

DRACULA & DAUGHTERS

‘Good, infectious fun’

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‘Absolute brilliance’

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‘Packed full of adventure . . . Hugely entertaining’

The Week Junior

‘Spooky, adventurous and thrilling’

The Bookseller, Children’s Book of the Month

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Jonathan Stroud, author of *Lockwood & Co*

‘Dazzling. The sort of fun you want to sink your fangs into’

Kiran Millwood Hargrave, author of *The Girl of Ink and Stars*

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***** *LoveReading*

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Jasbinder Bilan, author of *Asha and the Spirit Bird*

DRACULA & DAUGHTERS

School
for Slayers

EMMA CARROLL

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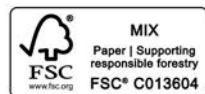
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gpsr.requests@easproject.com

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*To Alice, who loves a challenge.
Thank you for believing we could do it!*

TEMS

TOWN

HYDE
FOREST

NORTH SIDE
NECROPOLIS

RIVER TEMS

POISONWOOD
SCHOOL

DRAKE'S
FUNERAL
EMPORIUM

*Undertaker
Quarter*

SALVATION
BRIDGE

LYCEUM
THEATRE

Theatreland

SILVERISING
INDUSTRIES

*Medical
Quarter*

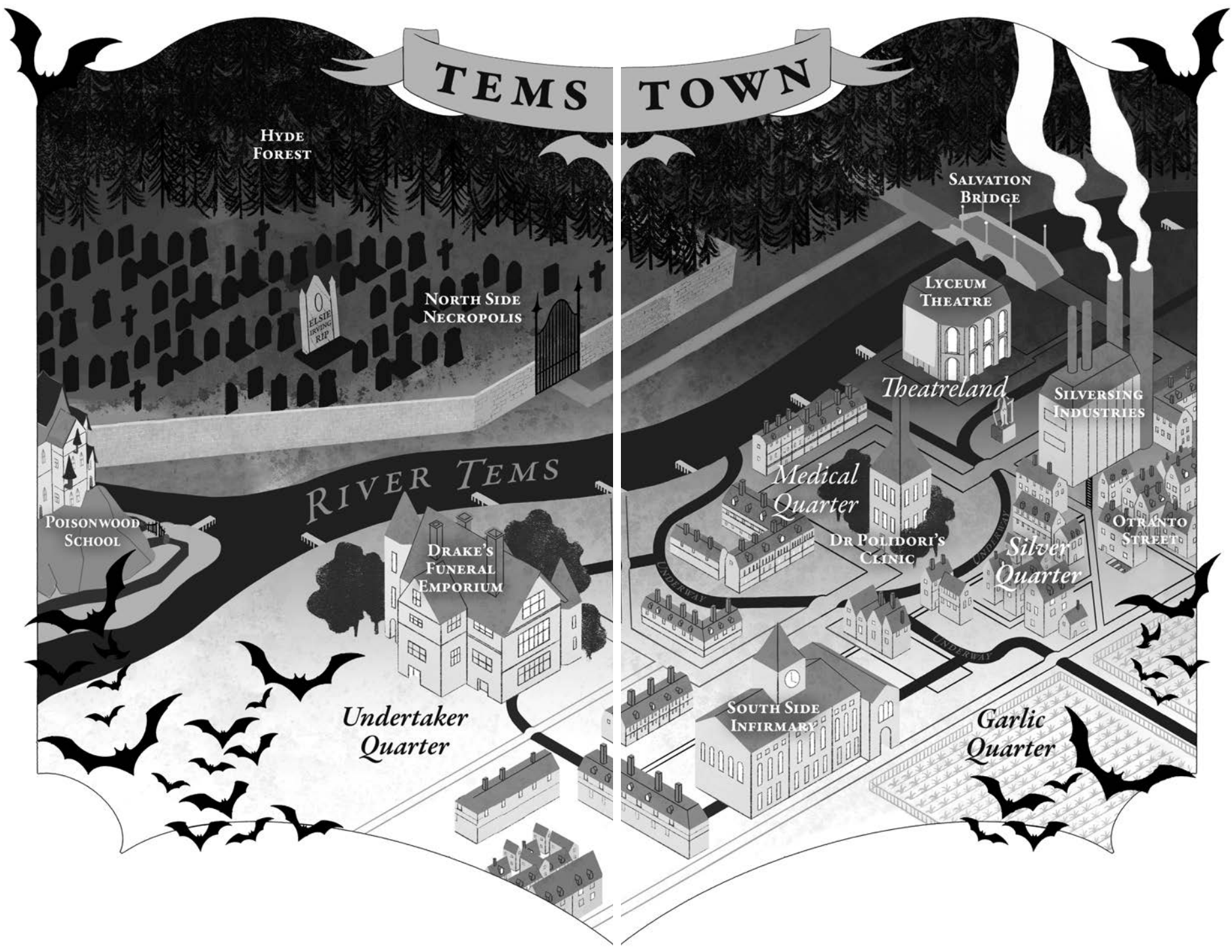
DR POLIDORI'S
CLINIC

*Silver
Quarter*

OTRANTO
STREET

SOUTH SIDE
INFIRMARY

*Garlic
Quarter*





AT EIGHT O'CLOCK EXACTLY, on a bitingly cold morning, Dracula & Daughters opens for business. It's a big day for us, and for Temstown, launching our vampire-healing service that will change everything people believe about the undead. I'm proud of this moment, and undeniably anxious, the fluttering in my stomach more crows' wings than butterflies.

We're hovering by the front gate, my sister, cousin and I, awaiting our first customers and admiring our brand-new signage that's bright enough to stop a dray horse in its tracks.

DRACULA & DAUGHTERS

VAMPIRE HEALERS OF RARE SKILL AND INTERGRITY AT YOUR SERVICE

No person – or horse – has reacted to it yet, but it's still early.

'The sign . . . it does look all right, doesn't it?' I ask my cousin Bella, sudden doubt making me seek some last-minute reassurance.

Arms folded, back straight, standing as tall as a soldier in her Dracula & Daughters uniform of black jacket, trousers and bowler hat, Bella smiles.

'Oh yes, Mina,' she confirms. 'It's professional. Classy.'

'All the things *we* are,' agrees Buffy, my sister, before wiping her nose on the back of her hand. Typical Buffy; I can't help but laugh.

It's hard to believe that three weeks ago we didn't know we had a cousin, and that Buffy and I lived in a damp basement in the Silversmith Quarter, destined for a life of grim, dull work, because that's what girls in Temstown are raised to expect.

The past few weeks have been a real education – first discovering we're part of the ancient Dracula dynasty, then, thanks to Professor Lucy Westenra's ground-breaking

The Vampire Healer's Handbook, learning that vampires can be healed rather than culled. Our unusual heritage means we've the 'traits' to be healers: we're dhampirs, which means we're mostly human *and* a quarter vampire, which we're still getting used to. But with a new Guildmaster in charge of the city, now's the time for us to go public, as vampire healers for hire.

'First people incoming,' I mutter now, as two women in bonnets and a man pushing a barrow come towards us along the pavement.

'Deep breath,' Buffy whispers.

We stand a little taller. I do a quick check of my jacket for rogue toast crumbs. Yesterday Bella bought us each a penny-sized silver badge bearing the initials *VH*, for vampire healer, that we've pinned to our lapels. I'm pretty sure we look the part.

'Good morning,' Bella greets the bonnet women.

They walk straight past. As does the barrow man, but more people are appearing in quick succession. Bella, amused at Buffy's and my dithering, nudges us into action. Soon every passer-by is getting a 'Good morning' from Bella, or an 'Excuse me, madam/sir' from me. At Buffy's friendly smile, plenty smile back, but few slow down to hear about our work, which is proving tricky to explain briefly.

‘Well . . . umm . . . you see . . . ummm . . . we heal vampires,’ I try. ‘Like you’d heal, uh . . . ummm . . . an illness.’

‘With treatments and medicine,’ Buffy chips in.

Bella raises her chin. ‘It’s a very new idea. We’re the only practitioners here in Temstown – probably in the whole country.’

The reactions vary – one man laughs outright, another asks if our mothers know what we’re up to, most of the others simply make their excuses and move on. Half an hour in, I’m frustrated. It’s freezing out here. While Buffy’s nose has turned adorably pink, mine’s running constantly, and stamping our feet does little to warm our toes. There *are* plenty of people out and about: Monday is market day, so we’re seeing baskets laden with bread, fish, vegetables – and garlic.

Always garlic.

It’s a timely reminder of the risk Temstown still faces. In the wake of the recent Contagion, the veil between the living and the dead remains damaged, and vampires are known opportunists. All it takes is one vengeful corpse ready to exploit one tiny tear in the veil. The Old Lore spells out clearly that the time straight after a Contagion outbreak is risky for further infections, so there’s a definite need for our services.

What we require is for some actual customers to materialise.

‘Patience, Mina,’ Bella soothes me. ‘People have to get used to the idea. Trust me.’

‘If you say so.’ I give her a half-smile. I do trust Bella; good business sense is something she has in abundance.

Behind us, watching over us like an old friend, is the grey-stone mansion that used to house Drake’s Funeral Emporium, the successful undertakers owned by my aunt Beatrix, Bella’s mother. It’s a grand address on Temstown’s busiest road, and in one of its ground-floor rooms, we’ve set up our office. I’ve dreamed of the moment when our first client walks in, and we’ll be proving that the women and girls of this city can be experts, can run businesses and contribute to the city’s well-being. Not every bright idea belongs to a man in power.

‘Wish our mothers were here to help us,’ Buffy says wistfully.

I nod. ‘Aunt Beatrix’d know how to drum up business.’

‘She’d take over, more like,’ Bella replies with a roll of her eyes.

Truth is, she misses her mother almost as much as we miss Mar. They’ve been gone three weeks now, after

fleeing the city to avoid arrest for refusing the Guildmaster's order to cull anyone infected with the Contagion. Now there's no need for vampire slaying and the old Guildmaster's in jail, it's safe for our mothers to come home. We've written twice to tell them, though we've yet to get a reply. But Transylvania, where they've gone, is a long way away, and letters take time to arrive. I only wish I was better at waiting.

Mid-morning, we finally give in to the lure of a warm fire and retreat indoors. Our office is my favourite room in the whole house, with its large bay window in which sits a long dining table that now serves as our desk.

'Ideas to attract people's interest, anyone?' asks Bella, stoking the office fire that our friend, groom and general all-round good egg, Varney, banked up for us earlier.

'Cakes,' says Buffy.

'What, *we* make them?' I'm genuinely surprised, because beyond cheese on toast, none of us are exactly wizards in the kitchen.

'I'm happy to bake some,' Bella offers.

There's a pause.

'Erm . . . no offence, but yesterday you made cheese and chocolate pie,' I say.

'And mushroom porridge the day before,' Buffy adds.

'Poe liked it,' Bella retorts.

'Poe is a raven. He's a carrion feeder,' answers Buffy. 'He eats dead rats from the gutter.'

Bella pretends to be affronted, then admits my sister has a point.

Thinking more seriously, I ponder how student doctors learn from observing a procedure – that's how it was done at Dr Polidori's when I worked there, back when I dreamed of becoming a doctor myself, but being a girl meant that's all it was – a *dream*.

'What about a demonstration to show off our traits?' I suggest.

Buffy jumps on the idea. 'Oooh, yes!'

Bella considers it, then reaches down into the coal bucket, finds the biggest lump of coal – that's easily the size of a grapefruit – and squeezes it.

Hard.

Her knuckles whiten. Her jaw clenches. With a crack, the coal crumbles, dust pouring from her hand into the carpet.

'That the sort of thing you had in mind?' she asks.

I grin. Buffy applauds. I'll never not be amazed by my cousin's trait of incredible physical strength.

Bat-like hearing is my personal trait, which is harder to demonstrate, though on shushing Buffy and Bella, I pick up Varney's voice outside in the stable yard. It's

where he spends almost every waking hour, and given that he sleeps in a loft above the tack room, most of his *unawake* time's spent out there too. I'd rather he took up the offer of a proper bedroom in the house, but it seems to suit Varney to have a quiet place to escape to, with his beloved horse, Zeus, nearby. It's the horse he's talking to now, declaring it's time for a morning cuppa.

'If I'm right, we can expect a cup of tea shortly,' I assure the others, because our golden household rule is if you're making tea, you make it for everyone. Suffice to say, we get through *a lot* of tea.

'Good. I'm parched,' Bella admits.

'Hope he brings biscuits,' says Buffy.

Indeed, breakfast feels like ages ago already. We're not used to early mornings: as vampire healers we do most of our work at night, when the undead are restless in their graves. I think of us as medics on call, primed for an emergency. I let out a sigh. All we need *is* an emergency.

A beak-on-glass tap at the window jolts me from my thoughts. Buffy's raven companion has arrived on the sill, and once she's lifted the sash, he swoops into the room.

'Time for my trait,' beams my sister, hers being her remarkable connection with animals. Honestly, it's as if she speaks their language.



I smile. 'And there was me thinking Poe was our first customer.'

'My dear Mr Poe.' Buffy speaks to him as if he's time-travelled from another century. 'Do you come bearing gifts?'

By this she means the latest *Temstown Tribune* that's hanging from his beak. It's our daily ritual. Poe fetches the newspaper. In return, he gets a piece of toast. This morning we ate our toast early, so when he realises this, he refuses to hand over the paper until I produce a crust for toasting. Only then does he drop his delivery at my feet.

Buffy gives his chest a tickle. 'Bravo, dear chap.'

Taking the crust from me and, piercing it on the toasting fork, she holds it over the fire. Bella has already seized the paper – her time as an undertaker means she knows exactly which page to turn to for the death notices. I read over her shoulder.

'Let's see who—' She's interrupted by the door opening, then Varney's head appearing round it.

'It's all right, V, you can bring the tea in,' I say, beckoning to him in the hope he'll stay and drink his cup with us, instead of hurrying back to the stables.

'Tea?' Varney gives his head a startled scratch. 'No, you've got a visitor, so you'd better look sharp. They're coming up the path.'

‘A customer? At last!’ cries Buffy, almost setting fire to the toast in her excitement.

We rush to the window. My heart’s beating fast. Bella, leaning forward on tiptoe, sees who it is before I do.

‘Oh no,’ she says, turning flushed, then pale. ‘It’s *him*.’



DESPITE HIS ORDINARY BROWN OVERCOAT AND UNREMARKABLE FACE, the man scurrying up our path is instantly recognisable. He’s also flanked by two enormous Watchmen dressed head to toe in black.

‘It’s Mr Seward, the Guildmaster!’ I cry. ‘*Sweet silver*, what’s he doing here?’

‘He’s here to congratulate us, *obviously*.’ Buffy grins.

But any excitement I’m feeling is shot with dread. The last Guildmaster tried to throw our mothers in prison, and kept an intimidatingly close eye on us until it became clear our healing skills could save his infected son’s life – that son, complicatedly, being Varney, who’s also my best friend.

‘Well, *I* didn’t invite him,’ mutters Bella with a pointed look at Varney, who holds up his hands.

‘Whoa! Don’t blame me!’ he cries. ‘I’ve had enough of Guildmasters to last me a lifetime!’

I wince. When the now disgraced Mr Helsing poisoned Elsie Irving for political gain, her vampire sought vengeance by attacking Varney. I’m still not sure my friend has properly recovered from what happened. It remains a delicate subject between us.

‘Blimey, did you have to say that?’ I round on Bella once Varney’s out of earshot.

‘What?’ Bella’s defensive. ‘You’re always wishing he’d get more involved in what we do.’

But her remark was unnecessarily prickly. We’ve been living together, the four of us, for only a week so I don’t expect her and Varney to be close pals yet, but I wish they’d try a little harder to get along.

‘I’ll answer the door,’ Buffy offers, before Mr Seward can knock.

Nervously, we wait. The new Guildmaster’s come here for a reason, that’s all we know. Bella closes the *Temstown Tribune*. I cast a quick eye on Professor Westenra’s handbook, which is in its usual place, shelved between *Lavender: Potion or Poison?* and a dictionary of bats. Hers is the one book I never leave lying around.

When Mr Seward enters the room, I notice two things: one, that he’s left the Watchmen out in the hall,

and two, he’s brought a box of cakes from the fancy baker on Salvation Street, the smell of their sugary vanilla-ness filling the room. Here’s someone trying hard to be nice, I think, which immediately makes me wary.



‘Good day, Mr Seward.’ Bella holds out her hand to shake his, then, realising hers is still covered in coal dust, rubs it on her trousers.

He waves away the offered hand, all smiles, as if we’re pretending there aren’t two armed men on guard outside and this is a visit between friends.

‘I feel I know you so well already,’ he says.

‘And yet we’ve not met in person before,’ I murmur, racking my brains for what *we* know about *him*.

That he used to be a garlic farmer, yes, and won the latest elections easily. He’s a father . . . of a boy, I think. He has big ideas for the city’s future, but didn’t all the men who stood for election?

‘You must be Bella Drake. And you –’ he turns to my sister and I – ‘are Mina and Buffy Cullers, am I right?’

‘We’re Mina and Buffy *Dracula* nowadays, sir,’ I reply, proud of the name our mothers only recently revealed as our true heritage.

‘She’s the brains of the operation,’ says my sister

proudly, but her eyes are on the box he's holding. 'Are those cakes for us?'

'Indeed. Here.' He hands her the cakes, which she takes enthusiastically.

I shoot her a warning glance. Bella gives Buffy a tiny shake of her head; before we eat his gift we should hear what he's got to say. It'll take more than pretty cakes to convince us to trust a Guildmaster again.

'Did you see our sign on the gate?' Buffy asks him. 'Isn't it brilliant? We're officially vampire healers.'

'Today's our first day of being open,' I explain.

Bella presses her lips together; she's watching closely for his reaction.

'It's quite remarkable, yes,' Mr Seward agrees, then gives a little uneasy laugh.

My heart sinks. So that's why he's here: to speak to us about our brand-new business.

'First and foremost, I'd like to thank you,' he begins, the smile fixed in place. 'For your excellent work in ridding Temstown of the Contagion by solving the Elsie Irving case.'

I sense a 'but' is coming. Buffy, who I'd expect to be delighted at the Guildmaster's praise, is regarding him through narrowed eyes.

Bella keeps it cool, professional. 'Thank you for

supporting our venture, Mr Seward. It means a lot to us that you—'

'Ah.' He interrupts with another nervous laugh. 'Obviously, your courage and skill mean we can look forward to a vampire-free future, where our city—'

'*Vampire free?*' Buffy cuts him off. 'Since when?'

'If the veil *has* closed, it'll be very easily broken again,' I'm quick to remind him. 'It's like a wound that's only just beginning to heal.'

'So what we're saying, Mr S,' says Buffy, addressing him as if he's an old pal, which is both endearing and disarming, 'is that we need to be vigilant.'

'The risk of a fresh outbreak of Contagion is high,' says Bella.

My uneasiness is growing. Yes, since the Great Contagion, twenty years passed without further incident – that we know of, anyway. But we've just had a new, major infection. How confident can we be that the veil between the living and the undead has completely closed?

'I'm sorry, I don't buy your argument,' Mr Seward replies, still smiling. 'It's over, girls. The Contagion has left town.'

I'm horrified. 'You can't seriously believe that?' I cry.

His smile begins to look strained. 'People are tired of vampires, Miss Dracula,' he presses. 'They're fed up with

spreading salt and wearing silver. That's why they support my vision for this city. They want change.'

I rub my forehead. 'With all due respect, sir,' I say, as I struggle to stay polite, 'people supported you because the alternative, Mr Helsing, was a murderer.'

'Vampires don't *conveniently* vanish because it suits your plans,' Bella puts in.

I nod, thinking of Varney. 'They leave scars. You can't just *forget* what's gone before.'

'Like my sister's told you, Mr S,' says Buffy patiently, 'the veil is thin. Anyone undead with a score to settle could seize the moment. We're still at risk from vampires – as much as ever.'

There must be something in Buffy's open, honest face, because for the briefest moment, Mr Seward *almost* begins to understand what we're trying to tell him.

'You're not implying there *is* another vampire outbreak, are you?' he asks, dropping his voice.

'Not yet,' I warn.

Of late, the city's passings have been from illness or old age. There's been nothing suspicious which, given the current state of the veil, is a relief. We've not had a chance to go through today's death notices.

Mr Seward takes a deep breath. 'I'm sorry, girls. I stand by my decision. My election is a new start for our city.

No more vampires.'

Bella gives him her death glare.

'Over the coming months, everything vampire-related will cease.' He keeps going, avoiding her gaze. 'Even the vampire-slaying lessons. Thankfully, the school's new headmaster is supportive of my—'

'I'm sorry, *slaying lessons*?' I interrupt, startled. The previous Guildmaster trained up *adult* slayers – who from our experience weren't especially skilled – but children, in school?

'Poisonwood School for Boys, yes. It's on their timetable – or should I say, *was*.' Mr Seward nods distractedly. 'Now, where was I?'

Buffy and I stare at each other, stunned. Poisonwood is Temstown's most prestigious school. I'd no idea they held slaying classes for their students. What a shocking and entirely pointless skill to teach young people. That Mr Seward sees the sense in ending these lessons is one thing we can agree on.

'So you're complicating my vision,' he says, finding his thread again. 'How can we move on from the recent Contagion when you've just opened a vampire-related business?'

'We *heal* vampires,' I argue.

Buffy nods. 'What you're saying, sir, is you want us to

pretend there isn't a threat from vampires. You want us to lie.'

He looks appalled. 'My dear child, I'm merely suggesting our city is hungry for change. We need to put vampires firmly in the past.'

I feel hot. Shaky. There's another point I'm keen to clear up.

'So if we're done with vampires, you'll honour Mr Helsing's pardoning of our mothers? It's still safe for them to return to Temstown?' I ask.

'Oh, please say it is!' begs Buffy.

Mr Seward hesitates.

'All our mothers did was refuse to slay another vampire, Mr Seward,' I insist. 'They're no threat to you, or your vision for a vampire-free city.'

The expression on his face suggests he doesn't entirely agree but, begrudgingly, he says he will honour the pardon.

'Good.' I give a decisive nod. 'We'll write to them again, in case the other letters got lost in the post.'

Bella signals the visit is now over. 'I'll show you out, sir,' she mutters.

'Thank you for seeing me,' he says with a polite incline of the head.

I didn't think we had a choice. On the threshold, he turns to us one final time with a bland smile.

'I'd like you to remove that sign of yours – today, before people get the wrong idea,' he says.

I bristle. 'And if we don't?'

'Then I'll ask you again, only less pleasantly,' he answers.

I don't like being threatened.

'You'll arrest us, is that what you're saying?' I press.

He reddens from the neck upwards. At last, his temper is starting to fray.

'Keep out of trouble, stop bleating on about vampires, and no one needs worry about anything,' he snaps.

Bella, thin-lipped with anger, escorts him out without another word.

I'm seething. For something to do with my shaking hands, I pick up today's paper and go through its pages. How dare Mr Seward! After all we've done for Temstown already! Buffy, fearing I'll tear the paper, slows my hand when we reach the death notices.

There's only one notice today, which is unusual, as is the fact it's for a teenage boy.

John Keats

Head boy at Poisonwood School
for Boys
Passed away suddenly after class

‘How sad,’ murmurs Buffy.

‘Wonder what he died of,’ I muse. It was probably an accident or a terrible disease, but the fact it’s not mentioned makes me curious.

And it happened at Poisonwood School which, after what we’ve just heard about its slaying lessons, adds to my interest.

‘Aren’t they all on school holidays?’ Buffy points out, because her school broke up for their mid-winter break last week.

‘How could he have died “after class”, then?’ I wonder.

I call to Bella, who we hear closing the front door. When she comes back in and we show her the notice, a blink of dhampir energy passes between us. It’s only faint, but it’s there: a hot, bright flicker. Despite Mr Seward’s threat – or maybe because of it – we agree the death notice warrants investigating.



BELLA, who knows everyone, tells us more about the dead boy’s family.

‘Mama and I dealt with some Keats a couple of years ago,’ she recalls. ‘A double funeral for a husband and wife, killed in a carriage smash. Their son was the only survivor.’

‘Called *John*, by any chance?’ I ask, my interest growing.

‘I think so.’ Bella nods. ‘Though it’s not an unusual name.’

‘But if it is him –’ Buffy’s expression saddens – ‘*then two* tragedies in one family *is* unusual.’

‘Are any of the Keats family still alive?’ I ask Bella.

‘An old aunt, I seem to recall,’ she replies. ‘Who breeds pedigree cats.’