

Black Rush

By Frederick Louis Richardson

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Chapter Five

By midday the vampires strolled along the National Mall side by side wearing the wet look of black urban chic.

The children of darkness, splendidly spooky, moved with the poetic rhythm of the city, their bodies elegantly flowing together in bizarre synchronicity.

Darkly absorbing, Isaiah and Aisha Zacharias didn't seem real, because they could only be real in a movie.

Beyond the low slung Jersey barricades surrounding the Washington Monument, they swaggered on to Constitution Avenue toward the National Museum of Natural History.

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Not open for public exhibition, the mummy's tomb held the elemental bearing of some irreducible essence, an archeological African treasure living in Death, the fossilized construct of a human being whose likeness seemed that of a ghost.

Whatever had stanced the flow of blood from circulating through its reticulate veins had left the baldheaded corpse frozen in Death. The antiquity of a sunken face, the flesh shaded from bodily decay yet with that haunting sense of life, possessed teeth sharp as a scalpel and slightly serrated.

Sekou Thomas, the African American reporter for the *Washington Courier* thought the dead seemed quite alive, the flesh somehow glimmering on the bones.

Closely, he studied the cadaver enshrined like a victim of mythology. Slowly he circled the mummification, astonished by those vacancies in the empty eye sockets. They reflected a band of light that seemed to shift position like a cat's-eye gem being turned, communicating a creditable sensation of someone staring back.

"This will blow dust off centuries of unwritten history in a very primitive world." Dr. Brewster Webb's sea-green eyes twinkled, as he tailored his remarks to tutor the young journalist on this ancient ruin.

A particularly hardy man, the long lanky locks of a red dirty mop crowned his unusually large head with the heavy scruff of a fiery beard wreathing his boyish grin.

The chief consulting archeologist for the Department of the Interior, Dr. Webb's expertise on skeletal biology and human mummies sanctioned him to describe the corpse as an undamaged Homo Sapien adult male.

He pointed out how after the rains came in the village of Popo Bobo, a dam had given up its hold on a small lake and an ancient grave emerged.

"This will have the modern world gleaning for insights into what diseases, parasites and viruses it may carry. And even what food it had eaten."

Bedazzled by the mummy's apparent preservation, it seemed eerie to Sekou that the mummy's tissues could somehow endure the unstable environment of equatorial Africa.

"Dr. Webb, if this mummy wasn't preserved on some icy mountain peak, then how did it become freeze-dried?"

"We're not sure, Sekou. We're still waiting on radiocarbon dating to determine when the remains had been buried. It's probably older than Methuselah. It's definitely the most complete and best preserved of any mummy ever found. And in better condition than any I have ever seen."

"Do you know how he died?"

"No, not so far, but we're hopeful that analysis might give some details on the mummification as well as the cultural life during that period in Zwetoland. This is why we're having the remains sent to the SCNTI."

"Where?"

"SCNTI...the Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer Institute."

"Why wasn't the gravesite in a place where natives could mourn?"

"We don't know. I could guess, but I'd only be speculating."

"You think the deceased was a kind of ritual sacrifice?"

"No, I don't. I think probably some inveterate royalty or a dignitary of some sort."

"What about earthenware or pottery or statuary? Anything?"

"The tomb was empty."

"Wouldn't there be treasures lying around to appease the gods?"

"Not if the mummy was considered a god."

"Who do you think this thing was?"

Hunching his shoulders, Webb said scientifically he had no clue as to how this withered, shrunken corpse might flow into the Zweto culture.

"Judging from the greegree found around the mummy's neck—it's amulet, like a tiny ansate cross—I'd say the defunct might be the mortal deity who reigned in the first century of the Zweto Empire. He's often referred to as *'the Devil's noble benefactor.'*"

“Who might that be?”

“The name has no honest translation.”

“Roughly.”

“In the Zweto language it roughly translates as *Mosquito*.”

“Mosquito? Why was he called that?”

“Because the mosquito is a bloodsucker.”

“I don’t get it?”

“The Mosquito was a vampire, specifically the Vampire King. Who knows, maybe the greegree was holding some evil at bay.”

“Funny...you know to look at this thing he could have died a few weeks ago. Something about it looks *frozen*, rather than dehydrated.”

“Well, there may be some truth to what you say. The organs never shriveled even though some desiccation did occur.”

“The organs are *intact*?”

“We even got the contents of the stomach....”

“Are you serious?”

“And there’s blood in the heart and lungs...in fact, enough collagen protein to derive DNA information. We got it sitting in a petri dish.”

“What will you be looking for?”

“We’ll be mining the blood for genetic gold. It’s probably holding some vital clues, so we’re going to have to—”

“*Clues*? To what?”

“To solving the riddle of the Zweto Empire.”

“You mean that thing about cannibalism?”

“Well, we know the Zweto aborigines were not hominids throwing rocks. Oral history has it that the tribe succeeded as a civilized society. They were cannibals and did perform some human sacrifices long before the European invaders arrived in Africa—then inexplicably swept away by the most lunatic craze in unrecorded history.”

“You’re talking about *vampirism*? But if they were cannibals....”

“It’s a distinction with a clear difference. The evidence is anecdotal that they indulged this dark belief, driven mad by excessive admiration of human flesh and blood. The mania apparently endured for centuries. The DNA analysis might show that they were afflicted by some pathology—possibly a vampiric disease.”

“Like porphyria?”

“Possibly.”

“So in the meantime without a written record we’re stuck with this fable about vampires and vampire kings.”

“The history of the Zweto aborigines is written in whispers and silence that can’t be quoted.”

“Which is your way of saying what?”

“True history, Sekou, is a mystery.”