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GEMINUS

My Vampire Story

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MY VAMPIRE STORY

Chapter 1

The house clings to the hill like something that doesn't want to fall.

Below, far down, the sea. From here, it's just a scrap of blue between two hills. But you can hear it. A slow, stubborn breath that rises between the olive trees and the stone walls and reaches all the way to the window.

Inside, the mess of a man who wasn't expecting visitors. Papers, a fire burning softly, the smell of wood. And me, sitting in front of the fireplace, with a quill I no longer quite know how to hold.

My name is Geminus.

It's 2026, and I'm almost two thousand years old. I say almost because I stopped keeping an exact count a long time ago. Birthdays lose some of their charm when you've lived through that many. Besides, you'd have to know what day I was born. My mother knew. I don't.

My mother knew a lot of things I've forgotten. Her voice, for instance. I could still tell you how she said my name when she was angry. I could recall the exact tone. But her whole voice, no. It left in pieces. One morning, a few centuries ago, I realized I couldn't remember her laugh anymore.

That's what nobody tells you about immortality. They tell you about blood, fangs, the sun. Never about what you forget.

The sun, since we're on the subject, doesn't turn me to ashes. Sorry to disappoint you. It burns me, it drains me and, if I push my luck, it makes me

sorry I went out. But I can cross a street in broad daylight without bursting into flames. Humans have a lot of imagination when it comes to vampires. They have even more when it comes to themselves.

I was born when the night still smelled of fire and oil. Today people ask an artificial voice to turn off the light for them. All that progress so you never have to get up off the couch. Quite an achievement.

I don't really make fun of them. Okay, I do. A little. I love them too much to despise them. That's probably my problem. I've always loved human beings too much.

Women especially.

One evening, long ago, I poured the wine at the table of a man who had just sent ten thousand others to die for a patch of land. He laughed loudly and talked about his dead the way people talk

about the rain. Then his wife came in. He lowered his voice. Without realizing it, like a child caught in the act. I've seen the power of men take cities. I've seen the power of women make the men who took them lower their voices. Maybe that's another reason I love them so much.

And for all the screw-ups of men, in all that time, I've seen enough love to believe that, in the end, love is what will save them. Even after so many lives, I haven't learned to stop loving.

And yet I know how it ends. I've seen it enough times. Hair changes. Hands too. One morning, the face you've kissed for thirty years carries marks that weren't there when you met. Then comes the day when the person you love closes their eyes and never opens them again.

I'm the one who stays.

At first, I thought I'd get used to it. I was young. Thirty-three. I died at that age. And at that age my body decided to stay.

Truth be told, it's not exactly the same body anymore. People who imagine immortals as eternally perfect have probably never broken a tooth. I've broken quite a few. People have tried things on me that I'd strongly advise anyone who values their jaw to avoid. Luckily, dentists have improved a lot. Finally, a human invention I won't make fun of. Almost.

I was born facing this sea. It's in front of me again today. The same one, apparently. I'm not so sure. Nothing stays exactly the same for that long. Not even the sea. Not even me. Especially not me.

A noise, outside. I stop writing.

I go out. Nothing moves. The path, the steps, the black trees. An animal, probably. They come

up this far now and then, at night. I'm not the only one up at this hour.

I walk around the house, slowly. Then I linger at the door, listening.

Inside, the fire has burned low. I pick up the quill again.

I came back because I've decided to die. I've thought about it before. This time, I think it's for good.

I've stopped drinking. For now, the thirst is still bearable. What worries me most is the memories.

Last night, I tried to find my father's face. I remember his hands. The thumb running along the rim of an amphora before he bought it. His voice when he bargained with the merchants at the harbor. Even the smell he brought home: salt, rope and terracotta dust. But his face, no. I closed my eyes. Nothing.

And for the first time in a long while, I was afraid. Not of dying. Of taking him with me.

Because there's one thing I understood too late. When you're the last one who remembers someone, your memory doesn't belong only to you anymore. It's also, a little, that person's last home.

That night, I realized I couldn't wait any longer. That's why, before I forget, I'm writing. And since you have to start somewhere, I'm starting where it all should have ended. At the edge of the sea.

I was thirty-three. I was in love. And I wanted to die.

The sea had decided otherwise.

* * *

I had lost the love of my life.

I won't write her name. Not because I want to hide it. Because it isn't time yet.

Her name I still carry. Intact. It may be the only word time hasn't managed to tear away from me.

It's strange, what all that time does to memory. It sorts through things without asking my opinion.

I've tried to find her face again. Hundreds of times. I close my eyes and I search. Her eyes. Were they green or blue? It seems to me they changed with the light. That sometimes they were the color of the sea, sometimes the color of the sky just before evening. But I can't see anything anymore.

I remember she had long hair. Golden, I think. The wind blew it across her face and she pushed it back with one hand, annoyed. I remember the gesture. Not the face behind it.

Her lips. I know I kissed them. That's all.

I remember the moment before the kiss. That little moment when we both knew what was about to happen and nobody needed to speak anymore. I

remember that. The waiting. But her face in that moment, no. It has faded.

I remember her hand in mine. I remember how happy I was. I remember everything I felt. Nothing I saw.

Her name, though, has stayed. So I hold on to it.

I put down the quill. The thirst does that. It doesn't erase things in the right order. It takes a face from you and leaves you a name you can't put on anyone anymore.

I hate not knowing what will go next.

She was dead. And I didn't want to live without her.

That morning, I walked past my father's warehouse without turning my head. The amphorae were lined up in front of the door, like every morning. My mother called me from the doorstep. I didn't turn around. I didn't think about

tomorrow. I didn't think about what I was going to leave behind.

I thought only of her. Of the one who had made me happy. Of the one I had imagined spending all my time with. I didn't know yet how much time was going to matter to me.

Portus Delphini was there. The sea was there. I'd had it in front of me since I was a child. I had learned to respect it long before I learned to fear men. It could be calm in the morning and angry a few hours later. It could bring home those who left, or keep them.

That day, it was gray and mean. It pounded against the rocks. And I wanted it to keep me.

I didn't want to be saved. I didn't want a second chance. I didn't want anyone explaining to me that the pain would pass. I wanted to go where she had gone.

I walked toward the water.

I was sure that in a few minutes it would all be over.

But the sea didn't want me. Strange fate.

* * *

How did I hold on all this time? That would take another book. I won't have time to write it.

I feel ancient. Not old. Ancient. Like a coin someone finds in the ground and turns between their fingers, trying to work out where it came from. Or like a language nobody speaks anymore.

And here I am, at the beginning, writing to you.

Mom. Dad. If only I had listened to you. If only... Maybe I'd have been with you for a long time now.

I've started writing this book. And yes, I know the books about vampires. Bram Stoker. Anne Rice. Her especially. I read her, I loved her. And then I saw the movies.

Did I recognize myself? I don't know. They were all better-looking than me.

For a while, I thought about telling my story as an interview too. Then I stopped. It would have been a rerun. And I have my own life.

So rest in peace, great writer. Let me tell mine.

I close the notebook. It's like a scene from a movie: the writer who gets up, walks, disappears into the night. Except it's me.

I'm standing at your grave, both of you. Nobody's here. It's five in the morning.

The sound of the waves reaches this hill hidden among the other hills, this place I chose a very long time ago. After the sea. After it had rejected me.

The thirst. The thirst.

I don't remember everything from those first days. But I remember the burning. That, I do. The body asking for something I didn't understand. Blood.

How long did it take me to understand what I had become? How many people did I kill before I understood? I don't know anymore. Maybe it's better that way. Maybe not.

Almost twenty centuries.

The thirst comes back. Stronger. I press a hand against the stone.

I sit down beside them.

You waited for me your whole lives. After I disappeared, you didn't want any other children. I know. I was there. A few steps away.

And I stayed. Century after century. I did everything I could to keep this place hidden. So nobody would disturb you. So nobody would take you away from me.

Then the archaeologists came. They dug. And they found you. So I came back.

I've prepared my grave close by. Right next to you.

This time, I'm staying.

And no one will ever touch us again.

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Chapter 2

Days have passed since I stood at my parents' grave.

Staying didn't mean lying down up there right away, on my slab. First, I had to finish this book.

I was told, a long time ago, that I couldn't die. Maybe.

So I kept writing. The same papers. The same fireplace. The same nights.

My house is above Portofino, high enough that the road doesn't really make it up here, low enough that I can still smell the salt in the air when the wind turns.

From the outside, it doesn't look like much. Gray stones, uneven, a roof of round tiles covered in moss here and there, shutters that have changed color more often than you'd believe. Nothing that catches the eye from the sea.

Inside, downstairs, the big room you already know. A narrow corridor leads to the study, and to that room next to it whose floor was never redone with the rest, go figure. Upstairs, a bedroom I hadn't used in a long time, because I barely slept anymore, and a window that looks out over the bay, the one whose cracked pane I'll never fix. That's where you see the sea best, in the distance.

The house has been rebuilt several times on the same foundations. Each time, I had to come back to have it repaired. Again. And again. The walls have changed, the rooms have been rearranged, one wing has disappeared, another has appeared. Only

the base remains, somewhere under all of it. A bit like me.

I was in front of the fire when I heard footsteps on the path. Then a key in the lock.

She came in without knocking. That happens when nobody's been seen here in a hundred years.

She pushed the door open, took two steps, and saw me.

She jumped as if she'd just found a ghost in her own living room.

"Sorry. I... the agency told me the house was empty."

I never announce my arrivals. Habit. Survival, too, at a time in my life when surviving meant never letting anyone settle into a routine with me.

I wanted to send her away. One curt sentence, two words, and she'd be gone with her apologies.

And then her scent reached me. Nothing extraordinary. Soap, maybe a little salt left on her

skin from the sea. And there she was, walking right into the lion's den, all by herself. My thirst woke up all at once.

The sun was coming in through the window at the back. It fell on her hair. I said nothing for one moment too long.

She had the kind of beauty nobody manufactures: skin still full of circulating blood, cheeks that blush for real reasons, a freshness that belongs only to bodies that haven't started counting time yet, that haven't had to repair anything yet.

My face stayed at thirty-three, but it isn't an intact face. Under the surface, there are my teeth, broken and repaired several times over the centuries, by one dentist after another. A youth that stopped, not a new youth.

She was new. In that insolent, temporary way that only people who are going to grow old can afford.

I envied her. A little. A lot, some days.

"You're..."

She searched for the word. The owner? A tenant? A burglar with a fire going in the fireplace and a strange amount of nerve?

"This is my house," I said. Not unkindly. Just enough to cut the question short.

She blushed, from her neck to her ears.

"The agency never told me about you. They told me to look after the house, air it out, check there was no damage after the winter. I... I'll come back later."

She took a step back. And that's when I should have let her go.

I didn't.