It’s an old story, and not terribly of interest, I’m afraid. I was born in 1453 in Crete. Ah, that’s B.C.E., as the scholars have it now: Before Common Era. I worked as a scribe for King Minos II, who is not, as some would have you believe, a work of fiction. He was quite real, and, indeed, the tyrant legends depict him to be. The snap of the whip and the cry of the slave were nearly as constant as the song of birds and the laughter of children playing, and were twice as loud. They echoed through his grand palace, and rang off the mosaics. Even in the dark quiet of the nights, I could hear the sounds still, though all were long since sleeping. The lucky ones never awoke.

It wasn’t always such a terrible life. As one of the King’s scribes, I was well clothed and fed, and I had a room in the palace. Not where anyone important could have seen me, of course, and I shared it with a few other scribes, but it was a magnificent shelter nonetheless. King’s scribe I was, but I was also still a servant, just one highly respected due to my talents. I daresay the king himself couldn’t read as well as I could – and Gods know he couldn’t write as well. The modern term is “chicken scratch” and, having seen chickens scratch, I believe this to be a nearly literate truth….if you’ll pardon the pun.

And of course, there was the bright shining light in my life: the High Priestess Ariastre. Oh, one so beautiful as she, with so heavenward a gaze, would never have seen me. She had eyes only for the Gods themselves, and after looking upon their divine visages, what could any mere mortal have to offer? I knew it was hopeless to fall in love with her, but the Gods are cruel, and Cupid’s arrow would not come out my heart. I was more her servant than Minos’s; he was a leader, but I would have followed her into the Underworld, had she but beckoned me. She never, in all my time, said a single word to me.

But I was a scribe, and so was often present at her meetings with our king. Even as I wrote down their words, I transcribed all she said upon my heart. Unlike Minos, she was benevolent in her wisdom, knowing that there can be a strength in showing mercy, in the right situations. She knew the times for war and her entreaties to the Gods on our behalf brought us glory; we even defeated Athens, and earned the Spartans’ envy for it. Minos took the credit, but I knew it was the work of the Gods – and done at Ariastre’s behest.

And this was my life: ignored by my King, unless I had done something to anger him, and then he and his whip made up for his neglect, and ignored by my love. Ignored, I was certain, by the Gods themselves, for what could They want with one such as me? I was fine with this – I knew the stories. Some few lucky mortals favored by the Gods earned great glory, wealth, and won the hearts of their beloveds. Most who drew the Gods’ attention to them were ruined, humiliated, tortured and killed. I had learned the lesson: do not seek the Gods out without excellent reason. And so I went on with my life, slaving over clay tablets at day and dreaming of Ariastre by night.

And then, one night, getting up to relieve myself outside, I heard a rustle. I looked up and asked who was there. Probably a guard or something, I thought, and then a man, a stranger to me, stepped out. His skin, hair, muscle tone and frame suggested youth and vitality, but his eyes were ancient, sorrowed. He had a mark on his forehead, as if someone had written there in blood. It hurt my eyes to look upon it.

“You there, Kairos, son of Stavros. Are you content with your life?” His voice was thickly accented, but strong, deep and beckoning.

I turned to face him in awe and fear. “How do you know my name, stranger? And what sort of man comes upon another in the night, with no name or stated purpose?”

“We will get to those, in due time. And I know your name because I know a great many names. And I know a great many things. I know about life. I know about the envy good men can feel in their hearts, because they know they are better than they are perceived to be. I know you quite well, Kairos; and I know you are a better, worthier man than your King.”

I shushed him, glancing around anxiously for the guards. “Do not say such things!” I hissed at him. “You would have us both as food for the Minotaur, or dying lost in the Labyrinth!”

He laughed, long and loud, and I was certain the whole palace would awaken. I cast my eyes about, but no other sound was heard, no lamps glowed into life, and all was still and eerily peaceful. “I cannot be killed, Kairos – and I can see to it that you do not die. I can grant you power such as even King Minos does not possess, and from there, you can take whatever you desire. It can all be yours, if you want it: the wealth, the palace…the High Priestess,” he added archly.

I confess, it was tempting. Especially at that time. He must’ve known I was most vulnerable at night, drowning in my aching dreams of her, longing for a fulfillment that I knew I could not have. And so I asked, “What do I do, to be granted this power? Swear my loyalty to you?”

He laughed again. “In a manner of speaking. But there is a…ritual to be seen to, if you will. And then I will take you away from this place, and train you. I will raise you up to be stronger in your newfound powers, and then you can come back and have your justice, your love: everything that is owed to you.” He smiled widely and his fangs were visible now.

And so it was that, despite the fear I felt for him, I agreed, immediately. There was not then this word that is used now, Vampire. He never had a name for what he was; in his darker moments, he said that we were Cursed. He never did tell me his name, he was always only my Master, but I believe I have placed who he was. And indeed, for him, it was a curse. But for me, and for those others like me, for I was and am among the Firstborn but was not first among us, it was a gift of life beyond death, of power beyond imagining. I reveled in it, in the beauty of the night, in the luxury of subtlety and being a myth of my own now.

As for Minos, his rule was not long for this world, and now he is thought of only as a legend, as a fictional tale. That is a vengeance far crueler than anything I could have devised, and I do so enjoy it. And Ariastre, the beautiful, compassionate queen of my heart? I approached her straight away, when the Master let me loose upon the world. She didn’t know who I was, of course, for now I was in finer clothing, smelling of softly-scented bathwaters. I told her I loved her, with all my heart, and always had. I poured my heart out to her earnestly, and scared her, this strange man saying these things so suddenly. She stepped away from me and I took hold of her arms, desperate not to let her go. I was holding her, perhaps, too tightly. She cried out and tried to push away from me. I pleaded with her to love me as I did her, promised she’d never want for anything, even foolishly offered my power to her, anything to make her mine forever. She looked up at me, and she was crying. She was deeply frightened, as I had seen new slaves afraid of the lash. As I had been myself afraid of Minos and his cruelty. She was terrified of me. I let her go, and she ran blindly from me. I watched her go, feeling tears well up in my own eyes. I looked away, not wanting to be so weak in front of her, even now, and then heard a scream. I turned my eyes back to her, but it was too late. Neither of us had remembered the cliff edge. She plunged into Poseidon’s domain, and the crashing waves swallowed her and her cries forever.

This wasn’t something that could be undone. I knew that without asking. This gift I’d been given which was supposed to have, in turn, given me all I wanted – it was for eternity. The word was whispered by my soul. So there was nothing to do but what my Master had done with his own Curse: embrace it, become it, enjoy what I could of it. And that, ever since, is what I have endeavored to do.

Sometimes, a woman crosses my path who reminds me of Ariastre in some small way. I have turned them all, in the hope of finding her again in this world, and so far, each has let me down. Most have been killed, or have let themselves die. Too weak, far, far too weak. And by these words, I mean to refer to myself.