from hunger, I was before I knew it, ushered in to the car by strong and determined hands.

We sped through the night in the chauffeured limousine and arrived at the house of Darius some thirty five minutes later, he spoke little on the journey other than to make polite enquiries about my school days, my profession before my demise (Merchant Banking) and to express regret for the inconsiderate way in which I had entered the rakehell.

His house was large and well placed in the better part of town; his servants, most of whom seemed human enough, greeted us.

Offered a bath and a change of clothes while my own were being laundered I took full advantage before accepting the invitation to dinner.

Dinning with Darius was a lesson in vampiric etiquette that remains with me to this day.

We sat on either side of a U shaped table, the open end of which faced the door. There was no cutlery upon the table only a small silver bell, which Darius rang to signal his readiness for each course.

At the first ring two white-gowned servants wheeled in a hospital gurney on which laid a young plump girl. She was unconscious and securely strapped down, a traditionally clad butler followed them and quickly dismissed the two orderlies. The butler adjusted the table slightly to raise the girls feet and tip her head, then using a precise instrument that resembled nothing so much as a twin spike bottle opener, he made a quick incision in to her neck that released to streams of arterial blood. These streams he expertly caught in to lechatelierite goblets that seemed to appear in his left hand from nowhere at all. Once the glasses were filled, he made some odd downward stroke with the instrument and the two wounds were at once sealed off.

He then served us in the manner of an exquisitely trained wine waiter.

"Appetisers sirs, a young maiden of Andalusian origin, a virgin pressing, I believe you will find it acceptable."

The blood was indeed exquisite, fresh and light with a slightly fruity aftertaste.

As we sipped, the body was discreetly wheeled away to make room for the next course.

The Main Entrée, was an overly plump chap, who the waiter assured us was beef feed and surfeited on port wine before serving, his rich blood was presented in ornate soup bowls and for this course we were given the use of some divine antique silverware.

He too was rolled away and the sweet brought in, a matronly woman stuffed with chocolate and cream teas, her sweet ad scarlet juices were served in dishes of the finest carved and decorated lead crystal.

I sat back full and satisfied.

"An excellent repast." Grunted my host, "That stock can be released to recover itself and we shall have them join us for dinner again another time."

"Oh you let them go?" I asked.

"But of course, one has to appreciate ones food old man, besides neither of us touched them, they will not become as us. It's a far more civilised way to carry on for the most part."

I nodded, but wondered aloud if Darius ever missed the thrill of the hunt and the kill.

He grinned at me.

"Of course, but that is the after dinner sport." He said and rang the bell again.

The butler opened the door and ushered in two confused and bemused young chaps, both the worse for drink and chuffing on large Havana's.

"Brandy and cigars old fellow?" offered my host.

"I don't mind if I do," said I wiping my hands as I stood.