THE AWAKENING

OR

THE PLIGHT OF VAMPIRE CHRISTIAN DU MAURÉ

by

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PROLOGUE

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I was not always a bloodthirsty monster shredding the throat of anyone unlucky enough to cross my path. No, this was all new to me: hunting in the velvety darkness with my closest friend Michel; using our youth and beauty to lure the most vulnerable with the promise of coin or the honor of being in the company of such gorgeous young men and then draining those same vulnerable people dry and tossing their husk-like corpses into the murky waters of the Seine. No, once, I was a mortal man anticipating my future.

Since I had been reborn only a few months, my thirst was bottomless, consuming. As soon as I had drunk from one mortal, the urge would come again and I'd be ravenous. Our maker, Gabrielle, had assured us that the first year was torture. In fact, she said most vampires did not survive what she had aptly described as "the awakening." Some went mad, while others became the prey of older, more cunning predators. I was both mad and full of hate and chaos.

I had been an anomaly in my short life, and though my pain and suffering scared me, the lure of eternal life frightened me even more. I'd relinquished my life unwillingly, so terrified was I to lose Michel, who had been the last vestige of the future I had hoped to have with his sister Leila. But she was lost to me, sent away to be married, and meanwhile I could no longer bear the pain of living without her or reconcile the unfairness of my plight. In my desperation, I believed

becoming immortal would render me invincible. I could rescue Leila from a man she did not love, and she and I could finally be together.

I was so naïve.

During my mortal life, which ended only five years ago, none of this would have seemed possible. Yet now I no longer even heard the screams of the mortals I killed. As I licked their blood from my lips and their warmth coursed through my veins, I knew that anything was possible.

Lost in these revelations, I was startled by the sliver of crimson across my latest victim's chest, only to recognize it. Leila's hair ribbon, tied to her bedroom key, which I had always worn around my neck. In this mortal wench's panic, she must have grabbed it, snapping it in two.

Beside me, Michel gasped. I recognized the sadness in his eyes. They were the same emerald-green eyes his sister had. I was haunted by Leila still; Michel and I both were.

This necklace was the only vestige of her and my last afternoon together as she lay across my bed with the early summer sun illuminating her pale skin. Her tiny breasts jutted through the long dark curls cascading around her shoulders. I had torn the ribbon from her hair in my haste to bed her. How were we to know that day would be our last? That everything we had dreamt would be ripped away, just like her ribbon? Only later did I find the token missing and only later still would it come back to me.

Our affaire had begun innocently enough several years prior. I'd been a boy of fifteen and Leila, a woman of eighteen. I never could take my eyes off her; from the moment I was old enough to experience lust, she had left her mark on me. I never thought she shared my feelings until one spring day, I followed her into her stables, thinking we would go riding together as we

sometimes did. She called my name, and I was helpless but to follow her voice deeper into the shadows by the hay bales.

Without warning, she pulled me to her and kissed me. My heart raced, and my knees went weak. Quickly, she unbuttoned her cotton dress and slipped out of it, her pale, perfect skin soft and warm to the touch. She yanked at my trousers until they dropped to the ground. Then, taking me in her hand, she gently guided me through the downy hair between her legs into her soft folds.

I'd tried to hold myself up on rubbery legs. We moved as one, our kisses growing deeper, my thrusts faster. Our skin, slick with sweat, made it hard to hold onto each other.

As she cried out my name, I reached my release, and our moans echoed to the rafters.

This was the first event that altered my life, but it was far from the last.

Now, standing over the bloodless corpse of the wench I'd drained, I reached for the torn ribbon across her body, and I was once again thrust back to my nineteenth summer.

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