

AN ALL-NEW SCI-FI/FANTASY YA NOVEL FROM
THE AUTHOR OF THE PRĪMULĪ PROPHECIES

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BENTON

LILI G
MUST
DIE

SAMPLE CHAPTER
FROM

LILI G MUST DIE

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

TREMORS

Although there were substantial differences between the two historic worlds of humanity, there were also many similarities between them. One such similarity was seismic activity, and all it usually took

was one good thump to get things going.

"Azulquake!" a school administrator yelled in utter panic, fleeing for the main entrance.

Children screamed and ran for the closest doorway. The ground rolled and shook. Flexible walls bent to the irresistible will of massive planetary forces.

It was a big one. That much was certain.

Standing in the original, main building, Lili frantically looked around for the twins. They had just been next to her, right after science class, but were now nowhere to be found. Keeping a sharp eye out, the one person in her immediate vicinity whom she personally knew was Margaret Morganstein, who had herself pinned into a corner with a look of terror frozen onto her pale, flawless face.

Soooo not brave. Now, where are the twins?

As the ground violently swayed from side to side and the floor buckled and rolled, Lili tried to maintain her balance and keep from falling down. She didn't know why, but her head was throbbing. Fortunately, her lycan instincts kicked in, giving her a boost of unnatural energy. Feeling like she could make a running start, she made a break for the open front doors, but stopped when she heard a soft sob.

Margaret was still in the corner by her locker.

Aw, dang...

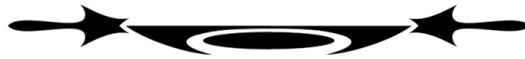
Lili couldn't leave Margaret. The protective nature of her lycan genetics prevented her from doing so. She ran over to where her drama-prone enemy sat, not even realizing why she was bothering to help the girl in the first place. "Margaret, come with me... now!" she barked, grabbing the girl's arm and pulling her into an upright position.

"No... don't touch me, Gatto. You're creepy," Margaret whined. She yanked away from Lili's grip and folded her arms in pouty defiance.

"You fool! We must escape from this building before it collapses onto our heads."

I cannot believe I am helping her. There are so many more deserving children in the world.

"Margaret, we need to get out of here now," Lili yelled, again grabbing the girl's arm. This time Lili managed to drag Margaret down the hallway. Turning to the main entrance, she saw the pathway out had already collapsed, so she hauled the girl in the opposite direction, with Lili's enhanced strength assisting in her efforts. However, she only managed to proceed about twenty meters before the entire floor fell beneath them with a thunderous crash.



It is so dark. Why... can I not move? What is this?

Lili concentrated as hard as she could, trying to bring up her HUD, but instead found undecipherable static clogging up her peripheral vision. Random, broken imagery flashed before her eyes. Something was wrong, and she knew it. After some attempts, she managed to bring up her hieroglyphics. Slowly scrolling through an erratic and partially complete periodic table of elements, she found the last thing she ever wanted to see.

The girls were completely surrounded by the element BQ—the Azulian version of quadrinium.

Lili looked around in the darkness. Her night vision, while usually excellent, was now better than ever. Lili found this to be a bit troubling. Then, she finally realized what was happening to her. She only hoped the same thing wasn't happening to someone else.

Remembering an article she once read regarding disaster survivors, Lili dragged Margaret to where they could hide under a triangulated space, thereby decreasing the likelihood they would be crushed.

"Gatto, let go of me—"

"Shut up, you idiot. I am saving your life... even though it pains me to do so."

It is also happening to Margaret. This is not good.

Grabbing her nemesis and pushing her down, Lili felt a surge of energy shoot through her body. She was changing, but it wasn't the natural change she was supposed to go through. As Margaret struggled to free herself, a deep, throbbing pain wracked Lili's mouth, made worse by the pounding in her temples. She reached up and felt elongated canine teeth, along with some sparse hair on her chin.

No. Not now... please. She cannot see me. If only I could slip us out of here...

"Gatto, what's happening? I don't feel well."

"Remain calm, Margaret. Help shall come soon."

Lili sat back against a fallen chunk of ceiling and attempted to analyze her situation while facing away from Margaret. Lili's hearing was acute as ever, and despite the pain in her head, she could smell, and even taste the fact that there were many people trapped inside the school. Listening intently, she tried to detect movement or voices near them, and concluded there was no one in their immediate vicinity.

"Gatto—what happened?"

"Azulquake, Margaret. It is the perceptible shaking of the surface of Azul, resulting from the sudden release of energy in the planet's crust, that creates seismic waves."

"Huh? Can't you just speak normal? You are so weird, and... oh my god..."

"What is it?" Lili asked, looking at Margaret's shocked expression.

"You have a mustache. That's it! That's why you are so weird. You're... a boy?"

"I am most certainly not a boy, Margaret. I believe that we are both being affected by a nearby metal. It has created some changes. You appear to have gone through a bit of a transformation, also."

"What? Like what?" Margaret demanded.

Margaret started to feel her own face, running her fingers over rotting flecks of skin. Lili sighed and turned away from her slightly enhanced antagonist. She knew Margaret had just acquired superior night vision—typical for a vampire—and would soon start to ask even more questions.

"Margaret, what do you know of your parents?"

"Like what?"

"I mean... have they been acting in a manner most unusual as of late?"

"Gawd, Gatto. You talk like a dork. And no. My parents are perfect. We're rich and we can do anything we want. So you better find a way to get us out of here. You made me stay, so it's all your fault."

"Margaret, I do not *talk like a dork*, as you say. I speak correctly, although neither English nor Castilian are my native tongues."

"Oh... what is your, um, native tongue?"

Lili sighed. "Margaret, you frequently refer to me as a *Swiss cheese-head*."

"Yeah, so?"

"Then, where am I from?"

"New Switzerland."

"Correct. So what is my native language?"

Margaret kept her mouth shut this time.

"It is called *Schweizerisch*," said Lili. "You would call it Swiss, or *suiza* when speaking in Castilian. It is a subset of the ancient German language. Now please, Margaret, have you noticed anything odd regarding your parents?"

"First, say something in swizzledorks."

" *Schweizerisch*. Very well. *Du bist ein dummes Kind*."

"Hey, that actually sounded kinda cool! What did you say?"

"I said *you are a stupid child*. Now, please pay attention. Have you noticed anything unusual regarding your parents lately?"

Margaret made an impish, disappointed face and stared out into the darkness. She then admitted, "Yeah. They don't eat with me anymore."

"Nothing? No solid food at all?"

"Nope. They just drink their wine all the time."

"Have you tried it?"

"Wine? Oh yeah, all the time. I have my own personal wine cellar, you know."

"No, I was unaware," Lili answered, unimpressed."

"I have a massive a selection of malbecs."

"Is that what your parents drink?"

"I don't know which varietal they drink, but they won't even let me taste it. It's super dark red, that's for sure. They said one day in the future I will."

"Hmm, of that I have no doubt." Lili paused. "Have you noticed anything else?"

Margaret seemed to ponder the thought for a moment. "Mom is mean to our housekeeper. I mean, meaner than usual."

"In what way?"

"Mom beat her up the other night. It really made me sad. I mean, I know she's not family or anything, but I love Maria a lot. She's been with us since I was a baby."

Margaret is capable of love? "Is there anything else you can tell me?"

"I think they had cosmetic gen-mod procedures done, 'cause they look a lot younger. Why do you wanna know?"

"I merely wanted to see if you were aware of their transformation."

"Their... what? Transformation? What are you talking about?"

"I might as well tell you. Margaret, you maintain the recessive genes of a subspecies of humanity long ago deactivated."

"Gatto, what the hell are you talking about?"

"You are an inactive vampire, but I fear our proximity to an exposed vein of blue quadrinium has had an effect on you, and your recessive genes are now partially activated."

"Daddy said we're called magisters, and that we're royalty. That means I own you, Gatto, so you'd better get your butt in gear and get me out of this place." The pale girl's brief period of lucidity was coming to an end. Her change was starting to take hold, and Lili could smell it growing in rotting intensity.

"Margaret, you are a spoiled, uncouth little girl. If you only understood that others are not here for your personal pleasure—"

"Shut up, Gatto. I can do whatever I want. And I'm telling everyone you're a boy and you grow mustaches when you're scared."

"You shall do no such thing," Lili said, attempting to remain calm, despite her amped metabolism firing up her emotional responses. She needed to find a way to escape

the effects of the toxic metal, but feared relief would only come when they got to the surface, and not a second sooner.

"I'll do anything I please, Gattoweirdo."

"Please, do not call me that, Margaret."

"Gattoweirdo. Dego wannabe. Swiss loser."

"Margaret, stop," Lili hissed.

"Huérfana! You're a sad, lonely little loser with no parents. Orphan!"

"Shut up!" Lili screamed.

Lili struck Margaret across the face, cutting the back of her hand on the girl's elongated eyeteeth. Despite her fury, Lili was sincerely glad she had left her rhodium ring at home that day. In Margaret's unnaturally enhanced state, any blood contact with one of the six deadly metals would have immediately turned her into a human meat torch.

But Lili's noble nature only worked to her disadvantage.

Margaret licked her lips, tasting blood. Her eyes dilated. And then she jumped.

Lili felt a sudden, piercing agony in her chest. Margaret had punched her with every bit of strength she had, and it hurt. The last thing Lili expected was for the girl to attack, but it was logical she did so. Margaret was changing, but not into the regal, near-immortal, UV-light resistant type of vampire. She was changing into the type that was modified by humanity's minders—into the cursed, Earthly version. Lili knew that if Margaret's transformation was to stick, the girl could expect to live to about thirty-five years of age, be completely intolerant to the system's twin suns, have rotting flesh and smell like a garbage dump—even to normals. Lili actually entertained the idea of the

lovely Margaret Morganstein smelling like fermented waste for a microsecond, but then she was knocked back into reality.

Margaret again struck Lili, but this time with a front kick.

Sharga! Does she study Karate or something?

As those thoughts flew through her head during the span of a mere microsecond, Lili's body flew through the air, with her landing flat on her back. The lycan mind was sharp, but the body was even sharper. Lili quickly recouped and was on her feet in less than a second.

Margaret commenced with her attack, but was unknowingly up against someone with ample battle experience.

Lili had over thirty hand-to-hand combat Vrol kills to her name: her insect body count was easily the highest on both Earth and Azul. She had taken lives before, without remorse, and wasn't about to put a lockdown on her macabre death tally.

Thus, Lili's reaction was swift and without mercy.

She shot her arm straight out and caught Margaret by the throat. Without hesitation, Lili slammed her adversary onto the ground, breaking not the girl's bones, but flooring material that had collapsed with them during the quake. Health particles coursed through Margaret's body, reinforcing and rebuilding her even as she continued to rot, just as would happen to her Earthly ancestors so many centuries prior.

"Do not ever call me that. Never, ever call me an orphan, you vile, repugnant garbage eater," Lili snarled, yanking Margaret up by her now dirty uniform shirt.

But the fight wasn't over.

Margaret surprised Lili with a powerful kick to the solar plexus, knocking the wind out of the lycan's lungs. Fortunately, it wasn't enough to cause Lili to lose her grip on the rapidly changing vampire.

Lili started to pull the girl into her punches. Again and again she smashed her clenched fist into Margaret's face, only to see the girl's cheeks, mouth and nose warp and eerily reform after each blow. Margaret, although pale and nasty, was quite a pretty girl, and it upset Lili more than anything to see her foe's face self-heal after each crushing punch.

Margaret wisely put her arms up and tried to block Lili's barrage, laughing maniacally as she did so. "Orphan, ha-ha-ha. Lili Gatto's an orphan. What's the matter, weirdo... your parents didn't love you enough to stick around?"

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.

Lili learned that rhyme while studying ancient Earth history. But, in her case, Margaret's face was like stone and the names did indeed hurt.

And then it happened. Lili lost it.

There wasn't a modicum of control left in her mind, her body or her immortal soul. Margaret had crossed the thin, red line that Lili constantly maintained—the barrier that separated her animalistic instincts from her more humane nature. Hitting Margaret so hard in the chest that it decimated the girl's sternum, Lili watched as her opponent cleaved through a wall, sliding to a stop on her back in an adjacent storeroom. Lili burst through the newly made hole and stomped over to finish her work, looking down at the now-unconscious Margaret Morganstein.

No one shall ask. No one shall know. It will appear that she died from fallen rubble.

Enraged and feeling a bit dizzy from involuntary hyperventilation, Lili picked up a large piece of hypercrete, and was prepared to drop it onto her enemy's head. Her hands slowly relaxed. She could feel the stone composite begin to slide along her fingertips. In a matter of seconds gravity would do the dirty deed. The hypercrete block would fall, with the massive weight of the stone flattening the girl's face, joining the fore of her skull with the aft, and causing Margaret's brains to splatter all over the floor and nearby walls.

But Lili hesitated. She noted a small change in her enemy's face, and it gave her pause.

Margaret was reverting back to an inactive state. In fact, they were both changing.

Lili ran her tongue over her canines and felt that her teeth were also retracting. She tossed the large chunk of hypercrete off to the side, where it landed with a tremendous thud, breaking into numerous, smaller pieces. Lili reached up to her chin. She failed to detect any stubble, and now knew they had both moved out of the range of the blue quadrinium's effects. Still, she wanted to kill the girl. Margaret brought out dark emotions in Lili that should have remained buried deep within in her psyche; feelings she didn't even know existed.

Taking slow, deep breaths to calm down, Lili fell into an exasperated, seated position and stared at the spoiled girl, who was by now back to her normal, inactive self, and partially healed at that. But she had one particular issue to deal with before they were rescued. Margaret now had knowledge of Lili's genetics, as well as her own, and Lili couldn't allow the girl to tell anyone. She stood up and walked over to another massive chunk of hypercrete, preparing to pick it up and close the loophole.

"Hey kid, you okay?"

Lili looked over to see the first of her rescuers—a short, muscular, dego fireman, who had arrived just in time to save a life.

It just happened to not be Lili's.

Instead of crushing the girl's skull with a massive hunk of manmade stone, as she had intended to do, Lili touched Margaret's arm and thought out her command:

Lili Gatto is a normal girl without facial hair. There was no fight. She is not that bad of a person. Your parents are not vampires. They are simply on a liquid diet and they recently had surgical procedures done to make them appear younger. Nothing happened.

"Yes, sir. I am well. My schoolmate here, however, requires medical attention."

Lili wiped the dust off her face and watched a small team of emergency paramedics attended to Margaret.

She shook her head.

Lili found life to be incredibly unfair. She knew Margaret Morganstein would never have a worry in her entire existence. The girl would meet the perfect, rich, vampire man, get married and have perfect, rich little vampire children. Margaret's terrible attitude would continue to be excused, and, unless she was turned, she would live out her pathetically short life of roughly a century doing whatever she pleased.

So, Lili did what any other girl with amazing magical abilities would do in the same situation:

Cuerpo incantatio cutis vulgaris.

"No amount of benzoyl peroxide can help you now, Miss Morganstein," Lili whispered.

As a paramedic used a gravity platform to lift Lili from the wreckage of the old main hall, she looked down and watched Margaret's face start to change.

END SAMPLE

