

Crimson Stains on a Black and White Smile

By: Ben Davies

Young Carter Fenrot has always had a fascination with veins; even as a baby, he clung to the hands of his mother and father to feel the blood being pumped through. Carter was a mischievous child, always biting the stuffed animals and examining the blue, faded ribbons on his classmate's arms. When Carter was a young man he decided to open one of these passages and see what miners traveled through these parts. Holding his mother's knife handle, the point left a trail across the back of his hand, and red ran free toward his wrist. Adrenaline took over at the smell of the iron river, and his tongue passed smooth across the crimson gate he'd opened so persistently. The warmth crawled down his throat, and as it struck his stomach with new experience, he felt satisfied. He began to feel dizzy, and the blood pooled at the crook of his arm.

At birth he was considered a curious child, with absolutely no medical problems, but that changed when they saw him growing at a slow rate. He was taken into the doctor to see what was going on, and they were told he had a deficiency of protein and iron. The doctors advised them to feed him more meat, and sure enough he grew stronger. Carter's diet for large amounts of steak, pork chops and chicken climbed through his childhood. Steak, weeping tears of blood and fat became his favorite; he enjoyed squeezing beef between his fork and plate, forcing streams to shoot out over the tablecloths. By Carter's 18th birthday, August 19th 1805, he was bored of his own rose water, and decided he needed to move on to harder, more precious blood. Carter's sanguinary reign had already grown unruly and tiring, but one woman kept him sane.

Her name was Mykah Beowin, and she was the slightest step from perfection. Her father, Heinrich Beowin, was an angry drunk with a fetish for burlesque, and nothing about Carter pleased him. As she approached Carter's barstool on a mid-August night, her stretch-satin skin and long, brown hair that unraveled down her shoulders were implanted in Carter's thoughts; they fell so amerced in his mind, he felt these traits familiar almost instantly. In those days for a woman to approach a man was insulting and disrespectful, but not to Carter; whether you were a man or a woman, he hated you the same. Mykah's ivory and liquid copper eyes mingled with Carter's emerald greens, and drew him in so closely that he couldn't turn away; Carter loved Mykah, whether he wanted it or not.

The first date consisted of wine and moonlight. They went to a local park around ten-o'clock at night; it was witching hour, and Carter's canine instincts emerged with the smell of over-grown grass and flocks of ripe, blood-filled beings. As Mykah drank, Carter saw the Chianti and blood flow down her neck in unison; as side-by-side as their intertwined porcelain digits. She fell asleep early into the morning, leaving Carter alone with the heavenly body in the sky and Mykah's heartbeat. Her face and button nose -- like the orb of night -- reflected the light around her, and ruined Carter. His control over this bloody desire wavered at her exposed neck, but her innocence and serenity kept his urges inhibited. Carter couldn't sleep at all that night, but he found himself in control.

A few months strolled by, and even sitting in front of a fire, reading separate books, felt intimate. Carter sustained his avidities with the love she gave; Mykah remained oblivious through her heavy workload, and conclusive belief that his most intense stares were caused by an uncontrollable itch for her companionship. It was apparent to Carter that Mykah wanted him forever, but Carter couldn't promise her this. Asking to fill her empty hand would only lead to disappointment, and Carter would rather let her go than have her in such pain.

One October night Carter decided it was time to end this mirage of a tango they rested their desires on. A long walk brought them to Jasper beach, Mykah's favorite place to read. "Carter, why have you guided me here tonight without my readings? Be there things I need knowing?" she asked, with a hopeful tone and a flushed smile.

"Mykah, in your vitality I find meaning, truth and beauty," Carter confessed. "But I feel your hindrance; your being is vigorous, and I strain you." Maaike examined these words for a while, and Carter's still stares gave no answer. She came to her own assumptions

"Carter, I comprehend the meaning, and accept this proposal my love. My fate can't progress in your arms without this bond," Mykah stated abruptly.

"Proposal?" he asked, and Mykah nodded, and the lightning patterned veins on her hands and by her throat pulsated; grabbing his eyes. Carter pondered that thought for a while, apprehending its content and concluding the meaning. She wanted his hand, and if he took it she would never leave his side. No matter what he told her, no matter what he did, she would be his; and he hers. This opportunity presented itself so willingly, and Carter couldn't let it down.

Mykah drilled December first against Carter's skull until he finally caved. Carter's hesitation was only due to an abrupt wedding; it left little time to rebuff his meeting with Heinrich. "He'd spit at me if he thought your respectability was lacking; you know he despises me so deep as my marrow."

"Carter, my father is possessed by his lustful and glutinous demons, but he once was human. I need always save that wedding dance for him." Mykah's passion for forgiveness ran deep; Carter grew aware of it the first time she came home from Heinrich's house with contusions chafed across the upper part of her arm. Mykah forgave her father without being asked, and Heinrich's sober periods became near fantasy since then. "My father needs to know--you'll need his permission, or he may never love either of us." the warmth running through her face siphoned to her empty heart. Carter draped around Mykah; her face damp and at home in his chest, and right hand raked through his short, gray-flecked dark-brown hair.

"Be still Mykah, I will see to your father's acceptance; by noon tomorrow he will be helping with the wedding plans." Carter told Mykah, knowing that Heinrich's mind would never really change; Heinrich would have to listen to threats to waver his hand, intimidation Carter was willing to make for his love. That night Carter sent word to Heinrich that he was coming for tea the next day, and to expect a long conversation on

choices and his daughter. The mood was set, and so was the time; 10:30 in the morning, late enough not to have worried neighbors home to hear Heinrich's bellowing snarls when his liquor took over his rage.

The following morning Mykah prepared a large breakfast for Carter in hopes of moving at least his stomach to love her this morning. She expected Carter to turn pale and break into cold sweats like he does any other day they're meant to see Heinrich, but Carter was still and full of color that morning. Carter felt in control and full of power that morning, he had his speech to Heinrich point-formed in his head, and his readiness to stand up for the first time in Mykah's honor gave him pride. Why he loved this fragile women so full of crippling emotional strain gave no understanding to Carter; his heart remained locked in her prison cell, living off her bread and her water.

The buggy, with Carter inside, shook with a sound like a single pebble being rattled around the inside of an empty tin can. The roads around Heinrich's home were paved by the early Beowin's, and that left them the responsibility of sustaining it. Beowin manor hadn't been properly kept up for years; Heinrich only kept his butler and chef on staff after his wife had passed, leaving the road craggy and every crack and cranny in the home to collect dust. Clicks of horses feet faded and the door swung open, leaving Carter to become a pebble underneath the Beowin footprint. The estate was extremely large; it had five stories, not including the cellar. Five rows of last centuries finest glass stared back at Carter with judgment, and a touch of longing. A steady burning started in Carter's feet as he approached the worn down tile road and passed the green columns of free spirited hedges being limited and controlled. Even his body, a purely instinctive creature seeking only survival and impulse, knew this wasn't free of danger. For whatever purpose, Carter continued; whether it was Mykah's love, Carter's hate for Heinrich, or a thirst for some morning scotch, Carter was driven.

Three knocks later the heavy-oak door split from its frame, and there stood Delbert. Delbert the butler as everyone called him; how uniquely cliché this family's past lives where. “Sir Heinrich resigns in his study, scratching at his memoirs. He will greet you in the living room when he is finished. Can I offer you something to drink?”

“No thank-you, Delbert” he told with a flaky tone. Carter wouldn't be caught drinking before Heinrich had arrived; he excused Delbert to his other business. He wouldn't permit Heinrich more ammunition; Carter's ears were bulletproof from Heinrich's toxic tongue, but Mykah's weren't. He couldn't let Heinrich hurt her; he had to gain permission, no matter the cost. The family room Carter sat in was once heavily colored, but the fabric had now grown dim, and wallpaper fractured from time, and Heinrich's groggy shouts. The door stood inside the same wall as the massive, light-stone fireplace; the sofas, armchairs and windows to the opposite. Ghastly floral patterns traced across the carpeting, and contrast with the maroon furnishing. The lady of the house had the taste of a colorblind lumberjack, you could sum it up purely by the pieces on the mantle above the fire pit: a copper owl perched atop a barn made of pure silver stood a good foot tall,

and several ivory squirrel, chicken and robin figurines a few inches tall, with a single golden chipmunk poised an inch taller than the rest, with fully packed cheeks.

“So you enjoy prying on strangers lives and possessions when their eyes are turned, Fenrot?” Heinrich's words bore into Carter's skin; he had picked up the gold chipmunk and looked for markings on the bottom; this wasn't how Carter wanted things started.

“No, of-of course not-sir. I-I was simply... admiring the figurines, the artists name doesn't appear to be on the bottom. Do you know who crafted them?” Carter justified promptly, though he knew Heinrich wasn't falling for it.

“You'll never see any like it elsewhere, they're unique. Don't bother trying to locate the craftsman, he died years ago; along with everyone else that mattered. Commitment and family loyalty seems to have died along with them.” Heinrich accused, looking at the empty cushion beside where Carter now sat. “You have not brought my daughter? Or is her schedule too occupied to visit once every full moon?”

“Actually, this is why I am here.” Carter said, ignoring his remarks on Mykah's absence and people who mattered; jumping straight to the point. “I've come with an absent arm to ask your permission to fill it.” Blank stares signaled a need for clarity, and Carter continued: “I wish to wed your daughter.” Heinrich's eyes went blank, and skin went pale. He was shocked, but that lasted only seconds once the anger sunk in. His face filled with blood boiling with rage; red lightning streaked through his eyes and sent out waves of hatred that rattled Carter's bones.

“My Mykah... in your hands?” the anger in his body seemed to burn the alcohol in his stomach; it ignited and intoxicated his system. Now Carter dealt with a fully wasted Heinrich. Grabbing another glass of scotch, Heinrich continued; “You disgusting excuse for a man, you've robbed my daughter from my home, whispering lies and corrupting her mind. Now you wish to bind her to you? You fowl git!”

“I've told her no lies; she stays away because of your drunken, lustful spirit that controls your love. For the time I have known you, I have never once been capable of depicting your actions toward Mykah as caring. Heinrich, it is you who is a fowl git; you're a disgusting tramp full of self-loathing and pity. I will take your daughters hand even if I have to rip it from you, her flesh.” Carter swore his ambition at Heinrich like a curse; and Heinrich's self-control failed. Wielding his scotch glass like a crystal dagger, he cast it at Carter in an attempt to whop him square in the forehead; luckily for Carter his depth perception was no more and merely grazed just above his left ear. This followed with a familiar pain; Carter reached his hand to his ear and felt the wet, dripping stains between his fingertips. Bringing the blood to his eyes, Carter's pupils dilated, and he now guided his index and middle fingers to his nostrils. Oh, that smell he had resisted now returned so sweet, this time mixed with a hint of alcohol.

Carter turned his gaze now at Heinrich, who was rooted to the ground. But something else was different, something new; it was beautiful, magnificent and strong. As Carter's

eyes were on the figure before him, Heinrich had become a clear red vessel; like staring at a flashlight put to a ruby, the crimson pumping through his system illuminated, and flesh and bone became invisible. Something about the mix of rage and the smell of blood sent a desire, and a frenzy had started: a blood lust he'd never lived with before. Left foot before right, Carter teetered toward Heinrich; his eyes, now pale-green, crippled Heinrich like a poison carried through the air. Passing the fireplace, dripping light drops of vital liquid off his lobe, Carter grabbed the russet owl and its sterling perch, and swung his right claw weighted with Mrs. Beowin's memorial centerpiece; the force of his stroke quit at Heinrich's skull, followed by a rending crack that enthralled Carter.

Grabbing an empty scotch glass, along with a shard of Heinrich's cup that had shattered and scattered atop the carpet, Carter approached Heinrich's now unconscious body. Pressing a rim of the crystal chalice against Heinrich's neck, he drew a line with the fragment; as his fingers and lips began to twitch, Heinrich's scarlet water flowed rapidly into Carter's stein. His lips flattened against the edge of the goblet, and the thick substance, like tomato juice, flowed down Carter's gullet warm and smooth. Like a shock to the system, Carter felt the feeling of relief and ease Heinrich now passed with, and every drop became precious. Frantically Carter moved his hands to Heinrich's dripping throat, gathering what blood he could get to his lips. His mouth was now masked with crimson lines, like jail bars streaking from his lips, down his neck, passing his collar and ran through the hair on his chest. Brushing his tongue from canine to canine, Fenrot prepared to feed. Bringing his mouth around Heinrich's fate, he bore his fangs deep into master Beowin's throat, and pooling scarlet-framed vivid ivory. Drawing as much iron into himself as he could, Carter veered onto his back, falling asleep atop a bloodstained rug.

Fenrot's grassy eyes opened to the sound of a thump and a shake on the floor. It seemed Delbert's heart had lost control at the sight of the mess his master had made. This, of course, was no matter to Carter; it became more of a convenience really. This way, Carter didn't have to slay him as well. Ignoring the recently collapsed figure before him, he headed to the kitchen and grabbed a cleaver, for disposal purposes, and brought it back to the living room. Throwing several logs on the cold and empty fireplace floor, he stuck a match and lay fire atop the wood. Measuring the width with his hands, giving several inches excess, Carter brought the dimensions to the corpses, and began cleaving. Twenty-three chops and swings later, Carter was now covered in blood, and began to lift the fractions to the fire; the smell, not even he could bear for long. Gathering his coat, he began to head down the lumpy road toward home. "Only the poor walk from place-to-place" Heinrich would tell Carter, but now that his flesh burns, his opinion didn't seem to matter. It was now mid afternoon, and Mykah wouldn't arrive home for several hours, giving Carter convenient amounts of time to clean up and craft a story.

Swinging open the front door, Mykah, along with a large stack of books burdening her arms entered. Carter had spent most of the hour he'd been given disposing of his old clothing, and working up a tale, and at the sound of Mykah's "Help, these are heavy!" Carter headed down the stairs with out time to button his shirt. Grabbing the books from her arms with ease, Carter places them on a stand in the foyer to boast his good-news

fable. “Carter, you look so much stronger... those books were so heavy, and you lifted them like they a silk scarf; what happened at my father's today?”

“You'll never believe it sweet dove, it is a miracle for the ages – sit, please, I have to share my story.” Carter pulled toward the sofas, and sat beside Mykah. His grin seemed unnatural for a visit at the manor, and Mykah's curiosity grew. “We are to be wed December first” he said.

“Don't spit lies at me, Fenrot; you cruel lover.” Mykah retorted, waiting for a look of guilt streak across Carter's face, but instead she found question. “You-your serious? My father has accepted your plea; how drunk must he have been?”

“Not a drop of poison in him, nor the house Mykah – he was disappointed you had not shown, in fact. He had news to share himself, he spent a good hour discussing the fractures in his life he wished to mend.” Mykah's eyes filled with confusion, glee and a touch of disbelief. “Heinrich has given up his ways; he only wishes to be pleasing in your eyes and feels he should start in helping with the wedding – financially that is. He wanted to ask of you if you'd forgive him. I know he'll be needing our help in these difficult times Mykah.” Carter lied with words like a sonnet to her ears. Mykah continued to simply stare at Carter, twisting her glances in search of some hidden trap, but found nothing in his determined face.

“This – It cannot be, I can't swallow it – we must see him. I must see his face.” Mykah admitted, expecting Carter to feel hurt.

“Of course my love, of course.” he replied. Mykah, bedazzled, started toward her coat; but Carter blocked her “Just not tonight my love – he seemed so weak; we should give him his sleep.” Carter convinced Mykah. How understanding and caring he must be, Mykah thought as she allowed his blight to sink in.

The next morning, news of manslaughter arrived in the form of an officer dressed in all blue. Carter decided it best Mykah answer the door; he feared the cheer shining through would deceive his false innocence. As Mykah broke into pieces before Carter, he dismissed the officer and carried her to the sofa. Resting in Carter's arms, Mykah shook and freed her pain in screams and tears into Carter's chest. The pain Mykah suffered continued through to the first week of November, but to follow her story would steer distant from the tale at hand; for Carter's life continued while Mykah's was shattered. Unable to handle staying home with screams he could not seize, Carter made arrangements around the town toward Heinrich's funeral, holding the wedding plans until signs that Mykah had coped. During the evenings Carter came home late; he found desolation at Barbarossa's, a bar several blocks away. The bartender was a large, burly man with a taste for tobacco, but this isn't what kept Carter from traveling bar-to-bar on a weekly basis.

Her name was Eris, she couldn't have been more than 16 years old, and she was Carter's only remaining vice. On November 8th, a mere 2 weeks into Mykah's mourning, while

Carter was heading home from the pub, he stumbled into the alleyway behind the bar. As he lifted himself up, Eris entered the alleyway with the barman's filled spittoon. Carter's hood had flipped onto his head, and the midnight darkness hid his identity. She dropped the large, brass cup to the floor: spraying black spit everywhere. "Can-can I help you? Sir, are you alright?" she asked, and Carter began to speak, but no words formed. Her face was like a white, creamy rose pedal, and her now empty arms exposed indigo lines through jasmine skin; Carter lost authority to his actions. Sprinting toward her, his intoxication seemed not to affect him, and swooping his right wing upward, he wrapped his talons around her fragile throat. What was he doing he thought, the barman had just seen him leave, he was an obvious suspect, and when the police started investigation, Mykah would become suspicious. But none of it seemed relevant; all he knew was he wanted this purity. Pressing her fully elevated figure against the hard and auburn brick wall, he grabbed her waste and sunk his canines into her chest. Innocent and sacred red filled his mouth, dribbling down his throat and turning his eyes empty. His stomach, filled with liquor, permitted little blood, leaving Eris' essence to spill on the floor. As Carter stared at the soaked, pale face on the pavement below him, his eyes filled with regret; how he'd taken her life without thought or consideration scared him. Walking home, Carter questioned his self-control, and began to hate whom he'd transformed into.

Carter found Mykah sleeping on a chair, facing out the front window, with her book resting on her lap when he arrived home. He was completely soaked from the downpour; he wrapped Mykah in a blanket, carried her upstairs to the bed, threw his clothes into the bathtub and fell asleep in the overwhelming warmth of the sheets. The following morning he woke to a burning stomach, and wrenching headache; it was 11 in the morning, and his dry heaves carried to the kitchen downstairs, where Mykah was cooking breakfast. "You where at the bar last night, weren't you Carter?" Mykah asked as Carter stumbled into the smell of eggs and coffee. "Barbarossa's?" she asked for clarity. Carter nodded without thought, "The paper arrived early this morning along with the milk, look at the front cover – a young woman was murdered last night in the alleyway beside the same bar. Did you see anyone suspicious last night?" Carter started to remember his downfall, and sobered up enough for a response.

"Yes, err, no. I can't be certain... its a pub, everyone's 'suspicious' when drinking." he said, and Mykah continued to read the article as Carter grabbed a mug of coffee. The doorbell went off, and Carter brought his George Washington brew to the front door. Standing before him was a short, well built man dressed all in blue.

"Carter Fenrot?" he asked, continuing when Carter nodded, "We are here on business about the murder of Eris Ateman. Last night around midnight she was found in a pool of her own blood, with a single incision on her left chest. Can I ask your whereabouts between eleven o'clock last night and one o'clock this morning?" Carter collected his thoughts, and decided the best course of action was to tell as much truth as possible while giving an alibi.

"I was nearing this front door around midnight, walking home from Barbarossa's. Am I in some sort of trouble?" Carter asked, miming innocence.

“The investigation is ongoing, but as you were one of Barbarossa's last customs that night, be advised your under serious consideration. Stay out of trouble if you'd like to remain an innocent, Mr. Fenrot.” The officer advised politely, and on the note left toward his buggy. Carter turned to Mykah's questioning glances without response; he then headed toward his study, head hung low, and Mykah's eyes followed with suspicion. Carter had no idea what to say next, his excuses ran dry and saying anymore would sink him deeper. He entered his study, grabbed a book and read for the rest of the morning.

For the next five days Carter felt like a dead fish, being tossed and turned between two tides, leaving his emotions distorted. Mykah and Carter talked increasingly during these days; about their future goals, and what they felt they needed from each other. Though it felt numb for Carter, because he could never tell the truth - even though Mykah's needs revolved around it - it was still enjoyable, and only made the human side of Carter stronger. Carter was under heavy investigation, and through the corner of his eyes he watched men appear and disappear in an instant; like a flash of light. Time as a free man was running low, and he knew something had to change. Twenty hours of working and two very long nights later, Carter gathered and formed his life and sins on paper; his final move, and attempt of understanding to Mykah. Collecting forty-six large pieces of finely-printed parchment paper, Carter headed to the bedroom expecting to find his loved one lying soft and radiant underneath the covers; instead he found a fully made resting place, with a blank envelope. Dropping his confession in a trail toward what he feared was Mykah's abandonment; he tore open the pouch, grabbed the script and studied it. In Mykah's sapphire handwriting was written, "Dear Carter, I need to see what happened to my father; please meet me at the Manor, I'll need you." with signature to sum. Something about the letter bothered Carter, like lies or bate where squeezed between every letter. Heading toward the Beowin's castle, contemplating the meaning, Carter decided giving Mykah ascendancy over his mind wasn't such a horrible idea.

Entering the large, nearly empty home, a chill brushed Carter's skin and a whiff of crimson delighted the senses. Approaching the smell, Carter turned his notice toward the study; opening the door revealed a pale, bloodstained figure draped in a white silk cloak covering detail but leaving form. Mykah stood, two cuts on her left arm and three on her right, dripping red atop Heinrich's taupe wall-to-wall matting. "I came to see for myself, for I couldn't believe what my mind had gathered. You were the last man to see that girl, and it was the same with my father. You told me he'd changed; that his life had been flipped around, but I found this glass with a line of scotch still left." Mykah accused, and Carter said nothing - he just stared blank at the beauty before him. She had become what dreams he'd hidden so deep inside, leaving him only to question his faded emerald eyes. "I'm here, torn between my lover and his demon, trying to find hope in this desolation. The fiend inside that draws out its claws for the blood of another drives me away, but I am here to commemorate the man I once loved. I know you remain core of your vessel Carter; I see the man I fell in love with in the green that's left in those eyes." On the table beside Carter, Mykah had placed the blade she opened her wounds with; Carter hoisted the blade to his side, and wavered toward Mykah. "Battle it Carter, I know the man who melted in my copper stares still remains - free yourself again my love; make me your strength, not your weakness."

"Don't run, don't move – don't even speak, or you'll die a martyr." Carter groaned, without the slightest hint of humanity. The animal had become him, and deep down somewhere, Carter wondered if love was enough to stop this. Wrenching forward, Carter forced his arms around Mykah, who neither resisted nor feared what Carter had to offer. Lowering her to the ground, he stood hunched over like a vulture over its bleeding prey. Bringing the blade to her throat, they connected eyes, and Mykah drew out raw emotion, like an exposed nerve; Carter was an enraged Minotaur at a fork in the labyrinth. Neither personality dominated at this point, both were at equal odds, and love only made sense to conquer; but Carter was still left with his choice. Nothing had ever been so difficult for Carter; the most obvious answer became the hardest to speak. Eyes flicking between rich ivory eyes, and the blue, faded ribbons detailing her neck; Carter released the blade to gravity's fate, and let it fall. With a ping on the ground, Carter felt relieved and in control once more; he never thought this feeling would return, and knew the struggles would progress, but Mykah's passion seemed benefit enough. Drifting his face toward her rose petals, their lips touched and affection flowed from cheek to cheek. In a moment of pure ecstasy, nothing could end the intimacy, not even the piercing burn that struck Carter's gut, and befuddled his breathe. The blade that drew him in now brought his blood out at the hand he once held and claimed his own. Looking back from the gash to her face, Fenrot looked for meaning in her action.

"I can't live with the man that now remains, nor can he live for his own fiends. Taking your life I take away theirs. Take me along, never leave me alone." Mykah, now barred with wet lines down her cheeks exclaimed with desperation. Though he'd never want her pain, and never sought death an answer, Carter accepted the judgment; even if it seemed a fool's route out, he respected Mykah's wishes. Baring his teeth, Carter was ready for a final feeding. Brushing his tongue from canine to canine, he prepared himself, and began pressing his fangs to her faded blue ribbons; he entered her skin and gathered her rose water around his tongue, and down his throat. Scarlet poured and stained the world around them, and the two lay dying, with a completed sense of love and understanding, ready to rest forever knowing a monster was gone from this forsaken world, and in a forty-six page tale left true loves story behind. Take sorrow and love from the tale before you, but feel confident that the impact this couple had on the world around them didn't end where our fable leaves off; two blank pedals atop a broken family's floor, taking with them all the sin, and leaving only blood behind.