

Lars Mæhle/Victoria H. Hamre:

The Vamp Family

The Mystery of the Long-necked Vampire Victim

Sample translation by Chloë Williams

1

Everything I'm about to tell you is true. Really. You might not believe a word of it. I mean, the story you're going to hear is completely bonkers so I'd get it. But whatever, believe who and want you want.

The first thing you're not going to believe, but that did actually happen, happened just after midnight one grim, drizzly night in October.

The night before Halloween.

Picture a dark cellar. Black coffins. Huge, skittering spiders. Dusty cobwebs gleaming in the moonlight streaming through the window. Cosy, right? If you look really closely, you can just make out a bat up in a corner of the roof too.

Can you see all that?

If you can, you'll have a pretty good picture of the cellar of the Shine On funeral home in the small town of Hayfield.

It was pitch black. You could hear a pin drop.

Right up until an awful squeaking sound filled the room.

The lid on one of the large coffins was pushed aside.

Slowly, inch by inch.

Two eyes blazed into life, burning yellow for an instant before settling to ice-blue and beginning to adjust to the dark.

Another coffin lid started to squeak too. A small one this time, but it still made a terrible scraping sound that pierced the air.

The noises cut through the night. Over and over again.

Until finally they stopped.

Two small, bright yellow eyes flickered before shifting imperceptibly to ice-blue.

Straight after, a distinguished-looking vampire in a black cloak rose up from the largest coffin while moaning and clutching his back.

Yes, this is *all* true.

The vampire also only had one fang. He glanced around quickly.

“Psst! Victor! Get up!”

No noise came from the small coffin.

“Are you sure, Dad?” A voice finally asked.

“Yes, come on!” hissed Victor’s father, who was none other than the vampire Vladimir Vamp. “We don’t have all night!”

“Are you reeeally sure this is such a good idea, Dad?” asked Victor. “I’m actually ... a bit ... scared.”

Vladimir Vamp took a deep breath, before saying in a quivering voice:

“We vampires have to preserve our traditions and we have to stick together, otherwise the humans will kill us. This is why you, Victor, need to start your vampire training now. There’s no time to waste!”

Victor still hesitated, but finally he pushed the coffin lid a little further to the side. It balanced precariously for a moment before falling...

THUD! Right onto his Dad’s toes.

“OOOOOOOOOOOOWWWW!!!”

Vladimir Vamp started hopping around the cellar on one foot, clutching his toes and screaming like a banshee.

2

Cool, let’s pause there for a sec. I need to explain a couple of things before I carry on.

Vladimir and Victor Vamp lived, together with the rest of the Vamp family, in a small, white, two-storey brick house. It was right next door to the funeral home. One day, seven years ago, Vladimir and his older sister, the extremely dangerous Veronica Vamp, dug a tunnel underground – leading straight in here.

From the house next door, that is.

It was a big job, but it was worth it.

Since then, the cellar had been Vladimir Vamp’s bedroom. Every day after the funeral home closed at 5 p.m., he crept in – and went to sleep in one of the coffins until midnight.

Vladimir Vamp was incredibly proud of this idea.

“Absolutely unparalleled genius!” he often boasted.

Well, until he started boasting about something else. That’s a typical vampire thing too, by the way.

They’re always bragging and starting competitions about *everything*.

In the olden days, they used to arrange Vampire Games in Transylvania and even Olympics in some vampire stuff. They competed in events like:

- blood-sucking (for example, most blood from a single victim (world record: 8.23 litres) or most victims in one night (Transylvanian record: 82));
- longest time outdoors on a sunny day (world record among living vampires: 15.7 seconds);
- sleeping in as many coffins as possible in 1) a night, 2) a week and 3) a coffin-swapping marathon (a year);
- eating as much garlic as possible without fainting (Count Dracula's record of 7 ½ cloves is still unbeaten);
- and so much more.

Basically, vampires love competing with each other. In everything, no matter how big or small or stupid, as long as they can turn it into a competition.

Vladimir's sister, Veronica Vamp, had crowned European champion in "merciless, blood-soaked blood-sucking attacks" no fewer than fifteen times.

Vladimir Vamp himself had been awarded for his "beautifully ironed and starched cape collar".

See what I mean?

Anyway, seven years ago the Vamp family were living in Transylvania and the reason they left was as horrible as it was painful. Vladimir Vamp had found out that his family – his family, no less! Typical! – had lost their ability to create new vampires.

Perhaps you've heard of that? That when vampires suck the blood from victims, the victims themselves become vampires? After a few days in a coma?

In any case, the Vamp family had, on some branch in the family tree, lost this ability. When Vladimir Vamp sunk his fang into his victims, they fainted, sure enough, but then they revived again after a few days, still completely normal humans.

He couldn't stop wondering why.

Were his family not proper vampires either? Maybe just half-vampires or something? Or was it because he only had one fang?

On the other hand, his sister, Veronica Vamp, had two fangs.

But she couldn't manage to turn victims into new vampires either, even though that was the tradition among vampires.

It was a major embarrassment.

In fact, it was such a big embarrassment that the Vamp family, at that time seven years ago when this discovered this dreadful problem, decided to leave Transylvania.

They didn't initially know where to go.

They travelled around Europe for months until they finally found a small town in Norway – Hayfield, tiny, boring and just right – and also really far away from Transylvania.

It was the perfect hiding place!

The other vampires would never uncover the family's secret or tease them about their awful vampire-defect somewhere like this.

Or so they thought.

Well. Vladimir Vamp wasn't exactly a picture of terror that night either as he limped around the cellar, howling loudly in a squeaky voice and cradling his foot.

Eventually he sat down on one of the coffins and blew on his toes, moaning all the while.

"Sorry, Dad!" whispered Victor Vamp.

Vladimir Vamp let out an enormous groan. Finally, he stood up again. He ruffled his son's hair, gritted his teeth and said:

"No bother. Shall we still go out on our first bloodsucking hunt?"

Victor Vamp looked anxiously down at the floor.

"You can just watch this time," Vladimir Vamp assured him. "But next time you have to bite a victim's neck yourself."

Victor still looked worried. Vladimir Vamp bent down and rested a hand on his son's back.

"What is it?"

Victor peered cautiously up at his father.

"Is blood actually nice?"

Vladimir Vamp slowly got up and licked his lips.

"There's nothing better, son. Absolutely nothing. Let's go!"

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OK. Hang on a minute. How do I know all this?

That's right. That was *my* Dad who got a coffin lid on his toes.

Vladimir Vamp is my father!

I heard the yelps all the way up in my bedroom, on the second floor of the white brick house next door. I heard everything they said because vampires – in case you didn't know – have really good hearing.

I was in a completely normal bed. Not a coffin. I only knew that there was some funny business going on.

Obviously I couldn't get back to sleep after that and lay there straining my ears for any sounds.

Right up until I finally fell back into a restless, troubled sleep sometime around dawn.

So there I was, dead tired at the breakfast table, poking at a bowl of cornflakes while reading the newspaper with increasing horror.

Typical!

Dad had been out on the hunt again.

When would all this childish vampire stuff stop? Didn't he realise that we could be exposed?

I shivered and couldn't bear thinking any more about it. I was running quite late too.

"Veeeeraa? Have you remembered to pack your lunch?"

Yep, that's my Mum, Vigdis Vamp. Really nosy, but otherwise fine. Pretty tough too, or at least more so than the guys in my family.

"Got it, Mum," I sighed and poured out a spoonful of cod liver oil before she could nag me about that as well.

Mum poked her head, with its mass of curls, around the kitchen door. She's quite short for a vampire, but she has seriously huge muscles. Her muscles are way bigger than Dad's, for example, he's long and thin and bony. Mum also has really cool curly hair that blooms around her head like a bush. I've inherited my curly hair from her, as well as my muscles, which are pretty big. Victor got the curls, but he also got Dad's spindly build.

Mum was also late for her job at the chemist's in the shopping centre in town.

"And the amulet?"

I lifted the little gemstone from where it lay on my neckline and showed her it.

Mum breathed a sigh of relief.

"You can never be too careful, you know, Vera."

Yes. That's my name she was calling.

My name is Vera.

Vera Vamp.

I'll be 12 on 23 December and yes, I'm also a vampire.

Unfortunately.

And that amulet I just mentioned? It literally saves my life.

Believe it or not: it's a magic amulet.

It is really true that vampires can't stand sunlight, but as long as I'm wearing this amulet, I'm protected from turning to stone in the sun, like a troll in a fairy tale would.

It was actually a wizard goldsmith in Transylvania who once made twelve of these amulets. He gave six of them to our family as presents. The goldsmith guy was related to – or was it in love with? – Mum.

"It's raining bats and frogs outside today!" Mum called from the hall.

"Yeah, Mum, I can see that!"

"Don't forget your waterproofs!" Mum nagged. "And your umbrella! And your woolly underwear!"

"Woolly underwear? But it's at least..."

Before I could finish, the door banged shut.

"... four degrees outside."

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Right at that moment, Victor came into the kitchen. He was practically dragging his feet across the floor. His curly hair, which he normally tried to smooth back, was sticking out all over the place.

He looked absolutely wrecked.

I scowled suspiciously at him.

"What's going on? You look dead on your feet."

Victor wrestled his face into a small smile, but he didn't say anything.

That was when I saw it.

"Wait ... you've got ... blood on your chin!"

Lightning quick, Victor licked off the tiny fleck of blood.

"Oh no, don't say that," I groaned.

"I'm not going to say anything," said Victor, like only an annoying little brother can.

"You went along on the hunt last night! Has Dad really started vampire training with you?"

Victor shook his head quickly.

I cocked my head to one side. Victor slumped down in front of me.

"OK, yes," he groaned. "I went on the hunt, but I was only allowed because you don't want to go. Dad's really disappointed in you, you know."

I counted to ten in my head before just about managing to say, in a low voice:

"There's a reason I don't want to."

“What’s that?”

“It’s rubbish being a vampire! Rubbish, rubbish, rubbish!”

Victor crossed his arms.

“It actually isn’t though. Sucking blood is soooo cool, Vera! You should try it!”

Oh. My. Days.

I took a deep breath.

“I’ve said it a thousand times before: I just hate all this vampire stuff! It’s just so ... naff!”

“Naff? No, it’s not, it’s so cool! Blood is actually really good, you know.”

“Ugh! It’s so disgusting.”

I was up and running now. I couldn’t stop myself, and I completely forgot the time.

“I mean, biting people’s necks and sucking their blood?” I exclaimed. “That’s what vampires were doing in Transylvania a trillion years ago.”

Victor started fiddling with his amulet.

“Oh, come on, real vampires still suck blood now! I didn’t actually bite a victim myself though. I just tasted a little bit of blood from the wound Dad made. I mean, it was only the first lesson, but it was soooo good! I swear!”

I shook my head dejectedly.

“I just don’t get it. Wouldn’t you rather be a normal person? Like Mum and me?”

“We vampires have to preserve our traditions, you know,” Victor said. “And we have to stick together. Otherwise the humans will definitely kill us.”

It was like hearing an echo of the rubbish Dad was always coming out with.

I decided to try a new tactic: outsmarting Victor.

“How are you going to manage at school today, then?” I said. “Since you’ve been up all night. You’ll be asleep before the end of the first class!”

Victor tried to stifle a yawn.

“It’s no problem, sis! I can do both.”

Just then an icy blast flowed through the room.

5

A second later a terrifying figure stood in the kitchen.

It was a woman, thin, elegant and very tall, over 6 feet. She had short, slicked back hair, just like male vampires do. Unlike them, though, she didn’t have a black cape, but a

purple one. Her fangs came well past her lower lip and were the family's preferred length (8.5 cm) and clearly extremely sharp.

It was, of course, Aunt Veronica.

The real question here was: how on earth had she got in?

It was always like this with Aunt Veronica though. She would just suddenly pop up, completely out of the blue. Without any of us understanding how. Or why.

The worst thing about Aunt Veronica was her eyes. They weren't light blue like mine or Victor's, but a startling light green.

Her eyes could see straight into your soul.

In short: she was the scariest of all the Vamps.

Smart. Merciless. Dangerous.

Veronica, quite rightly, had her amulet around her neck. She must have waited until Mum went to work before she came in. She avoided Mum whenever she could.

Mum and Veronica were bitter enemies.

But Veronica being here now at all could only mean two, no, three things: 1) trouble, 2) that she was challenging Dad to another stupid competition, or, most likely: 3) both.

I glanced at Victor. My little brother, who earlier had been so boastful and tough. Now his face was a chalky white unusual even for a vampire.

Veronica studied us carefully before plastering a fake grin on her face.

"Good morning, my delightful niece and nephew!"

"Good morning," Victor and I mumbled as we stared down at the table top.

I waited for the silence to break, for Veronica to announce why she had come, for instance. But she didn't say anything.

That was such a *her* thing to do. She just loved psyching us out. On top of everything else, I was, as you know, late.

Suddenly I found some courage and said:

"Why are you here now? We're just leaving for school."

A short, wicked laugh burst from her mouth.

"Bah, school!"

She laughed as though she was spitting.

"Where's my good-for-nothing brother?" she asked.

"Er..." Victor cleared his throat. "Dad's resting. Er... we were actually out hunting last night."

Veronica ruffled Victor's hair, hard. It looked like it hurt.

"Excellent, Victor! You're coming along nicely!"

She turned towards me.

"What about you, Vera? When will you start your vampire training?"

I tried to meet her gaze, but I couldn't.

"I don't know," I said, feebly.

"I can train you myself, if you'd like. Not to brag, but I trained some of the most bloodthirsty vampires in all of Transylvania!"

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