Sasho's Tale:

My name is Aleksandr Philipou. I am not like you.

Once, I was; my people call themselves the Virehnai. No matter how unlike you we may be, all of us started out *just* like you.

We are very old, created by old magics. We are not born; we are made. The magic that made us, lives in our blood.

A man called Diotimus Artimidorus made me Virehnai. I fought alongside him in a war called the Peloponnesian War, between the city-states of Athens and Sparta. I fought on the side of Athens. We lost that war; I gained *this* life after dying on a battlefield soaked with the blood of brave men.

What I have is not so much immortality, as it is an extraordinarily long life. I can be killed. I have both seen and done things during that time that human men only dream of. What did it cost me? It cost me *everything* I held dear. My wife. My children. My human life.

I gained this life at the total loss of my old one, as does any of my kind. It is the nature of being Virehnai.

I'm no longer human as you are; I no longer eat as I once did, as you do now. I endure by consuming blood, either by hunting people such as yourself, like I would an animal – which I am loathe to do - or by making agreements with those willing to provide me the blood I need. Everything comes at a cost, true; but what you gain often replaces what you lost. You would think that is where my story starts – but friend, you would be wrong.

My life changed dramatically when I went with my sire to an Inn called Focaria Rubra, in Zurich, when it was a Roman outpost. My sire, Dio, took on an errand for a Sethari of another Clan, then named Alban Casimir, head of Clan Casimir; he owned the Inn. We stopped there on the way to Prague, and he asked us to deliver a message in route. It was a courtesy we all did for one another. We delivered his message. While in Prague, we were asked if we were willing to return by way of Focaria Rubra to deliver a package to Alban. That's why we stopped there on the way back, to deliver his package. He inquired where we were headed next. We would be meeting up with my brother Michel to travel on together to meet with Vibia Sabina, who as a human had once been an Empress.

We stopped at the Inn only to deliver Alban's package. A blizzard kept us there longer than we planned. A party turned into a massacre – and I was part of the Tribunal that ultimately found three Virehnai, including Alban Casimir's own son, Tobias, guilty of killing fifteen humans and eight Virehnai.

While staying there during the blizzard and before that damnable party, I got lost. I ran into a man who looked to be in his fifties; his Virehn age was significantly older than I. He appeared to be Assyrian. The man seemed frightened to see me. I apologized for startling him, and tried to ask him for directions. He scurried away, back into the room he came out of, and hastily shut the door. It was an alchemy workshop, from what I could see before he shut the door; though I didn't need to see it to know what it was. I have a nose! It had the acrid smell of alchemical tinkering.

I found someone who could redirect me. The snow eased, and our trip continued where we met up with Vibia. Our wanderings finished for a time, Dio, Michel and I parted ways, and I went home, to Wallachia. Not long after, the fighting began. It was 'the war' then. Only once I awoke would I learn it came to be known as the Fourth Virehnai War.

People said after the war ended that I had a hand in causing it; much in the same way history sometimes blames a mother or father for the sins of their son. Some later said that I was purposely dabbling in politics. Others said I was trying to engineer a dominant bloodline, and find a way to create a human dynasty, a Virehnai dynasty…or both. Most thought me irresponsible, meddling in matters I shouldn't, or at the least, I accidentally created a Virehnai royal line across Europe.

They were all wrong.

Here is my truth, whether you choose to believe it or not. I loved my Virehnai family. I loved my human family. It was that simple. My Clan family was my strength. My human family kept me fed. I loved them all. I did my utter best to keep them ALL safe. Occasionally, I would turn a human because I couldn't bear to lose them, in the way I lost my human wife and children. History may see it differently, but history isn't necessarily the truth. History is merely the story that was repeated oft enough that it became the tale best known; history is seldom the truth of a matter. Often, truth is inconvenient. Acknowledging something that others would judge harshly or view in a dim light actually IS the truth usually skins someone's soul raw, whether they are Virehn or human. We hold that in common. Rather than chance feeling uncomfortable, they hide the truth from their heart, soul and mind instead, preferring the relative comfort and safety of a lie.

Am I an irresponsible monster simply because of who I loved and couldn't bear to lose? I'll let you be the judge of that. I know what my answer was. Even now, I would choose the same way.

After the war ended, there was a Tribunal; it was a formal Inquiry, by a committee made up of Virehnai and bloodsworn alike, looking to pinpoint the causes of the war and try those responsible. As a result, they jailed a bloodsworn son of the Basarabi line for the crimes he committed, along with several Virehnai, who used horrible magics through their blood witches. The names of the Virehnai, you would be hard put to remember. The bloodsworn human? His 'crimes' were actions born of passion. I didn't agree with all the choices he made, or how he carried those choices out. The one thing he made me understand during his time in jail was that there were too many conflicting loyalties; so many, in fact, that navigating them safely became impossible. One man, subject to royal oaths demanding

loyalty, action and obeissance; to Human oaths (both royal and familial) clashed directly against Virehnai oaths, and there were conflicting oaths and duties even between Virehnai clans he owed obeisance to. He was in an untenable situation; from whatever view you chose. In a game of chess, it would be called 'zugzwang.' I used that term when I spoke to the committee on his behalf. Zugzwang is a funny sounding word, that the more I thought about it, the more I realized it means 'fucked.' Why? You can't skip your move, but any move you make would put you in a worse position than you already are; you try to figure which is the 'less worse' position and choose THAT – only to discover that you are back in the same situation, again…only worse. Zugzwang. The playing field itself becomes your enemy. The Virehnai word for this condition came about because of my testimony: Val'morath. It means 'fucked by fate.'

For a time, I thought I might be tried before a Tribunal myself, to sit alongside my human kinsman, Vladimir Draculesti, called Tepes. I wasn't. I was called only to testify. They would've preferred I condemn him, rather than what I did, which was speak on his behalf. There were many who would've killed me then and there. Cooler heads, such as Vibia's, prevailed. I went home to Wallachia. Later, she called us all to Bran Castle. Vibia had devised a "Compact" that she promised would bring peace, at last, to all. She wanted us to hear her out. For Vibia, whom I knew, loved and trusted, I left the safety of my home, to travel to Bran, which could potentially be dangerous, particularly after the war, and after the Tribunal.

I never made it there. Blood I drank around the fire made me sleepy. I woke up bound in the dark, and it was then I realized I myself had been Zugzwang; Val'morath…Fucked by fate, only I didn't know it, and never saw it coming. Before Alban Casimir's men locked me into the tomb, I asked why. I could only guess that Alban was angry that I hadn't faced a Tribunal for 'my role' in the war, despite his own son had faced a Tribunal – and should be dead right now.

I was *so* wrong.

It was the man I had seen five years earlier that I had startled. Virehn zuth akret. The man I'd seen was a 'ghost.' He was an alchemist, and Alban Casimir faked the man's death. I'd seen the man and his workshop. They were brewing concoctions using both Virehnai and human blood, mixed with various other substances. As I sat, bound in the dark tomb, waiting for the gnawing, inevitable hunger to take hold, I realized that the carnage and the horrors of that night were likely induced by one of his concoctions.

Alban was afraid I would realize that and feared other things he was making – that were more forbidden still – would be discovered.

I was simply a loose end, one that was about to be tied up. I was out of moves and waiting for checkmate.

My life? My friend, my life truly began the day I awoke from an 800-year sleep – in a strange land, surrounded by strangers – except for three. One was my brother. He goes by the name Michel now. I have never been happier to see him. Another was a very young, newly made blood witch, named Kiera. Without Kiera, I might not be here, or more importantly,

here, and relatively unscathed. A Virehn can endure the long sleep…but the longer you sleep, the more likely your brain will be addlepated, effected by lack of sustaining blood for too long.

The other? The other is an angel. MY angel. I endured that tomb, unable to escape for 800 years. First, I felt a gnawing, aching hunger, which consumed me unto madness. Desperate, I tried drinking my own blood, to no avail. Finally, I went into hibernation. I dreamed. My soul, no longer anchored to my body by magic, was free to wander. A face filled my dreams, as time washed over and around me like a stone in a fast moving stream as I slept for centuries.

My angel wasn't simply a figment of a broken mind held in stasis. My angel is real; she has a name. Her name is Elaina Jacoby. She was sired by my brother Michel. That I saw her before she was born, either as a human or Virehn; that she saw me as she ascended…fills my heart with joy. Do you believe in a God, my friend? I didn't. I do now. I thank Sabazios. I thought when Diotimus made me, Sabazios turned his back upon me, so I turned mine in response. Yet here I stand, whole and with a future. I don't know what that future will hold for me, but I know I won't face it alone. I have my angel.

I look around me and see such a different world than the one I left. There are still political waves from my time swirling all around us. My biggest fear is that I'm still playing that damned chess game; that the board is yet my enemy, and someone might still want me dead. This fear took on more significance after I learned that Alban Casimir and his son were recently killed by means of treachery prior to my Awakening, and they learned through means of magic that it goes back to that damned party at Focaria Rubra.

What I have now that I didn't have before is my Angel. When she stands beside me, while I fear I'm still standing on that same place on the chessboard, I don't fear being Val'morath, or Zugzwang anymore, if I am. I have cheated the quicksands of fate; maybe I can overturn the damned board and begin again.

Can the mere presence of a person act as a talisman against harm? Once, I would've said no. Now, it feels like truth.

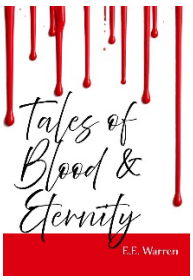
Her love is full of hope and speaks of power. Her body, lying beside mine, makes my blood sing. As old as I am, that my blood has learned a new song leaves me hopeful.

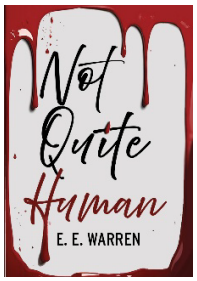
That is enough for me, particularly after the coldness of the tomb.

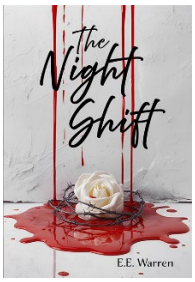
If I rose from hibernation only to fall and meet my maker, I will thank them – for sending me my Elaina and letting me live long enough to bask in the glory and joy of her presence and her love.

As I said, my friend, that is enough. For the first time in my long existence, I am complete.

I hope you enjoyed Sasho's Tale, from "The Virehnai Chronicles: Blood and Eternity" Series. Interested in more? Check out the other titles in the series!





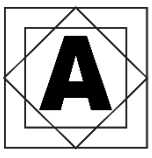


Tales of Blood and Eternity is the prequel novella in the series, that starts it off.
Not Quite Human is Book 1.
The Night Shift, Book 2, is scheduled to be released in February 2026! Look for it soon.
Blood Witch, Book 3, will be out during Summer 2026.

All are available on Amazon.com (in print, Kindle and Kindle Unlimited), as well as online at Barnes and Noble.

If you'd like updates to know when more books in the series are coming out, sign up for my mailing list!

My website is http://www.homehearthmagic.com



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