



CHAPTER 1

THIRST

It was just after his 15th birthday that Elias began feeling... different.

It started with night sweats and general edginess. Pretty soon he didn't want to be around people much. Then came the thirst – a dry mouth no matter how much water he drank. What was going on?

The weirdest thing was that his parents seemed unconcerned. Even when Elias spent more time isolated in his room, and stopped eating fruit or vegetables any more, they never once suggested he see a doctor.

To take his mind off things, he began taking long walks alone at night. Something about the midnight hours – the darkness? the cold? – drew him out.

Elias had plenty of space to wander. His home and its grounds extended for miles. His parents were rich. His father was a bigwig in some never-spoken-about job. Whatever he did, Elias knew it had to be super important because he'd been wrapped in special protection his whole life: never left for long on his own, home-schooled, his friends chosen carefully. People were always watching him, too. His parents called them 'house servants', but Elias knew they were guards.

Actually, something had happened when Elias was seven years old that made him realise his safety was more important than that of the children of the other families. He'd tripped up on the lawn. It was nothing – just a twist of his ankle during football. But the reaction! Every adult visiting that day had run towards him. They'd forgotten their own children in their rush to get to him.

Home life with his parents and their friends was pretty odd in other ways, too. There were often weird night-time episodes – parties with no drinking, but where the adults seemed to get more and more excited, staying out late while he was minded at home.

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It was a few days after he started taking night strolls that Elias' first true craving occurred.

He woke to a surprising rasping noise. What made it really surprising was that the noise came from him. His mouth, tongue lapping warmly, was attached to a small cut on his arm. He'd grazed it on a railing earlier that day, and now he was sucking at the wound in his sleep.

Horried, Elias jumped out of bed. A cooling breeze wafted over his hot face from the window, but it did nothing to stop the panic.

Or the thirst. His entire throat was on fire.

Hurrying to the kitchen, he drank four full glasses of water, but was still parched. What on earth was wrong with him?

Moments later, he was standing beside the open fridge when he caught sight of himself in a side mirror. When was the last time he'd had a decent meal? He was so pale and thin he barely recognised himself. He looked like a gaunt wraith in the moonlight.

Then he caught a whiff from the fridge – a scent attracting him. His nose guided him towards a package at the back of the second shelf.

He carefully unwrapped it. Even before he saw that something wet and heavy was inside, he could smell the blood. A steak waiting to be cooked?

He dropped the package onto the floor when he saw the contents spill out. Inside was what his parents called offal: internal organs. There was a heart, mixed with kidneys and a sloppy white string of intestines.

Elias backed away in horror. He'd wanted to be close to that? Many times he'd seen his mother and father eating offal at lunch and dinner, but he'd never wanted to try the stuff himself. Now – bending closer to sniff it – he had to try very hard to stop himself licking the spilt blood off the floor.

A light abruptly snapped on in the corridor. His parents were standing there. Both were smiling. 'Smells tasty, doesn't it?' his father said.