



Definitely Not a Fairy-tale.

W-Day

Cyma Rizwaan Khan

V-DAY

*Cyma Rizwaan Khan*

My name is Antaeus Keppocke.

Yes, I wish that were a joke too, *every* damned day of my cursed life.

And when you're a vampire that's a whole lot of days.

My mother must have been high on some sixteenth century equivalent of Xanax when she titled me thus. When you name your child after a grotesque gigantic creature known for slaughtering hundreds of innocents for the sole purpose of entertainment (okay so they were illegal immigrants who entered his realm) you must have a slight idea how that would turn out.

I never figured out whether my mother did it out of spite towards my absent father or to piss off her prissy parents. In truth, the details of my childhood are hazy. For one thing, vampire turning is like a bloody Chernobyl incident. Your body becomes this nuclear reactor and more often than not there are alterations in the process.

For me, it was memory loss. Another vampire friend I have lost his eyesight. Eternity as a blind bat is hardly construed as attractive. Women like it even less. In any case, I think I got off easy. People think they know about vampires but I bet there is a lot you still don't know. For one thing, have you ever met a vampire named Bob, or Johnny or Drew?

No. It's always something exotic-sounding and on the verge of being archaic: *Lestat* or *Louis* or *Edward* – have you never bothered to ask yourselves why? Why would someone in their right mind go around carrying a name like *Count Dracula* when the only purpose they have in life is to remain inconspicuous, so they can continue dining on Keanu Reeves blood?

Yes, I know who Keanu Reeves is.

First thing I did when I came out of confinement in 1999 was watch *The Matrix* at the big screen. It was where I had my first real meal – an oily young girl with pimples sitting beside me with a bag of popcorn twice the size of her head. It wasn't an accident that I had followed her inside the cinema, but the fact that the seat beside her was empty was something I took as a sign. Sadly though, I was dragged into confinement again – long story – so I never really had a chance to get to know that era much.

The one other thing I remember doing was grabbing hold of all Keanu Reeves movies and having my very own marathon. I sat through *Bram Stoker's Dracula* well enough but found myself asleep halfway through *Speed*. And before I knew it, I was caught and sent back to confinement (again, some other time). Now I have woken, out of nowhere, my last memory that of a very bulky vampire hauling me into a grave and throwing me into a coffin. Of course after that I don't remember much.

I am pretty sure they must have drugged me. Not just any drug though. Over the course of the past few centuries, vampires have developed a kind of magic potion – something you can drink to fall into a deep sleep. There are ways to *wake* you, but when you go to sleep there is really no telling when you would wake and this is exactly what was happening to me. Two days, two years or two centuries? That was the question. You wonder why vampires would need such a potion? Well that's because being a vampire is no more fun than being a human I assure you.

At times, you want eternal life, and other times, you want to just give it all up and quit. Vampire suicides are so rare because vampires now have a way to go to sleep, with a substance we call 'potion'. Yes, I know that's not very creative but you know how it is. I am not in the manufacturing business. I would have to acquaint myself with the nomenclature of magical compounds to have a say in something like that and I never quite had time for that, being the busy vampire that I always was.

Anyway, as I was saying, every once in a while when it becomes too much, vampires hibernate in a coffin. But in my case it was different. I had been *potioned* without my consent. That's the only conclusion I can come up with. But the question now is how long have I been sleeping this time? And yeah, as I was saying (I have a tendency to sway from the topic at hand), why do you think you've never met a vampire named Drew?

Well, there is this law.

Turning into a vampire is like signing a supernatural contract and like any contract, there are *clauses*.

And there is the fine print.

And one of those asserts that no matter what happens vampires cannot change the name given to them by their birth parents.

*Even* if you are stuck with a name like Antaeus Keppocke.

That's just regulation, along with many other rules that one has to follow. In any case, I was just trying to get back to my senses, nerves hungry and pounding with lack of sustenance. I barely had enough strength to stick my hand through the wood of the coffin and cause it to split, and when it did, dank earth filled my mouth. All those centuries and I still get dirt in my mouth every time I break open a coffin from inside.

I almost retched, spit the earth that reeked of ammonia and made my way through the structure. Fresh breeze greeted me on my way out and even though I just had a taste of dog urine, I found myself feeling enthralled by the simplest thing nature had to offer – air. I raised my arms to the sky (us vampires have a flair for theatrics), closed my eyes and just breathed. Breathing for vampires isn't the same as it is for humans, but the feeling of relief is quite mutual I must say.

I think I was laughing, when I hear from a corner a kind of squeal. Thinking it must be a rat, which would be a start at this moment to fill my hunger, I turned in the direction of the sound. Instead of a rat, what I saw made me feel embarrassed and happy at the same time. Embarrassed, because it was a human; a sorry, junkie excuse of a human, but a human nonetheless, and I remembered the entirety of the melodramatic display he must have had to witness just now.

What must have gone through his mind to watch a six foot man come out of a grave, and put his hands to the sky in an overzealous gesture of jubilation? But I was happy too, because beyond his skin I could feel the warmth of his blood – flowing inside him was my food for the day – food that I hadn't touched for who knew how many years. He was looking at me with eyes wide and dilated, skin translucent under the delightful glow of the moon.

He was pale and looked as if he hadn't eaten for days. But it would not be safe to go out in the open without knowing where I was or what time it was, or without having my meal first. I needed the strength. As much as I hated feeding in the graveyard (I am really more of a wine and dine person), I had to do it. I went up to him and his body was locked and trembling in fear. Then he tried to touch me. I think he wanted to see if he was hallucinating.

I cleared my throat to speak my first words after such a long time. "Hello," I said. He just stared at me, speechless. I think he started drooling a little from one side of his mouth as his jaw dropped even further. Not a pretty sight. But then, not most humans are. "I am a vampire," I said. And then wondered why I said it. Vampires, I suppose, are no less narcissistic than humans.

"Can you tell me what year this is?" I asked out of sheer curiosity.

"You don't know what year it is?"

"Kind of a dull question to ask someone if I did, isn't it?"

He seemed to understand. "2013."

From 1999 right down to 2013 – it felt a lot like time traveling.

"I suppose you also want to know the exact date?"

I smiled one of my sheepish smiles at him. "If it's not too much trouble--"

"January 15."

So the year had just begun. "Are you going to drink my blood?" he wanted to know. I think I had expected him to be a little more afraid of me and his casual tone was a tad bit frustrating to my ego. "Well, I was planning on it, yes." He wouldn't stop with the staring and it was making me nervous.

“Are you going to *glamour* me and do it?”

“*Glamour* you?”

“Yeah, you know, mind control?”

“I am a vampire. Why the hell would I need to mind control you when I can do this!” I grabbed him by the shoulders and sunk my teeth into his flesh, right around the artery in his neck. Even in my most unfed state I was more strength than he could take. And a little anger never hurt. But he wasn't much of a chase. He wouldn't even flinch as I went ahead and drained the blood out of him. I couldn't tell if it was shock or the Dilaudid.

For those of you who don't know, draining blood is a very tedious procedure and takes longer than most people would think. Since this was my first feed after a while I think I went a little overboard. We stood in this awkward posture for a long ten minutes at least. When I finally broke away, he was already dead. I dumped him into the same grave from which I had come and proceeded to move into a new world: 2013.

If you think the hangover from tequila shots is bad, wait till you've had junkie blood.

It was as if someone was playing a very annoying guitar riff in my head and the amplifier was blaring right inside my eardrum. I couldn't believe I had been so stupid. But then how could I have known – I had never had a junkie before this. If only someone would write a damn manual on vampire feeding. But they won't.

There are endless works of so-called fiction, talking about whether or not vampires exist but nothing to just cut the crap and come right down to the point. Why can't people write books for vampires for once? I mean, what they don't deserve to be target demographic just because they feed on people? That's kind of racist won't you agree?

In any case, I had so much to do, so much to figure out and now this hammering wouldn't go away. I tried to drink coffee, in an attempt to appeal to my human side, but nothing. Now I was going to have to live with this for the rest of the day. So much for all the plans – all the excited rampages I had planned through the new universe I had only just discovered.

And now all of a sudden it was sit-inside-the-house-with-a-headache day instead.

Then I found what is known as a remote control. Pardon me for sounding naïve but I was very much awake around the eighties. I just couldn't stand the stink and decided to go underground only to come out in 1999. So my only view to the world was a black and white television set in a dingy apartment of the person I had just fed on. I knew there had to be color television in the world of course, I had seen enough color screens in the video store.

But obviously that poor chap I had fed on, was actually poor. He had a worn out toaster oven serving as a kitchen.

Anyway, the point is if there is one invention that humans have truly excelled at it is the remote. I mean that's what technology is supposed to do right, make you a slob? Well no one knows that vampires actually prefer dining on slobs. They eat all the time and they have the tastiest blood – it's like feeding on a meat burger. You may be tempted to inquire how I know what a meat burger tastes like.

Well vampires CAN eat – contrary to popular belief. And they can find the taste in food. They just can't rely on it for nourishment. I realize this is becoming more like an information manual than a memoir isn't it? It's just I feel these little bits of information can be helpful to humans and vampires both.

Humans, because they learn more about their predator and vampires because they wouldn't have to go into lengthy speeches about *their kind* when they are doing their *predator* bit. They would

no longer have to be all sensational before devouring someone's blood. Anyway you must know I wasn't planning on staying here much.

I just needed enough time to get the junk out of my system. I have to get to the Swiss Alps or something – this normal city life just isn't for me. But first there is something very important that I must accomplish. And that has a lot to do with why I was in the coffin in the first place.

Looks like you all are in for yet another story – and this one is going to be a flashback so bear with me.

It was 1999.

People were still dressed like idiots.

Come on, the puffy sleeves, the whorey make up and the space hair didn't tip you off?

So there I was, thousands of years old, high on human blood and looking for a way to make my life better. And how do I decide to do that? I join the vampire government. Well politics may be right for some people but I should have stayed away from it. I think in the beginning I was caught by all the importance I seemed to have. People were respecting me and they were curious about what I was doing, what I was going to do.

And I, sparked by the adrenaline of my new found vampire morals, started thinking about the impact I had on my society. I realized vampires don't have to be the monsters that they are. So what if they have to feed on people once in a while? That doesn't mean they can't be respected. I started thinking of ways to make things better. I started talking about using blood bags and death row inmates as food instead of average human beings.

What I didn't realize, was that the vampire government wasn't looking for a change. They wanted conformity. I had mistakenly assumed that no one before me had thought of all that. Suffice it to say I got kicked right in my undead face. It was disturbing and it was annoying. But I was so high on principles I decided I would go against whoever tried to go dark side. I think I may have become something of a resistance leader. I had followers – vampires who believed in what I was trying to achieve.

And then they put me in a dark dungeon of sorts and tortured me. Yes, vampires can be tortured. You just need to know how. Perhaps we'll talk more on that for a next memoir. And yes this is a marketing gimmick – for those of you who are still in their diapers. I want you to be so engrossed in reading this memoir that you are bound to read my other books. And judging from all the bookstands I passed on the way to here, vampire fiction is selling like cinnamon rolls. Well I know it used to be hotcakes but piping hot, sticky cinnamon rolls seem more appropriate now.

Well, as it turns out, the vampire government who had thrown me into an eternal torture cell didn't want to get slowed down by keeping a vampire holding cell for too long. Eventually they got tired and wanted to get rid of me. They didn't kill me – killing a fellow vampire is serious business – and even vampire governments cannot do it. That kind of thing is only for The Council – an hierarchy of *original* vampires. The first-borns – ones from whose loins the entire vampire population came forth – okay so perhaps the loin bit was a tad extreme but you get the gist.

In any case when they got tired of me they decided to dig me a grave. In retrospect that wonderful berry tea could have been a distraction for *potion*. I should have been more guarded but naiveté is my middle name.

No Kidding.

It's Antaeus Naiveté Keppocke.

And for the last time I DON'T know what my mother was smoking.

It is when you see sparkling vampires on television,

that you realize just how much the world has changed, how truly pathetic it has become. I rather like the fact that women are so into vampires though. I suppose if it wasn't for *Sparkly the neighborhood vampire* that would not have been possible and I have to send out my regards to whoever made that sorry excuse of a movie. Also, I must say I like the new 'woman' better than the old one.

Say what you will about 'decency' but I happen to be a fan of skimpy tube tops and really short skirts. Womankind is the true essence of beauty – and what is more wonderful than to be able to experience that magnificent beauty wherever you go. I mean how amazing is it that you could be in Wal-Mart and your eyes could be feasting on a particularly heaving bosom.

Before it was all perversion and stay indoors and have unscrupulous sex with concubines or cabaret performers but that's all changed now. Even good honest women will have sex with you now which is great. *One small step for man one giant leap for mankind*. I was browsing through the horror fiction section of the bookstore, minding my own business, looking for a light read, just to – you know – entertain me along the way.

And that's when I saw her.

Hovering over at the Self Help section, there she was – legs long and lean in a lovely sundress, holding a copy of *EAT, PRAY, LOVE* in one hand and awkwardly browsing through something titled "*KNOW YOUR CHAKRAS*". There was a window right next to her that spilled sunlight on her beautiful skin making it look radiant. I just remembered – did I tell you vampires can now walk in the sun? It's true.

We have a kind of tattoo – well okay it's more like brand than a tattoo but *tattoo* just seems cooler. In any case, it is a kind of magical brand – it keeps us from that whole Ash to Ashes thing. As long as that mark is on us, and we have blood in our veins we can stroll in the sun as much as we want. Again with my tendency to waver from the point at hand–

She looked beautiful, that's what I'm trying to say. You just have to take my word for it without my having to express how truly blue her eyes were or exactly how much heaving her bosom did. I am new to being an author so cut me some slack. So while I was only realizing the height of her loveliness, she had walked off towards another part of the store while I was left there, holding a Sookie Stackhouse novel in my hand.

I stashed the novel back, and went after her.

Valentines Day is all about finding the right window of opportunity.

Ask her out too soon, she will probably find someone else better than in the next few days and you will left all alone, sipping merlot in a gargantuan glass from IKEA watching True Blood reruns pretending you're Eric Northman. Invite her too late and she will already be in her teddy bear PJs watching every movie Bradley Cooper ever made and you would just be a nuisance at that point. I mean not even I can compete with Bradley Cooper.

And now that I had already graced the world with my presence and Valentines Day was coming near, I had to have my shot at gooey chick flick style romance. So I arrange for her to have a meet-cute with me in a not-so-chance meeting at the local café. If it wasn't for the barista's exotic dark looks I would have had half a chance too. But no. At about the moment that I decided to pour my sugar on her (accidentally of course), the barista decided to offer her free coffee and his phone number on a napkin.

I ask you, how old is that routine right?

So I had to actually rev up my act.

I followed her and when we were at a place where I didn't think getting slapped by a woman would be such a big deal, I called her by her name.

“Briana!”

She stopped. And then she turned in my direction.

“Can I help you?”

I looked at her, momentarily mesmerized by her human beauty.

“My name is Antaeus” I said. “I'm a vampire and I think I have fallen in love with you.”

She looked at me for one instant disbelieving. Then she saw the little quirks on my physique – the cold pale skin and the dreadful puffy eyes.

She waited a long time to answer.

“Okay,” she said. “But you're not going to kill me or anything are you?”

*Thank you Pattinson.*

Women are a lot more complicated than what romantic comedies will tell you.

They will decide days ago that they want banana toffee cheesecake when they go to so-and-so restaurant and then, right when you're about to order, they will take a complete half hour to choose something entirely different. And that's not all. Even when they order they will ask to make some *tiny* alterations. How they went from banana toffee cheesecake to apple strudel and how apple strudel managed to have berry bits instead of apple is beyond my understanding.

But they are also incredibly fun.

They could be just sitting there, quietly watching the lights go by in the car and you will feel a kind of closeness – a kind of connection that only a woman can make you feel. They are just fabulous at making you feel good about yourself too. Or at least Briana was. I was having a lovely evening and she had been kind enough to compliment by old world manners and vintage clothing. She was just the loveliest person I have ever met. So she couldn't tell Noam Chomsky from Aristotle but then what.

Intelligence isn't the only thing that makes a personality.

Okay so part of it had to do with the ample front of her dress – if you catch my drift. Suffice it to say a corset would have been perfect on her. She was lively and fun and she drank a lot. We decided to take a walk as the evening progressed. And that turned out to be my folly. From out of nowhere it seemed, four vampires came around us, and cornered us into an alley. They were all flying and fangs and vampirey – hoping to scare the living daylights out of my new human mate.

“You should have been smarter Antaeus,” I heard a familiar voice speak to me.

It was William – the one who worked with the vampire government and had abducted me.

“William,” I said my tone scathing. “You need to *leave* – now!”

Instead of scaring him the line made him laugh.

“Oh my God you are such a genuine little thing,” William said, taking the fangs away and standing down on the ground. “Aren't you going to introduce us to your girlfriend?”

“Not really.”

William laughed.

“Hi,” he said in the general direction of Briana and held out his hand. “I'm William. Actually Antaeus here owes us something – don't you Antaeus?”

And that's when I remembered.

Pardon me but like I said I happen to have a memory issue. Ever since I have turned there have been times when my memory had simply vanished, without telling me. I sometimes have one of those revelation moments – when the memory does return.

This was one of those moments.

“I don't know what you're talking about.”

William came towards me and grabbed my jaw.

“I'm sure it will come to you,” he said, jerking my head away.

I couldn't possibly fight four vampires, especially when one of them was much older and stronger than me.

As I stood there, hoping he would leave, William turned and walked towards Briana.

“If you remember Antaeus,” he said. “Call for me.”

And then he vanished.

William is too quick a vampire even for other vampires. We are nothing in strength and agility in front of that powerful demon.

And then I realized why William had gone off without any bloodshed.

They had taken Briana.

Briana was bait.

It's the simplest method. Take something I want to get something they want.

But what they wanted wasn't something simple – they wanted the entire future of the vampire population in their hands.

There was actually another big reason that the vampire authorities were mad at me. I was in possession of this artifact – an ancient thing but very powerful. It is a ring that a witch put a curse on. It is this curse which can kill every vampire on earth. The person who possesses the ring and wears it, also has the power to use it for his or her evil purposes.

Now, according to the records this ring should be nowhere near any vampire's hands and only The Council should carry it. But somehow, William and his friend Athena, who is another powerful vampire, both found a way to steal the ring from The Council's vault. I don't know the details of their operation but I did find that out many many years ago.

When I was in the dark hole that they held me in, I realized there was this one particular place which they guarded more than their lives. I was sure that was where they kept the ring. So I talked to someone and bribed someone else to get a friend of mine to steal it from them. Granted they could have also helped me escape but that would have been too obvious. A ring gone on the other hand, people barely even notice.

Since William and Athena were working against The Council already it was obvious they would not have much help. So basically I know where the ring is – I know who has it – I just don't think it would be a walk in the park to go get that thing from him.

After all he is a vampire slayer.

“For goodness sake I’m a vampire slayer!” Rodney yelled.

“At least allow me some respect. Don’t just fly uninvited into my home like that! What if someone had seen you?”

“Rodney you know I have good eyes,” I told him, trying to assuage his fears.

He still seemed uncomfortable.

Rodney is fifty four and he has some mental disease where they become all paranoid. Granted he spent his life as a vampire slayer which calls for a bit of paranoia but Rodney does sometimes overdo the whole thing.

How Rodney and I became friends is a long story.

Well okay so it’s not that long and I basically just saved his life from a vampire.

I suppose that’s somewhat brave but you know how I am.

Brave is my middle name.

Okay no actually that’s not true and I already told you Naiveté is my middle name but you get the drift.

So I saved his life and we had a drink together and we become best friends.

Probably not best friends but well, friends.

“Where have you been all this time?”

“They poisoned me Rodney,” I told him. “I just woke up.”

“So why are you here?”

“Okay here’s the thing. I was just hanging out with this girl, and well, you know its Valentines Day – and I wanted to just show her a good time. And William and his guys pounce on us. They took Briana – my date.

“Now they want me to give them the ring in return.”

“What ring?” Rodney said but his own memory gave him the answer. Understanding fell all over his face.

“Yes,” I said. “*That* ring.”

“But isn’t that basically like handing them out invites for mass vampire execution?”

“Yes,” I said. “That is why I have come to you. I want you to do your vampire slayer thing and get the girl from the bad guys.”

“I’m fifty four!” Rodney yelled. “I can’t bring no princess back from the dragon’s mouth.”

“Wow,” I said, not expecting this. “I was really hoping you’d go all slayer mode on their behinds.”

“Yeah well that aint happening.”

I thought about this.

“I can’t give them the damn ring,” I said. “It’s like signing every single vampire’s death warrant. William and Athena have some major earth shattering plan up their sleeve which can’t be good for humans either.”

“You know what,” Rodney said. “Present trumps future. Go save the princess right now. You can save the world later.”

Many many hours later, I was fishing the ring from some dingy old gravesite.

Rodney had dumped the ring here just in case. At first he couldn't even remember the right address. Vampire slayer types tend to burry a lot of crap. I had imagined he would get all dangerous stake-y demolisher when I turned up but he barely looked up from his bottle of rotgut.

All the while I wondered if I was even making the right call.

Briana could leave me tomorrow and I would be over, but the ring will never leave me. And yet, I kept picturing her face in front of my eyes every time I had second thoughts. And please since I am not a human do not expect me to go all heroic and save a *human life*.

No one does that anymore.

I told myself I had to think rationally but it just wouldn't work. My mind was still being dragged down by her beautiful melodic voice and her luscious brown hair. I couldn't live in a world where there was no Briana. Yes vampires do fall in love easy I suppose – haven't you read all those vampire novels?

Like I said fiction is hardly ever fiction.

And then my hands touched something soft.

The black shiny velvet of the ring pouch was beautiful with those real-diamond designs. I opened the pouch to reveal the ring, and it was a thousand times more breathtaking than the pouch.

But Briana as it turned out, was more breathtaking than diamonds.

“Let her go,” I said. “I have what you want.”

“How about I see the merchandize first?” William asked, his face all evil and annoying.

Briana was in the arms of one of William’s side kicks, her mouth gagged and hands tied in front of her. Even in this moment, her hair a mess and make up running down her face, I felt as if she was the most beautiful creature in the universe. I took out the small velvet bag from the back of my jeans.

Even as William saw the diamond markings on it he was stunned. “Here it is,” I said, waving the pouch at him. “Now let her go and you can have this.” William waved to his sidekick. Apparently the signal meant let her go, which he did. He untied her hands and removed her gag.

She came towards me, afraid, her steps cautious and the minute she was close to me she came into my arms. I cannot explain how amazing that felt – her body wrapped against mine like that – it was the best feeling in the world I tell you. I was glad I had chosen her over some century old artifact.

“Now hand it over,” William said.

I threw the pouch towards him and he caught it – vampire vision and all that.

When they were gone, Briana looked up at me.

“Why did you give it to them?” she asked like a true heroine.

“Because they would have killed you.”

“But what about the whole vampire execution thing?”

Obviously they had been talking to her.

“Cross that bridge when we come to it.”

“Why’d you something like that Antaeus?”

I smiled. “Because I want to celebrate this V-Day and every other V-day henceforth with you and only you, my love,” I said, in true vampire old-fashioned essence.

She hugged me even tighter.

*THE END*