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DRACULA & DAUGHTERS

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ILLUSTRATIONS TO CONTINUE THROUGHOUT

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In memory of Marcus Sedgwick,
whose vampires inspired this story.

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EMMA CARROLL

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MAP TO COME

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THE TEMSTOWN TRIBUNE

STRANGE AND UNCANNY

Temstown is in mourning at the strange and uncanny death of theatreland's most popular star. Miss Elsie Irving, aged 22, collapsed onstage during yesterday's matinee performance at the Lyceum Theatre. At the moment of her death, horrified audience members report that every gaslight in the building went out. Theatre manager Mr Bram Stoker was too upset to speak to the press. Meanwhile, Guildmaster Mr Helsing assures us there is no evidence of Contagion being the cause of Miss Irving's untimely demise.



1.

It's November, midnight: the perfect time to steal a corpse. No stars are out, no moon, only the steady hum of cold, vertical rain to keep me company as I follow the twist of narrow lanes down to the river. I'm as tense as a feral cat. Every sound, every shuffle makes my pulse beat faster. The last thing I need is a Night Watchman on my tail. Grave robbing is dangerous work, especially when the body involved is Elsie Irving's. But when you've a score to settle, only the most famous corpse in Temstown will do.

At the end of the street, the river awaits. So far so good. The ferryman is at our agreed jetty in his rowing boat, ready to take me over the water to the opposite bank. Though I've not told him precisely what I'm up to, there's only one reason anyone crosses the river, and

it's for North Side Necropolis, the cemetery where Temstown buries its dead. The busy, winding, sometimes stinky river acts as a barrier between the living and the dead. It's for our own protection: vampires never cross moving water.

Tonight's ferryman nods me a greeting and spits out a mouthful of half-chewed garlic. It lands with a splat near my feet.

'Evening, mister,' I greet him.

I too have been eating, drinking and chewing garlic all day. Not that I'm expecting to meet a vampire, for it's been twenty years since the last infection. And yet protection rituals remain a way of life: garlic, salt, silver – we're meant to use them every day, though you're more likely to hear people moaning about the price of salt or how sick they are of eating garlic. The man in charge of Temstown is Mr Montague Helsing, whose vampire-hunting credentials during the last infection earned him the title of Guildmaster. So, he's the one who makes the laws that recently seem to be going out of favour. Twenty years is a long time to fear something that's no longer around.

All the same, I'm wary. North Side Necropolis is a desolate place. If the undead are anywhere in our city, it's likely to be there. In daylight hours only undertakers and

funeral mourners are allowed inside its gates, and then only with the right paperwork, and via the river's one road crossing, Salvation Bridge. After dark, the entire graveyard is out of bounds. The Night Watchmen who patrol there are said to ruthless, the sort who'd lock an intruder up on sight and throw away the key.

Our plan is risky, then. I'd rather be home in bed with my little sister snoring beside me. But there's only so many broken promises and unpaid wages two people can stand, which is the situation my pal Varney and I find ourselves in. We've tried bringing it up with the doctor who employs us. Tried pleading, too. Admittedly, I did the talking – Varney's more the quiet, supportive type. When, for the umpteenth time, the doctor batted us away as if we were wasps at a summer picnic, Varney agreed we had to take action, though even he was initially doubtful my idea would work.

'A dead body? Is that a bit *drastic*?' he'd responded when I aired the possibility over our lunchtime cheese sandwiches. 'What if we dig up –'

'– a vampire?' I'd guessed he might say that. He's more cautious than I am: his favourite cheese is mild cheddar, whereas mine's a ripe Stilton which, I think, makes my point.

'Twenty years of no vampires and one happens to turn

up just for us?' I'd argued. 'Come on, V, how likely is *that*?' Though for a second, a chill did seep down my spine.

According to the newspapers Elsie Irving's death *was* mysterious, which increases the risk of her becoming a vampire. But she'd been buried with great care, face down in a garlic-filled coffin, so the chances are slim. Realistically, our biggest danger will be getting arrested, which, I'm terrified to admit, would scupper my dreams of becoming Temstown's first female doctor. But Elsie Irving's corpse is the only way to get Dr Polidori listening. This is our last resort.

And it has to be tonight.



Dr John Polidori, head of the Surgeons' Guild, and the man who should be paying Varney, and training me, carries out anatomy lectures every Tuesday morning – in nine hours' time, in other words. The students – all male – will be learning about the human body from the dissection of a corpse. It's because I'm so desperate to be there that we're going to use the city's most famous dead body as our bargaining chip. Yes, it's against the law to steal a body, but Dr Polidori himself

has done it in the past, albeit with less famous corpses. And actually, he's so ambitious it's a wonder he'd not thought of the idea himself.

'What's your name, kid?' The ferryman is squinting at me.

'Mina, as I told you earlier when I paid you,' I remind him.

He spits more garlic. 'Huh. Almost thought you were the boy, the stable lad.'

I fight the urge to roll my eyes. The *stable lad* is Varney, who's travelling via Salvation Bridge to meet me outside the cemetery gates with a horse and cart 'borrowed' from Dr Polidori. We'll then make our way inside the Necropolis together. Frankly, Varney and I don't look anything like each other: he's half a foot taller than me, with short dark hair and a chip in his front tooth, caused by a horse kick. I'm what my mother calls 'wiry' – small, in other words, and quick on my feet. It's my red hair most folks notice because there's so much of it, all springy and face-tickly, so I tend to keep it hidden under a cap. That, and my trusty black-flannel trousers, mean I'm often mistaken for a boy.

'Ahem, any chance we could—?' I indicate climbing on board. My nerves are kicking in, so I'm eager to get going and the spade I'm carrying is heavy.

The ferryman digs in his pocket for another garlic clove, which he pops into his mouth like a mint, then beckons me on board.

I step down from the jetty on to the boat. A slight trembling begins in my knees when, just at the point of no going back, I wonder if my plan *is* ridiculous. What if we get caught? What if the doctor sacks us? What if we do dig up Temstown's first vampire in twenty years? I take a deep breath. Tell myself it's only nerves. I'll feel braver once I've met up with Varney.

I sit opposite the ferryman. Stowed under his seat is a familiar red tin box: the vampire tin. Every household in Temstown has a vampire tin. We keep ours on top of the kitchen dresser, gathering dust. Inside is a bottle of sacred water, salt, garlic powder, silver nails and instructions on how to fend off a vampire, which, thankfully, is an emergency I've never had to face. Yet seeing the ferryman's tin makes my heart skitter. It's a reminder that tonight I'll be amongst the dead.

'Young girl like you going over the river,' chides the ferryman, as if he's spotted fear in my face. 'It's dangerous. Wish I'd never got talked into it.'

The coin I'd given him earlier did most of the talking, if I remember rightly. Though his vampire tin in my sight line doesn't help steady my nerves. Nor does recalling

Varney's warning over what we *might* dig up.

'Can we just get going?' I plead, before I'm overwhelmed.

With a heave, the ferryman pushes off from the jetty. We're away. The rain has stopped, the night air is cool. The river has an oily, murky appearance, pockets of mist floating above the surface.

Hugging my knees, I try to think nice, silly thoughts. My mother's terrible singing of the sad ballads she loves comes to mind, though the slurping noise the oars make sounds more like my sister, Buffy, when she's eating stew. Buffy would've wanted to be in on the plan had I told her. She'll be fuming when she finds out. But I mustn't feel guilty: our mission's risky and I don't want her coming to harm. I've kept it from our mother, Mar, too, because she'd insist it wasn't safe and I mustn't do it, and I hate going against her word.

The river currents are strong; the ferryman is having to row hard. We pass an undertaker's boat, its black sails limp in the night air as it sails south. It's the only other river traffic we see. I touch the silver good luck charm I'm wearing around my neck, which is shaped like a letter *T* for Temstown. Most people still wear silver because of the long-held belief that it protects against the Contagion, and my little charm feels comfortingly familiar.

'*Sweet silver*, keep Varney and me safe,' I whisper.

In my head I go over tonight's plan one last time. It's my first-ever visit to the North Side so I've memorised a map. The only road skirts the walls of the Necropolis, running parallel to the river. There's a main gate – guarded but unlocked – and a smaller service gate which the gravediggers use. It's here I'm meeting Varney, who should be arriving about now. Together, we'll go in through the gate, find the right grave and dig. Timings are extremely tight. If we're not super fast we'll get caught.

When we near the opposite bank, the temperature plummets. The North Side is famed for being devilishly cold, as if nature itself is warning people to stay away.

'As cold as death,' is how Mar once described it.

The clouds are now thin enough for the waning moon to cast light on the water. The ferryman aims for a jetty downstream from the cemetery gates.

'We're coming in shortly,' the ferryman warns me.



I sit forward, ready to jump out. All too fast, a wooden jetty emerges from the freezing mist. The northern bank of the river stretches beyond it, as dark and welcoming as hell. My pulse picks up speed. Our left oar stills, and with the right the ferryman manoeuvres us alongside the jetty until the

boat grinds against it. He jerks his head, which is my cue to get out. By the time I've both feet on dry land, he's already rowing away. I don't blame him: no one would choose to linger here. The world of the living is behind me, on the other side of the river.

Welcome to the land of the dead.