

NIGHT OF THE GUPPY
Book 1 of the series
Sylvia Chesterton, Guppy Vampire Hunter

From the author of *Blood and Sunlight: A Maryland Vampire Story*, comes the riveting tale of a vampire fish, a hunter, and the most important guppy show competition ever. (Totally tatheleth and ridiculouth, but try reading it anyway. After all, it's free – and what better way do you have to waste your time?)

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ELECTRONIC EDITION

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~AUTHOR DEDICATION~

With apologies to my uncle Louie, author of *How to Raise Show Guppies*.
This book is for Amazon's Kindle boards. See what happens when you encourage crazy people?

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Chapter 1

Becoming

It is a well-known fact that animals can sense natural phenomena. If you see a cow sitting down in a field, a tornado is probably approaching (or she is extremely tired). If that same cow is seen flying through the air, you can almost bet without doubt, that the tornado is here. If the cow should suddenly stand on all fours and sprint like a little girl into the barn ... well, I don't know what that means, but I would run like hell in the opposite direction.

Fish are particularly attuned to danger, and of all aquatic creatures, none is more sensitive than the guppy. They are widely known as the floating Carnacs of the animal kingdom – or they would be if animals bothered with such things ... or people for that matter. I mean, millions of dollars have been spent on analyzing whale squeaks and dolphin farts. Would it kill science to spend an afternoon figuring out what a fish might be trying to say?

Regardless (Irregardless), the room was quiet except for the soft ticking of the clock.

Bloop.

The piano collected dust in the corner, and rows of books sat unread on their shelf.

Bloop.

Down the hall, the fridge hummed grateful that its owner had the foresight to clean it out before he left on vacation. Strange things had been growing in its nether-regions.

Bloop.

The only light in the room emanated from the small aquarium in the corner. Somewhere, buried behind rows of trophies, ribbons, plaques and a gift certificate to Shoney's, a fish *blooped* happily in his tank.

And not just any fish, but Lord Fin-land Aquarius III, the six-time inner-city show guppy champion of District 17, a fish more highly decorated than any creature to have previously swum through a plastic castle.

Lord Aquarius blooped again, but this time, with an edge of concern. He paused in his lap through the new banana plant. He enjoyed the way it tickled his belly. It might have been his first lap or his one thousandth – he was blessed with a three-second memory span (most fish had five).

Bloop. bloop. bloop! he called out frantically – as frantically as a fish is capable.

Aquarius retreated to the corner of the tank, just as several things happened very quickly. Two people crashed through the ceiling and landed on what was left of the philodendron. The first person, a long-haired brute of a man, got to his feet first and hurled the pale, dark-haired creature next to him into the life-sized unicorn painting by the couch.

Bloop, Lord Aquarius said, which in fishspeak meant, 'Good riddance you artistic eyesore!' (See how much a little scientific grant could benefit mankind?)

The creature got to his feet and brushed off his clothes. He was dressed in a snazzy tuxedo with a red vest. His shoes were so shiny, you could floss your teeth in their reflection. A long silk cape completed his ensemble. Lord Aquarius really liked the cape.

"This ends here!" the long haired man shouted. He was a hunter, part of a long line of folks dedicated to destroying evil everywhere. This hunter was grateful he was only responsible for vampires – not like his cousin, Claude who continually had to deal with telemarketers.

The creature shrieked and leapt at the hunter's throat. "You ruined my seams!" he shouted.

The hunter expertly caught the creature in the air and slammed him to the floor in front of the fish tank, causing the water inside to slosh about. (I mention this because no one else seemed particularly concerned about the effect on the fish – which, in my book, is downright selfish. And since this is my book, I can say whatever I want. *Defibrillator*. See? Anything I want.)

The hunter smiled, pulled a thick, wooden stake from his trendy, but somehow antiquated clothing that showed off his broad shoulders, and buried the spike deep into the vampire's chest.

The vampire shrieked, and a fountain of blood gushed from his chest, just like the end of the log plume ride at King's Dominion, located right off the Beltway. (Mention this book and get \$5.00 off admission.)

Blood stuck to the ceiling and poured onto the couch and floor. Just as quickly, it dried to dust. The vampire too was already flaking away like the worst sunburn ever.

“My work here is done,” the hunter exclaimed, then eyed the human and vampire-sized hole in the ceiling. “Well almost.” The first rule of vampire-slaying was to always clean up your mess after you’re done.

The once quiet room filled with the sounds of sawing and hammering. The refrigerator paused in his humming to try and determine the source of the noise in the other room, and whether or not it would affect him, then resumed.

In the tank, the fish blooped unhappily, then noticed a single crimson drop floating at the top of his tank. He wondered if it was food, then wondered if Lindsay Lohan was finally out of prison, and then thought about taking a lap through the banana plant. As he swam toward the banana plant, his attention was diverted by a single crimson drop floating at the top of his fish tank. He lunged for it and gulped it down hungrily before he could forget it was there.

The room fell quiet again. A man cried out something about his thumb and lack of benefits. The house creaked. The fish blooped.

And then all hell broke loose.

Chapter 2

Unbecoming (a Priest)

Milosz walked down the long hall. He had left his office sometime last Tuesday, grabbed a quick snack on Wednesday, and continued walking throughout Thursday and Friday. It was now Sunday, and he stopped to rest in between the water fountain and the aviary.

Vatican Underground was a splendid place and offered the priest many opportunities for quiet reflection, but all this walking was a bitch. Would it kill the pope to put in a trolley or a few golf carts? He was a dedicated servant, but he also had a predilection for Ho-Ho’s, Twinkies, and unfiltered cigarettes, and he did not think one needed to suffer to get closer to God. Mild discomfort should be enough.

“Don’t ... understand ... why ... the ... inner sanctum ... has ... to ... be ... so ... far...” He spit something terrible on the floor and then added, “...away.”

Milosz! a voice screamed inside his head.

“Yes, my lord.”

Where are you?

“Almost there, sire.”

Is that a peacock I hear?

“No, your masterfulness,” the priest lied. He never should have stopped at the aviary during mating season.

I want my message.

“I could just give it to you now.”

That is not the way.

“Might be faster.”

Are you questioning my order?

“No, oh grand one. It’s just, it’s rather urgent. There’s been an incident in...”

La la la la la la la.

“Pope?”

I can’t hear you. La la la la.

Milosz let out a deep sigh. “I should be there in...” He mentally calculated the rest of the journey. He still had to get past the holy crocodile pool, the acid baptismal, and the daycare center. “...another hour or two.”

Excellent. And Milosz?

“Yes, oh robed one?”

Stop and get me a snickerdoodle, would ya?

“Of course, wearer of the pointed hat.” The food court was at least a mile in the other direction. Maybe more. And he had to wrestle the gladiators first, as a test to prove oneself worthy to eat. He tapped the spot on his head where he imagined the implanted speaker was. *If he could rip out that cursed thing*, he thought, then took a deep breath. *Never question the grand plan*, he reminded himself. Plus he loved the new satin robes they gave him – they were very slimming.

* * * * *

Three days later, Milosz stood in the office of the Secret Underground Pope (SUP) – Frank to his friends and family. He was not a real pope, per se. He didn’t spend years of selfless dedication working towards a higher calling. He wasn’t chosen by a religious council of learned men. His tie didn’t even match his pants. But he was appointed by someone important, though no one could quite remember who. And he was doing an important job. It seemed an insignificant thing to put up with calling him pope and kneeling every now and again.

“Enter,” Frank said.

“SUP Frank.” Milosz bowed.

The SUP was a formidable figure with silver hair and steely eyes. Though he would be even more intimidating without the inverted white hat he wore.

“Sit, wretched one.”

There were no chairs in the office. Most of the space was taken up by the enormously grand desk and large, tasteless paintings of demons doing unspeakable things to comely young women. Milosz thought some of the demons resembled Frank.

He half-leaned against the desk.

“Not there, you fool!”

Milosz shrugged and sat cross-legged on the floor. From this vantage, the only thing he could see was the ornate front of the desk. More carvings – these more explicit and of a distinct sexual variety.

“My message,” the pope’s deep voice rang out.

“There’s been an incident in the States.”

Milosz heard the sound of a chair screeching back on the floor.

“Rocco? Dear Lord, no!”

“I’m afraid so, oh, um...”

“Exalted one?”

“Yes, exalted one. Our hunter was on a flight from Texas to Maryland when he identified the sucker.”

“Vampire or IRS agent?”

“Both, sire.”

“Oh, mon dieu.” The pope sagged heavily in his chair.

“They bailed out in the air. We tracked the crash to a small house in the Orlando, Florida, area, your Excellency.”

“I like that one. Use it more often.”

“Yes, your Excellency. Hunter Rocco destroyed the sucker. We found traces of ash in the house. He was in the process of repairing the roof when something went wrong.”

“That poor, beautiful man.”

“Er, yes. So we believe another creature in the house may have been infected. And Rocco was killed in the aftermath.”

“Such broad, strong shoulders he had.”

Milosz cleared his throat and continued. “We believe the creature is still at large.”

“The man didn’t even work out. He just looked great in anything. Did you ever see him in a bathing suit?”

“Please, ineffable one!”

“Sorry, go on, pussball. How did you come to discover all this?”

“There was a note.” Milosz handed a piece of paper from inside the folds of his now very sweaty robes.

“This makes no sense,” the SUP said after reading it over. “What creature was turned?”

“Something of the aquatic variety.” The priest tugged at his collar.
 “A fish? Like what, a shark?”
 “I don’t believe a shark is actually a fish.”
 “Don’t question me, human excrement.”
 “Sorry, bountiful one.”
 “What kind of fish, then? A piranha?”
 “Um, no. Nothing quite that grand. After speaking with the owner, we believe it was a guppy.”
 “Well, he has excellent penmanship.”
 “Yes. Well, we think that perhaps the fish may have entered Rocco...”
 The pope grinned.
 “...through the ear cavity.”
 “Oh,” Frank said disappointed.
 “And is controlling him.”
 “Well, the human body is 80% water I suppose. Though highly improbable, I am willing to suspend some disbelief in order to continue following your story.”
 “Yes, your highness.”
 The SUP picked up the note again and read aloud, “Free at last. And soon there will be justice for my brethren. Revenge shall be mine. Cower, dry ones. This shall be the night of the guppy! P.S. Shoney’s sucks.”
 “Imagine if he made it to the water supply. Or worse, to Krispy Kreme headquarters.”
 “What is your plan of attack, you fat sack of pestilence?”
 “We have activated Hunter 2.1,” Milosz said sadly. That last verbal smear had hurt his feelings.
 “You can’t mean...”
 “Yes.” The priest shook out his leg, which had fallen asleep. “Sylvia Chesterton.”
 “God help us all.” The pope crossed himself and muttered, “Spectacles, testicles, wallet, and watch...”

* * * * *

Somewhere, far across the globe, a well-timed bolt of lightning struck the ground. Its significance was sadly lost on the unfortunate person who was struck while erecting a metal fence in his yard. Omens are rarely well-timed and even more infrequently well-placed.

Chapter 3

The Perfect Amount of Exposition

Sylvia Chesterton was a bad, bad woman. She was convicted of shoplifting, arson, and cattle rustling. She was incarcerated for numerous weapons and assault charges. She was a serial jaywalker, a loud talker, and a selfish lover. She never called her mother back. She liked to torment birds. She had a terrible temper, and she ignored emissions testing warnings. When she worked as a waitress, she never washed her hands after using the bathroom. She spit, swore constantly (and colorfully), and smoked, but never bought her own – she just bummed off other people. (Do you have any idea how annoying that is?) She posted bills over ‘post no bills’ signs and always walked on the grass. And she hated sunshine, unicorns, and rainbows. She never colored in the lines. She drove slow in the left lane, always left her blinker on, and never yielded right of way. She frequently broke hearts and shattered confidences. And all of this before her thirteenth birthday.

By her seventeenth birthday, she had garnered the attention of several local law enforcement agencies, the CIA and FBI (who frequently argued over who should deal with her), several confused terrorist cells in Switzerland, and the Russian Mafia. But most importantly, she had caught the eye of the Secret Underground Pope and his army of demon-fighting priests, hunters, and accountants who, although they might not get outside as much as they’d like, still knew talent when they saw it.

After a series of negotiations that involved moving money from a Swiss Bank account to a special offshore account in the Bahamas (and then back again), a Tiddlywinks tournament, and several stitches, Sylvia consented to join the agency.

She was trained in the ancient art of kabuki, tai chi, and how to make a Thai latte. She was the ultimate killing machine. So good, in fact, that she eliminated most of her handlers, her trigonometry teacher, and the entire SUP's HR department. She was deemed 'too ruthless' for field work and too impractical for public transportation. Sylvia was put on 'sleeper' status until a situation arose that was too terrible to be handled by any other agent. Mind you, these are people who ate glass for breakfast. Literally. It was part of their training. Not that it had any practical purpose. Not once had a situation in the field ever required gnawing on glass shards. Firearms training or hand-to-hand combat would have been far more practical and might have even saved a few lives, but that's just the way it was. Traditions should never be tampered with. Nevertheless, they never imagined the need for drastic measures such as activating Agent Sylvia Chesterton would ever occur.

However, on Tuesday, shortly after evening tea and right before Wheel of Fortune, such an occasion did indeed occur.

* * * * *

"Ow! That hurts!"

"Quit being such a baby."

"Could you at least use the less-rusty needle?" Meyer lay bare-chested and facedown on the table in Sylvia's kitchen. The tiled tabletop left a checkered impression on his forehead.

"It's all the way across the room. Now shut up." Sylvia closed her eyes. Her head rang like one of those big gongs in an old kung-fu movie. (How cool would it be to have one of those in your living room?) Something bad was going down. She just knew it.

"I can actually reach it from here."

"Stop talking. When we're done, I'll let you see my boobs. Would that help?"

"Actually, yeah." Meyer sighed. Sylvia had really good boobs. Slightly upturned like a ski-lift at an exclusive resort. He'd put up with an awful lot over the course of their so-called relationship, just for a glimpse of nipple. So far, it hadn't paid off. Not once. Still, she was hot – so hot that he couldn't walk away from her – he had an enormous bulge in his pants. Today, her red hair was tied back, drawing attention to her green eyes, which instantly hated everything she saw.

"How much longer?" Meyer asked. "Not that I'd ever suggest that I'm not having the best time here..."

"Don't worry your pretty little head. I'll be done when I'm done."

Sylvia had been on a tattoo kick and, once again, Meyer had consented to be her guinea pig. He'd let Sylvia pierce his ears, eyebrow, both nostrils, abdomen, and that little web-like part next to the big toe. At the moment, he looked a bit like the last sheet of memo paper next to a phone. (You know, where it's completely full but no one wants to bother to look for another pad, so it just keeps filling up with more and more notes. God, that makes me so mad.)

"So, what are you tattooing on me now?"

"The Lord's prayer in Mandarin Chinese."

"Well, that should come in handy."

She was actually tattooing 'Meyer Wasserman: Property of the US Army – Medical Testing Subject – STD Division.' Lately, Sylvia had become bored with him, and she didn't believe in just burning bridges – she firebombed the house and garden, then salted the earth to ensure nothing else grew.

The phone rang.

Sylvia got up, delivered an expert roundhouse kick, sending the receiver spiraling end over end until it rested in her hands.

"Y'ello?" She listened. After a moment, a wide grin appeared on her face, like she had just discovered a forgotten box of Girl Scout cookies in the bottom of the pantry, long after Girl Scout cookie season was over and done with. "I understand. Where and When? Yes, I'll take care of it."

She hung up the phone and walked over to a special wooden chest in her living room and stroked the pine box reverently. "It's time, my darlings," she whispered, and opened the box. That was more action than Meyer

had seen in the last six months. In the box were rows of wooden stakes, cloves of garlic, small vials of water, and an assortment of firearms, explosives, fishing hooks, and, curiously, a copy of *How to Raise Show Guppies* by Louis Wasserman. She was nothing if not prepared.

She looked at Meyer as he remained face down at the kitchen table. "Come with me," she commanded, and dragged him into the backyard.

"What are we doing now?"

"Target practice. Do you have any apples?"

* * * * *

"God help us all," the pope said.

"What is it now?" Milosz asked, in between bites of his snickerdoodle.

"Tyler Perry is going to be one of the judges on American Idol. What has this world come to?"

"I don't know, your reverence."

"Milosz?"

"Yes, your pointed hattedness?"

"Why are you still in my office?"

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