

WOLVES ARE BLUE



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#1 BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *ROSES ARE RED*

Chapter 27

I FINALLY HAD A LEAD, courtesy of Tim, Jamilla's contact at the *San Francisco Examiner*. The chase was on, or so I hoped. The next morning I drove up Route 101 to Santa Barbara, which is located approximately one hundred miles north of L.A.

It was sobering and a little depressing to watch the sky actually grow bluer as I traveled away from Los Angeles and the copper-gray cover of smog spread thickly over the city.

I was to meet a man named Peter Westin at the Davidson Library at the University of California, Santa Barbara. The library was supposed to contain the most extensive collection of books on vampires and vampire mythology in the United States. Westin was the expert who had been recommended by Tim. She warned me that Westin was thoroughly eccentric but a definitive source on vampires past and present.

He met me in a small private sitting room just off the library's main reading room. Peter Westin looked to be in his early forties and was dressed completely in deep purple and black. Even his fingernails were painted a shade of mauve. According to Jamilla, he owned a clothing and jewelry shop in a small mall called El Paseo on State Street in Santa Barbara. He had long black hair streaked with silver, and he was dark and dangerous looking.

"I'm Detective Alex Cross," I said as I shook hands with Westin. His grip was strong, lacquered fingernails or no.

"I am Westin, descended from Vlad Tepes. I bid you welcome. The night air is chill, and you must need to eat and rest," he said in overly dramatic tones.

I found myself smiling at the prepared speech. "Sounds like something the count might have said in one of the old Dracula movies."

Westin nodded, and when he smiled I saw that his teeth were perfectly formed. No fangs.

"In several of them, actually. It's the official invitation of the Transylvania Society of Dracula in Bucharest."

I immediately asked, "Are there American chapters?"

"American and Canadian. There's even a chapter in South Africa, and in Tokyo. There are several hundred thousand men and women with an avid interest in vampires. Surprise you, Detective? You thought we were a more modest cult?"

"It might have a week ago, but not now," I said. "Nothing surprises me much anymore. Thanks for talking to me."

Westin and I took seats at a large oak library table. He had selected a dozen or more volumes on vampires for me to read, or at least leaf through.

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"I especially recommend Carol Page's *Bloodlust: Conversations with Real Vampires*. Ms. Page is the real deal. She gets it," he told me, and handed over *Bloodlust*. "She has met vampires, and records their activities accurately and fairly. She started her investigation as a skeptic, much like yourself, I expect."

"You're right, I'm very skeptical," I admitted. I told Peter Westin about the most recent murder in Los Angeles, and then he let me ask whatever questions I wished about the vampire world. He answered patiently, and I soon learned that a vampire subculture existed in virtually every major city as well as some smaller ones, such as Santa Cruz, California; Austin, Texas; Savannah, Georgia; Batavia, New York; and Des Moines, Iowa.

"A real vampire," he told me, "is a person born with an extraordinary gift. He, or she, has the capacity to absorb, channel, transform, and manipulate pranic energy — which is the life force. Serious vampires are usually very spiritual."

"How does drinking human blood fit in?" I asked Peter Westin. Then I quickly added, "If it does."

Westin answered quietly. "It is said that blood is the highest known source of pranic energy. If I drink your blood, then I take your strength."

"My blood?" I asked.

"Yes, I would think you'd do nicely."

I recalled the nocturnal raid on the funeral parlor north of L.A. "What about the blood of corpses? Those dead for a day or two?"

"If a vampire, or a poseur, were desperate, I suppose blood from a corpse would suffice. Let me tell you about real vampires, Detective. Most of them are needy, attention seeking,

and manipulative. They are frequently attractive — primarily *because* of their immorality, their forbidden desires, rebelliousness, power, eroticism, their sense of their own immortality.”

“You keep emphasizing the word *real* vampires. What distinction are you trying to make?”

“Most young people involved with the underground vampire lifestyle are merely role-players. They are experimenting, looking for a group that meets their needs of the moment. There’s even a popular mass-market game, *Vampire: The Masquerade*. Teenagers especially are attracted to the vampire lifestyle. Vampires have an incredible alternative way of looking at the world. Besides, vampires party late into the night. Until the first light.” His lips curled into a smile.

Westin was definitely willing to talk to me, and I wondered why. I also wondered how seriously he took the vampire lifestyle. His clothing shop in town sold to young people looking for alternative trappings. Was he a poseur himself? Or was Peter Westin a real vampire?

“The mythology of the vampire goes back thousands of years,” he told me. “It’s present in China, Africa, South and Central America. And central Europe, of course. For a lot of people here in America it’s an aesthetic fetish. It’s sexual, theatrical, and very romantic. It also transcends gender, which is an attractive idea these days.”

I felt it was time to stop his spiel and focus on the murders. “What about the murders — the actual violence taking place here in California and Nevada?”

A mask of pain came over his face. “I’ve heard Jeffrey Dahmer called a vampire-cannibal. Also, Nicolas Claux, who you may not be familiar with. Claux was a Parisian mortician

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who confessed to murders in the mid-nineties. Once he was captured he took great pleasure in describing eating the flesh of corpses on his mortician's slab. He became known all over Europe as the Vampire of Paris."

"You've heard of Rod Ferrell in Florida?" I asked.

"Of course. He's a dark hero for some. Very big on the Internet. He and his small cult bludgeoned to death the parents of another member. They then carved numerous occult symbols into the dead bodies. I know all about Rod Ferrell. He was supposedly obsessed with opening the gates of hell. Thought he had to kill large numbers of people, and consume their souls, to be powerful enough to open up hell. Who knows? Maybe he succeeded," Westin said.

He stared at me for a long moment. "Let me tell you something, Detective Cross. This is the absolute truth. I believe it's important for you to understand. It is no more common for a vampire to be a psychopath or a killer than it is for any random person on the street."

I shrugged. "I guess I'd have to check your research statistics on that one. In the meantime, one or more vampires, real ones or maybe just role-players, have murdered at least a dozen people," I said.

Westin looked a little sad. "Yes, Detective, I know. That's why I consented to talk with you."

I asked him one final question. "Are you a vampire?"

Peter Westin paused before he answered. "Yes. I am."

The words cut through me. The man was completely serious.