

# One: Sandor's Daughter

## **Excerpted musings taken from Caoimhe Gavril's current journal:**

I first saw this quote on a coffee mug in a gift shop: *If you love somebody, set them free. If they return, they were always yours. If they don't, they never were.*

Its confetti-like sprinkling of roses and hearts laughed up at me in loud derision. The trite saying on its side mocked me without remorse. I don't recall the year; it could have been within the past two years or the past twenty years for all I know. What I do know is that it was close to Valentine's Day because everything in the store was blood red. Cupids grinned down at me from their lofty perches on store shelves. Over my head, paper hearts swayed in the breeze created by the heating ducts on the ceiling. A smiling stuffed bear clutched at a balloon which read: I love you beary much!

Disgusted, I marched out of the store, nearly knocking over a tray of heart shaped sugar cookies. I have never liked Valentine's Day. I guess I'm bitter. Old and bitter. I am undoubtedly unlucky in love, always the bridesmaid never the bride. You know, that sort of thing. I have been single for... Let's just say a really long time and leave it at that for now. I'm in one of my strange, dark moods at the moment, and the quote on the mug seems appropriate for the situation I currently find myself in.

Who would have thought I would ever get desperate enough to capture a man, hold him against his will in my apartment for weeks on end, and then decide to set him free? I certainly never expected that of myself. I am lonely, yes, but really it is quite insane when you think about it. I am not insane, I assure you. I do have my pride to consider as well. I am sure my pride had something to do with my decision to set him free.

Part of me wants to be an optimist and think he will return to me one day and proclaim his undying love for me or something like that. Oh, how nice that would be for you, Caoimhe, I tell myself. My name is Caoimhe by the way, if anyone but me ever reads this. It's an old name, but it's easier to pronounce than spell. It's pronounced Keeva and I'll spell it that way from here on out to make it easier for you. But I've strayed off my topic – which was probably intentional now that I think of it. I miss him so much, and I've been trying to distract myself with other things.

It's ridiculous for me to miss him this badly. I'm trying not to think of him too often, which is hard to do as I sit here in my apartment where his delectable odor still permeates the air. The pessimist in me says that he never will return because he hates me as much as I love him. Why would a vrykolakas, who is over three thousand five hundred years of age, fall in love with me anyway? Did I forget to mention he isn't an ordinary man? He is not human by any definition. No, I had to go fall in love with a vrykolakas of all things!

What do I think is so special about me that he would care to give me a second thought? Especially after what I did to him; I did try to kill him at first. Even if I hadn't tried to kill him, vrykolakes are incapable of feeling love for anyone other than themselves. What was I thinking? I mean, I don't live in a fantasy world where vampires or werewolves fall in love with beautiful maidens! That sort of thinking will get you killed or worse if you believe that. That is why my initial reaction toward him had been violent.

I think my rage against him was justifiable given the circumstances. He had recently killed my best friend, Mandy. She is the first person who has meant anything to me in a very long time and he killed her. How was I supposed to not be angry?

I wanted to kill him at first. I took him home with me and imprisoned him instead. Then, admittedly, I fell in love with him, and eventually I set him free like the rosy coffee mug advised me to do. He promptly fled from my presence after I drove him to a dark, deserted place outside of town. I haven't seen him since, which is no wonder since I warned him not to come back. Yet, here I sit wishing he would.

I really should get out of here, leave my apartment for a while. The longer I stay here the more my heart aches for him. Who am I kidding? Myself, that's who. Love and vrykolakes do not go together.

Once again I ask you, what was I thinking? How could I let myself actually feel affection for a vrykolakas? They are utterly conceited, utterly selfish, and altogether wicked beings. They don't love anything or anyone but themselves. Yes, he pretended to flirt with me, whispered sweet nothings to me when I came to check on him. He even kissed me once. He manipulated me, trying to get me to loosen his bonds – or something. I don't know. He's a clever one. I knew he didn't mean any of it, but still...

I remember so vividly each time I spoke to him. His smooth voice dripping with typical vrykolakas conceit, but so tantalizing. The way his lip curled in a sneer when he was speaking. The taste of his lips on mine when he kissed me, and his aroma which still lingers in my apartment.

Now however, as I ponder what I have done, how I let him walk away that night so alive and well, I am worried. What if – What if something really awful happens because of it? That is stupid of me to say. Of course something really awful will happen because of it. Someone will die. He is a vrykolakas after all, and he feeds on the life force of humans. I let him walk away into the night!

What will Sandor say to me when I tell him what I've done? What will he do? It has been a long time since I have made him truly angry. Yes, I fear he will be exceedingly angry with me over this.

Sandor is my dad. I haven't seen him in over three months. Yes, he calls me – weekly, like clockwork. What are you doing, he always asks me. It is his way of being an involved parent I suppose. We talk for half an hour or so. Then we both go back to living our lives – our very, very long lives.

We parted ways two centuries ago. We didn't have a falling out. I simply wanted to go one way and he another. Once, I was content to go wherever he went. Maybe whatever I am takes a long time to mature, and maybe I finally matured enough by that point to finally exert an independent will of my own. I don't know; it's just a theory. I think it confused him at the time, maybe even hurt his feelings a little, but we didn't argue about it. We agreed to meet up again at a specified place at the close of a year's time apart. He worried about me the entire year we were apart of course. I think I shall always be a child in his eyes, no matter how long I live. My brothers grew into men and he acknowledged that at the time, but as for me, I have always been little Keeva even if he doesn't address me in such a manner anymore. I know in his heart he sees me as his little girl.

In those days, when we were first living apart, there were no cell phones. In fact, there were no telephones at all. We wrote letters back and forth to each other during those early years of my willful independence from him. We had to travel by horse or carriage to see each other and that took a long time. Now, a simple plane flight and the Internet can make it feel as if we are not living so far apart.

Sandor is roughly the same age as my beloved vrykolakas whom I recently set free, give or take a few years. My beloved vrykolakas' name is Severin. Sandor and Severin were once brothers. There is no blood relation between them however. "Brothers" was simply an ill concocted metaphor for their relationship to each other. They were no more brothers to each other than a cat and a horse are of the same species. But they do have a colorful history which they share, and it isn't a pretty one. When I say colorful, think red, blood red like the Valentine's Day decorated store I mentioned earlier – blood red, but don't think of love in connection to that color.

They hated each other. Actually, hate is an understatement for how they felt toward each other back in those days. Doubtless, their animosity toward each other has not diminished over the years they have been apart. Oddly, their relationship wasn't always like that. They were friends for a brief time – quite brief actually.

Over the years, Sandor has told me his life story, the early part of which includes Severin. Because of that, I felt like I already knew Severin before I ever met him – well, captured him. He was a frequent antagonist in Sandor's stories. It is curious that I fell for him fully knowing the stories about him that I do. I'm not the type of girl to fall for the bad boy, not at all, and Severin is so much more dangerous than a bad boy. He makes bad boys seem like newborn kittens in comparison, all hiss but no defenses.

Until recently, it had been a mystery to me and Sandor whether or not Severin had survived the volcano eruption some several thousands of years ago. It is still a mystery to Sandor because I have not told him that Severin is alive and well. Sandor never saw his old enemy again after that eruption. He has said many times in times past that he hoped Severin and the other vrykolakes perished during that time, if not in the eruption, then in the tsunamis and the earthquakes which followed afterward.

That eruption occurred on the island of Santorini where Sandor was born; it was called Strongili at the time. Severin is originally from Athens while my father is Minoan. That reminds me of a funny story.

Once, when I was living in New York, I was riding home on the subway after a particularly grueling day at a book signing I was doing. The previous year I had written a New York Times bestseller titled *Death Mask*, but the sequel, *Memento*, was not doing so well. I think it was because Agatha Christie's *Curtain* stole my limelight. Who can resist a Hercule Poirot novel?

My agent was beside himself and set out to right a wrong which he felt had been committed by my publisher. I have long since decided that no one in particular was to blame, except for myself perhaps. I didn't put my heart and soul into that second novel. I was ready to move on to something else.

That's me, the ever restless Keeva. Shortly thereafter, my agent had me scheduled for multiple book signings as well as television and radio appearances. Sandor didn't approve of the latter two public appearances as he is always after me to keep a low profile wherever I go in the world. I was writing under a pen name: Greta Vanhorn. What more could he expect from me? I needed an outlet for my thoughts at the time and writing did that for me.

Besides, I had never yet met even one vrykolakas, and with the pen name I had taken, I felt that I was being reasonably safe. Truthfully, at the time, I had decided that since I had never encountered a vrykolakas in all my long years, they truly must have all perished from off the face of the earth long ago. I thought Sandor was being silly, overprotective as usual. Now, I know better.

So, I was sitting there on the subway, trying to not think about the next day's full schedule of more book signings and interviews. I could have taken a taxi that day or a limousine; it wasn't as if I couldn't afford it. But the subway made me feel more in touch with humanity, I need that from time to time even if I'm not human.

I rested my head on the window glass with my eyes closed. I heard a rustling, shuffling noise followed by a deep sigh. I opened my tired eyes and saw this harried looking little man sitting across from me. He was grading a handful of term papers with the dreaded red Bic pen. The sheen of his brown polyester suit was subdued only by the sheen of sweat on his round face. He tugged at the garish, yellow tie which appeared to be strangling him. It had been spattered by something he had eaten for lunch, it looked suspiciously like ketchup. His earlier attempts to blot it left an awful brown smear. It was beyond help now.

His stubby fingers dropped the red Bic which rolled toward my left foot. I retrieved it for him.

"Thank you." He smiled grimly over his black rimmed glasses which had slipped down his nose.

"You're a teacher," I remarked. I didn't really care what he was. I tend to babble when I'm tired.

"Yes, a professor at City College actually. Ancient Greece. Not that you're interested I'm sure, no one is really, least of all my students." He gave his head a small shake of disdain.

"Oh. Actually no, ancient Greece is fascinating. My father is Minoan as a matter of fact," I said.

He laughed heartily at this; it was slightly nasal sounding, part wheeze, part whistle. He shook so much from laughter that he had to push his glasses back up on his sweaty, red nose. He looked at me as if I had the I.Q. of a gnat.

"I think what you mean to say is that your father is from Crete. The Minoans were an ancient civilization which predated the Greeks," he said.

"No, my father isn't from Crete. He is from Strongili. You might know it as Thira or Santorini."

"So your father is Greek, eh?"

"No, like I told you, he is Minoan."

He raised his eyebrows and said, "He must be very, very old then. I have some colleagues who would love to speak with him. There are several questions we would love to ask an ancient Minoan, several questions he could, no doubt, clear up for us."

"Oh, I don't think he would be comfortable with that at all. He's not shy exactly. But talking about his past makes him uncomfortable. The volcano eruption on Santorini was traumatic for him, but his life there even before the eruption was not good."

The professor chuckled, looking at me over the top of his glasses that didn't want to stay in place on the bridge of his nose. "You have a strange sense of humor, young lady."

I shrugged my shoulders indifferently and turned my attention back to the window. Sometimes it's nice to tell a complete stranger the truth, even when they think you are a lunatic. That exchange happened back in the early 1970s prior to the decline of the psychedelic drug movement. He probably thought I was strung out on something and so telling him that my father is Minoan was harmless. Sandor wouldn't have thought so, which is probably why I never told him that story, but he needs to lighten up and stop worrying so much.

You may be wondering why I call my father by his given name. I am not trying to be formal, chic, disrespectful, or any other reason a child calls her parents by their given names. It has been a long time since I called him Daidi, or as you might say, Daddy. The reason I call him Sandor most of the time is for practical reasons.

My father does not look like a three thousand five hundred year old man. I suppose we should all be thankful for that. Rather, he looks to be no more than twenty-two years of age. At least, that is what most people peg him as. It still irritates him that he is carded every time he wants to enjoy a glass of wine with his dinner. His current driver's license says that he is twenty-five. He likes twenty-five for some reason. It's his favorite age to pretend to be. I, on the other hand, am partial to the age of thirty. I cannot say why exactly. It's to be a nice round number.

Sandor has nothing to complain about however, because I do not look yet to be twenty; although I passed that mark over two thousand two hundred years ago. My how time flies! I say I am partial to the age of thirty, but no one would ever believe me if I tried to pass myself off for that age. Sandor may get carded, but I often have truant officers looking suspiciously at me during the school hours of the day.

It would seem odd if I went around calling Sandor, Daddy, in public settings, and so I call him Sandor most of the time. We tell everyone that we are brother and sister. We favor each other enough for people to believe that we are. I have his eyes, or so I was told by my mother, although mine are green while his are as blue as the Mediterranean Sea. We share the same smile as well. Where we differ is in hair color. His is light, wavy brown while mine is dark, almost black and straight. His nose is nice and straight while my own slightly curves up at the tip. His face is narrower than my own; I have my mother's rounded jaw line. In all, he is movie star handsome, and while I am not ugly, I am merely pretty, not beautiful by any means. But we favor enough to convince everyone that we are brother and sister instead of father and daughter.

Last night he called me. It was his weekly call. He never misses it, though sometimes I, being the bad daughter, am sometimes away from home when he calls. I know he will call my house every Thursday at eight o'clock p.m. We didn't schedule this time; Sandor scheduled it without consulting me at all. I'm usually home at that hour anyway. It is a school night after all, and like the responsible seventeen year old high school senior I am currently pretending to be, I should get to bed early on a school night.

But sometimes I like to exert my independence. I am two thousand two hundred twenty-three years of age after all and I can go out when I please. I don't have to hang around the phone every Thursday night if I do not choose to. I always call him back when I miss a call night. I'm not that bad of a daughter. He could call my cell phone, but either this has never occurred to him or he prefers to talk to me when he knows I'm within the safe confines of my apartment. It is probably the latter explanation. I know he worries constantly for my safety.

"What are you doing?" he asked, as usual.

Sometimes I dream up an elaborate answer such as: I am parasailing in Catalina.

I have actually parasailed more than once by the way; it is quite exhilarating. It brings back childhood memories of happier, easier times.

When I am in a darker mood I might say something like: I'm contemplating my demise.

He hates my dark moods. Last night was definitely a dark mood; but I was scared too and didn't opt for a witty or dark answer to his customary question.

"I'm finishing a report for my government class," I answered.

"Well, that doesn't sound very exciting," he commented.

"No, but it's thorough, and my teacher might learn something if he bothers to read it."

"Tell me again, Keeva, why did you want to attend this school? With all your talent and capabilities, it seems like such a waste of time."

"I don't know. Perhaps to recapture my lost youth, get a fresh perspective, that sort of thing."

"And are you doing that? Have you been successful in that endeavor? I'm just trying to understand this strange mood you've been in lately."

I could tell that he was worried about me; it makes me feel guilty for some reason. He has never known how to deal with my frequent bouts of depression. He wants to fix me, or make my sadness go away, much the way he would have kissed away my tears when I was a child and had fallen down and scraped my knee.

But Sandor cannot fix what is wrong inside of me. I feel alone and disconnected from the world around me most of the time. I try to engage in the world around me, but I can't ever seem to find the place I belong. I do keep trying. I haven't given up on the idea of living, really living one day.

Sandor never gets depressed. He gets absorbed instead. Absorbed in whatever has captured his interest at the time. He has tried just about every activity available to mankind and once he has run the gamut, he simply starts over again. He is particularly fond of archaeology and architecture however. At the moment he is employed as a promising young architect for a large architectural firm in Washington.

He told me the amount of money he requested for a starting salary before they offered him the job. He had been joking with them in his peculiar way, not overly interested in working for that particular firm. He made an astronomical demand for someone supposedly fresh out of college. He had actually already made up his mind to work for another firm when this firm called up and accepted his salary request. They accepted his demand and didn't try to negotiate it down.

But that is Sandor for you; he has this magnetism about him that causes people to want to be near him. He could be the modern day King Midas. I don't think he ever feels lonely. People line up for the opportunity to be his friend.

On the phone with him that evening, he had asked if I had been successful in my attempt to recapture my youth.

I said, "Me, successful? Never. I'm not sure if that's even possible. Unlike you, I never get the results I want with whatever I'm endeavoring to do at the moment. My efforts are always frustrated."

"Keeva, that's not true and you know it," he began, with gentle concern in his voice.

He would have continued with his pep talk, but I cut him off. I said, "Sandor, I need to see you in person. Can you get away from work and come here to see me?"

My abruptness caught him off guard. He said, "Yes, of course, I'll fly out as early as possible. Are you all right? Tell me what is wrong."

I chewed my nail. I hadn't been this nervous in a long while. "I'm fine. Thank you for coming on such short notice," I said.

"Can you tell me what this is about?" he asked.

"No, not over the phone, I need to speak with you in person."

Part of me wanted to tell him what I'd done right then and there, but I needed to see his face when I told him about Severin. I needed to visually gage how upset with me he would be. I was in agony over the whole situation. I still am. I dread seeing him, seeing his reaction to my news, my blatant stupidity of the past few weeks.