A woman with dark hair, wearing a dark, textured coat, is shown from the waist up, looking down. Her hands are resting on a dark, textured surface, and there is visible blood on her fingers. She appears to be drawing or tracing glowing, reddish-orange symbols on the ground. The background is dark and moody, with silhouettes of bare trees and several birds flying in the sky.

The *Threshold* of Beatrix Renley

A gothic tale of
surrender, shadow,
and the price of
knowledge

Ellis

The
Threshold
of Beatrix
Renley

By Sam Ellis

Based on

The Works of Bram Stoker
Co-authored via ReTell™

ReTell™
2025

Copyright © 2025 by Sam Ellis and ReTell™

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except as permitted by U.S. copyright law.

The story, all names, characters, and incidents portrayed in this production are fictitious. No identification with actual persons (living or deceased), places, buildings, and products is intended or should be inferred.

Book Cover by Sam Ellis
Illustrations by Sam Ellis

1st edition 2025

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

The Roots Beneath Bistriz1

Chapter 2

Ash and Coin5

Chapter 3

The Ash Path9

Chapter 4

The Blood-Marked Earth13

Chapter 5

The Bird That Did Not Blink17

Chapter 6

The Shop of Wrong Names21

Chapter 7

The Drinking of Dreams25

Chapter 8

A Choice Sharper Than Ash31

Chapter 9

Bride of No Ceremony33

Chapter 10

Fog with a Name37



Chapter 1 | The Roots Beneath Bistritz

Bistritz, 1887. Spring thaw bled through the Carpathians, turning narrow forest paths into black veins of mud. Most saw the melt as a sign of life returning. But to Beatrix Renley, the apothecary of Moldovan Lane, it brought things back to the surface that should have stayed buried.

Her shop sat low along a cobbled alleyway, half-sunken, with iron-latticed windows clouded by steam and tincture smoke. Inside, roots and herbs dangled from ceiling beams, casting spindly shadows that quivered in lamplight. Glass jars lined the walls — horehound and hellebore, belladonna and bloodroot. All meticulously labeled. All studied deeply.

Beatrix was not native to Transylvania, but she had lived in Bistritz long enough to know what the villagers whispered. They did not trust outsiders — not even one who cured their children's fevers and eased their childbirths. But they came to her nonetheless, when the priests failed them and the sicknesses turned strange.

That week, the strange had returned.

It began with the starlings. Flocks of them — hundreds, maybe thousands — had begun circling the steeple of the old Lutheran church just past dusk. They did not roost. They only circled. And when they cried, it sounded like a scream muffled by snow.

Then the twins fell ill — Adina and Viorica Dumitru, seven years old, previously healthy. Their eyes clouded, they could not wake, and each dawn they were paler. Father Petru claimed it was the grippe. But Beatrix had pressed a mirror to their lips. Their breath did not fog it.

Something old was moving again.

That night, she stirred elder root into sheep's milk and left it outside the Dumitru home — an offering. Her grandmother would have done the same. She did not expect it to work.

But come morning, the milk was gone — and beside the empty bowl lay three long black feathers. Starlings did not shed feathers that large.

Later that day, a man came to her shop. Tall, shrouded in a weather-stained cloak, with an accent like Moldovan stone. He asked not for herbs, but for ash — from the bones of a stillborn calf, charred in a thistle fire. He laid down a gold coin the size of her palm.

“I have need of it,” he said. “There are things in the earth that no longer sleep.”

She did not ask his name.

That night, she locked her shop with trembling hands.



Chapter 2 | Ash and Coin

The man's coin had weight — not just of gold, but of omen. She could not shake the image of it as it lay glinting in her palm: worn smooth, etched with an emblem she did not know — a two-headed bird pierced by a black sun.

He had not returned. And no one else in Bistritz had seen him. At least, no one admitted to it.

But Beatrix had learned to listen with more than ears.

She began with the old woman who swept the steps outside the Lutheran rectory. Bent, silent, always watching. When Beatrix asked about strangers arriving with the thaw, the woman said nothing — only spat through the gap in her teeth and pointed east, toward the market, where the Romani caravans had passed the week before.

She found a young boy near the ox pens who said he had seen a man matching that description — tall, hunched, his boots stained in white mud — bargaining

not for wares but for bloodletting leeches. He paid with a coin “too big to fit in any hand but the priest’s.”

That evening, Beatrix went to the river.

There, at the edge of the water, stood a woman no one in town called by name. She was known only as **the Widow of the White Gorge**, and no one asked how long she’d lived. Some said she was a midwife. Others said her child had never been born. Either way, Beatrix brought a flask of horilka and two dried apples — her usual offering.

The Widow took them without thanks and sipped from the flask. Then she said, “You seek a man with no shadow.”

Beatrix’s voice barely carried in the damp air. “What is he?”

“Something that used to be a man,” the Widow said. “But it starved too long. So now it feeds differently.”

She leaned forward, fingers brushing the frost-hard ground.

“He walks between parishes, where no priest claims him. No mirror holds him. He does not kill quickly, Beatrix Renley. He empties you like a flask, drop by drop, until you pray for thirst to end you.”

Beatrix steadied her voice. “Do you know where he went?”

The Widow nodded toward the hills. “The ash path.”

Beatrix knew it — a scorched stretch of trail behind the Dumitru fields, where nothing grew. The soil there was gray and always warm, even in winter.

As Beatrix turned to go, the Widow whispered:

“Don’t take iron. Don’t take prayer. Take something that remembers the blood.”



Chapter 3 | The Ash Path

At first, the trail looked like any other — a thread of dirt between the heather, darkened by melt and mule hooves. But an hour beyond the Dumitru fields, it turned pale. Not from frost. From ash.

No trees grew here. No bird sang. The silence was deeper than absence — it felt *held*, like breath before a scream.

Beatrix moved carefully. She wore her thickest coat, but the air made her bones ache. The wind blew wrong — it moved toward her instead of past.

The path dipped into a hollow. Burnt stumps jutted from the soil like ribs, and the earth grew warm underfoot. She thought of the old stories — the ones whispered by dying widowers and blind washerwomen. Tales of roots that drank what should never have been buried, of white bark soaked in sins older than man.

At the center of the hollow stood a shape.

At first, she thought it was a scarecrow — a cross-pole figure draped in ragged wool, motionless. But as she stepped closer, her hand twitching toward the scalpel in her boot, she saw the cloak.

The cloaked man stood with his back to her, facing the charred trees. He had no pack. No fire. Only a crow perched on his shoulder — silent, feathers matte with soot.

“I know you,” Beatrix said quietly.

“I know you do,” he replied.

She stepped into the clearing. The ash shifted under her boots.

“You asked for bone ash. Said the earth was waking.”

He nodded, still facing away. “It’s not waking. It’s *unsealing*. The frost was its lock. And the lock is melting.”

She felt the weight of the scalpel against her ankle. “What is down there?”

He finally turned.

His eyes were yellow as goat’s milk. His mouth too pale, too tight, as if unused to forming words.

“They call him Count,” the man said. “But he is older than that title. Older than thrones. He is hunger with a name.”

Beatrix’s breath stilled. “You serve him?”

The cloaked man looked up. The crow left his shoulder and vanished into the burnt trees.

“I serve balance,” he said. “But the Count... has not eaten in a long time. When he rises, Bistriz will be first.”

Then he stepped backward into the ash — and was gone.

Not vanished, exactly. *Sunken*. As if the ground had drunk him.

Beatrix stared, heart pounding, ash clinging to her lashes. Then she heard the breathing.

Not hers. Not wind.
Below her.

Wet. Slow. Smelling of rot and roses.



Chapter 4 | The Blood-Marked Earth

Beatrix had read it once in a scrap of a Saxon grimoire: *“That which sleeps beneath cannot be summoned by name, only by need. The land drinks need through wounds.”*

She knelt.

The ash burned cold where her knees touched. Slowly, without prayer, she drew the silver scalpel from her boot. The blade was spotless, mirror-sharp — even after all these years. She placed it against the base of her palm.

Then cut.

The pain was small. The *sound* it made — of skin parting — was worse.

Blood spilled across her lifeline, and she let it drip freely. One drop fell onto the earth. It smoked. Another. Another. Then she pressed her open palm against the ash, grinding it in.

At first, there was nothing. Just the whisper of wind, the scent of rot.

Then the breathing came again — *closer*.

The ash beneath her hand pulsed.

Beatrix tried to pull back, but her hand stuck — *held*. The scalpel clattered from her other hand. She screamed, not from pain, but from the cold rising up through her arm. It was as if something beneath her skin was *sniffing* her through her blood.

Then came a voice.

Not aloud. Not in her ears.
Inside her.

A voice like a cathedral door being opened after centuries:

“You are not the bride.”

Beatrix gasped, struggling. The ash gripped tighter.

**“You are not the priest. You are not the child.
You are not the wolf. Why do you bleed?”**

Beatrix forced words through gritted teeth.

“I want to know what you are.”

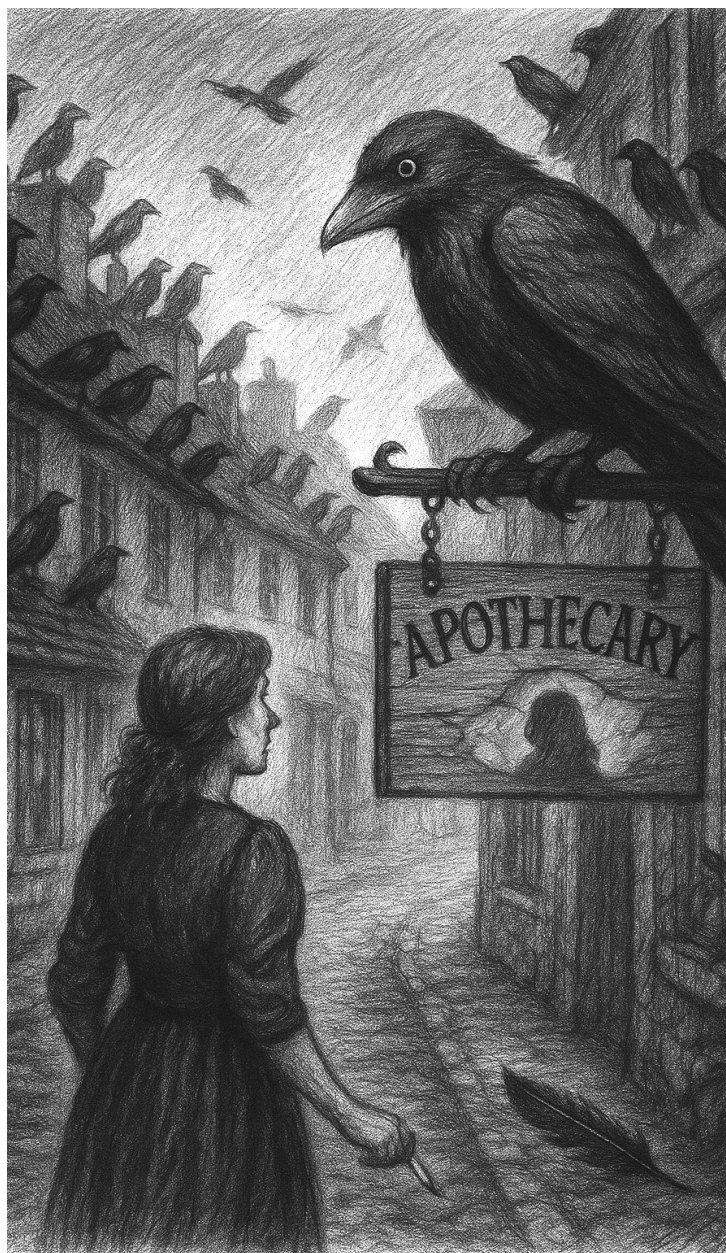
The silence that followed was thick as grave soil. Then
— the earth let go.

Beatrix tumbled backward, gasping, hand slick with blood and cinders. The hollow around her had changed — slightly. The ash now formed patterns. Glyphs. Circles. Symbols she didn't recognize, but somehow *understood*.

A *bargain* had been opened.

She had not summoned the Count.

But she had drawn his gaze.



Chapter 5 | The Bird That Did Not Blink

Beatrix reached the edge of town as the sun began to fall behind the chapel spires. She pressed her scarf to her wounded palm, already crusted with black ash and blood, and forced her steps to look measured. The Bistritz townsfolk knew how to spot a woman who had been *in the woods* too long — and they did not take kindly to it.

But it was not the villagers who watched her now.

It was the birds.

The first perched atop the miller's chimney — a sleek crow, not large, but too still. It did not call. Did not move. Just turned its head to follow her.

Another on the bell tower.

Another above the grainhouse.

Another on the lamppost outside the butcher's.

Each one silent. Each one black as coal and gleaming in the half-light.

When she reached Moldovan Lane, her fingers trembling at the key in her coat, she dared to look up.

There, on the apothecary's sign — where the painted mortar and pestle swung gently in the dusk wind — sat a crow.

The crow.

She knew it. The one from the ash path.
Its eyes were wrong — too pale.

It did not move as she unlocked the door. Did not caw when she stepped inside.

But it stayed.

All night.

Beatrix drew the curtains. Lit no lamps. She wrapped her bleeding hand in wormwood gauze and took tincture to calm her nerves. But sleep came only in pieces — every noise a question. Every silence worse.

At some point past midnight, the crow tapped once on the glass.

Only once.

The sound echoed through her skull like a cracked bell.



Chapter 6 | The Shop of Wrong Names

Morning rose weak and colorless.

Beatrix awoke hunched in her chair, the wormwood bandage clinging to her palm, brittle with dried blood. She'd fallen asleep with the silver scalpel clutched in her other hand. The fire had gone out.

She opened the curtains.

The crow was gone.

Only a single black feather remained, caught on a shard of glass from the windowsill. It fluttered once — then crumbled to soot.

Beatrix moved through the shop slowly, with the dread of someone walking through a memory turned sour.

The change was subtle — at first.

A jar of valerian that had been labeled “*Sleeproot*” was now marked “*Wakebone*.”

Woundwort had become “*Hollowleaf*.”

Every label in the shop had been turned to its opposite — yet the handwriting was her own.

She tried to peel one off — but the ink bled into her fingers, refusing to lift.

And then she saw the mirrors.

The long one by the counter, the compact one near the tincture shelf, the shard she kept behind the drawer in case of light charms — all *cracked*.

Not shattered — *veined*, like glass suffering from some slow disease. Her reflection stared back fragmented, eyes multiplied, hands wrong-sized. In one mirror, her mouth did not move in time with her own.

She backed away — heart pounding — and knocked a jar to the floor.

It rolled. Stopped.

Then began to *roll back* toward her.

Beatrix fled the room.

In the dark of the root cellar, she sobbed. Not because she was frightened — though she was. But because she

knew, deep in the red pulp of her heart, that this was not a curse meant to harm.

It was a **summons**.



Chapter 7 | The Drinking of Dreams

The elixir was not meant for sleep.
It was meant to *pull*.

Beatrix had made it only once before — and only then to guide a dying child beyond pain. It was brewed with poppy smoke, ashcap spores, wolfsbane root, and her own blood, dissolved in nightshade wine under a waning moon. The old books called it *Milkurath* — the Mirror Draught.

She drank it at dusk. Alone. Surrounded by the wreck of her shop.

It tasted like copper and honey, like crushed petals in milk gone sour. Her body resisted it — her fingers trembling, stomach knotting — but she forced it down.

Then she lay in her apothecary bed, blindfolded with black linen, arms stretched outward like a corpse in waiting.

Sleep did not come.
She *left*.

It was not like dreaming.

It was falling **upward**.

Through a windless dark that smelled of damp velvet and burning coins. She saw no stars — only eyes. Saw no sky — only *ceiling*. Vaulted and stone, lined with bones. And below it — a long chamber, lit by candelabras made of antlers, glowing with tongues of blue flame.

At the far end of the chamber sat **a throne carved of wolves**.

And on it — *him*.

The Count.

He was not in motion. Yet somehow he *shifted* with every glance — now man, now shadow, now silhouette against the blood moon that *was not in the sky*.

His voice did not echo. It *arrived*.

“Beatrix Renley,” it said. **“How deep must your hunger go, to drink your way into mine?”**

She could not speak. Her lips moved, but sound did not carry.

He rose. The wolves that made his throne *howled without mouths*.

He walked toward her — floating, not stepping, his coat a river of black.

He reached for her chest.

And opened her.

She saw herself from the inside.

Her memories bled out like moths.

The dead twins. The scalpel. Her grandmother's song. The crow. The Widow. The mirror that would not reflect.

“You have been seen,” he whispered. **“You have been tasted. You have been... invited.”**

Then, softly:

“Come to me. Or let me come to you.”

And with that, she *awoke* — screaming.

The shop was dark. The moon had vanished.

And someone had *lit the lantern in the back room*.



Chapter 8 | A Choice Sharper Than Ash

The flame in the back room was too still — like something holding its breath. Beatrix approached with the scalpel gripped tight in her bleeding palm.

She did not expect the cloaked man.

He sat at her table, his hood lowered for the first time. His face was older than it should've been — lined like a tree stump, with a pallor that seemed more stone than skin. His eyes glowed faintly, not gold this time, but silver.

Before him, on her butcher's board, lay a stake. Not wood. Not iron.

Blackbone.

Forged from something *that used to live but never should've* — it gleamed oily in the lantern light as he sharpened it slowly with a file that hissed like steam.

“I told you,” he said without looking up, “you are not the bride. But you *could* be the door.”

Beatrix said nothing.

“I saw what you did,” he continued. “The ash. The blood. The dream-draught. He sees you now. You didn’t summon him. You *offered yourself*. And now...”

He looked up.

“...you have to choose.”

Beatrix sat. Her legs didn’t ask permission.

“Choose what?” she asked, voice raw.

He slid the black stake across the table.

“You can go to him. Join the court beneath the Carpathians. Trade your breath for power and become something *other*. Or—” he tapped the stake “—you can take this, find the chapel where his body lies waiting, and drive it into his resting heart *before he fully wakes*.”

Beatrix looked down at the stake. It felt *alive*, even untouched. Like it remembered being used before.

“And what if I fail?”

“Then Bistritz will rot. Your bones will scream in your sleep. And he will not kill you. He’ll keep you *to remind the others.*”

They sat in silence for a moment.

Then the man leaned in.

“Make no mistake, apothecary. You are not the hero of this tale. You are its *threshold*. What steps through you is up to you.”

He rose.

And vanished.

No door opened. No wind stirred. He was simply gone.

Beatrix was alone with the stake, the lantern, and the cold.



Chapter 9 | Bride of No Ceremony

The fire was low. The coals barely breathed.

Beatrix stared at the stake for what felt like hours. The blackbone glistened — not with oil, but with memory. It *wanted* to be used. It *ached* for old blood.

And still, she opened the grate.

The flames licked higher as she placed the stake in slowly — not with haste, not with fear, but with ritual. The bone sizzled, then screamed — a high, keening cry like wind through a keyhole. The flames turned violet.

She whispered.

“I am yours.”

The fire *went out*.

Not slowly. Not naturally. It *snapped*, as if swallowed. The room plunged into silence.

Then the apothecary began to *change*.

Not outwardly. Not yet.

But in her mind — in the place where names live.

She could no longer remember the scent of rosemary.

She could no longer picture her mother's face.

Her hand — the one she had bled with — no longer ached.

The cracked mirrors began to heal.

In one of them, her reflection tilted its head. Smiled before she did.

And then — at the edge of hearing — came a sound like hoofbeats, but softer. Like paws on marble.

He was coming.

No longer asleep.

No longer beneath.

He had been *invited*.

And Beatrix Renley — apothecary of Bistriz —
was now the **first stone in a new foundation**.

Not bride.
Not victim.
Threshold.



Chapter 10 | Fog with a Name

The fog came at sundown.

Not like mist. Not like breath. It rolled in from the east, low and thick, and it did not rise. It clung to the streets like hunger, coiling around fences and shutters and open mouths. It drowned the chapel bells. It made dogs whimper and milk curdle.

And at its center walked Beatrix Renley.

Her apothecary door swung open not with a creak, but a sigh — as if the town itself had been holding its breath.

She walked slowly, barefoot, hair unbound, her apron stained with ash and elderroot sap. Her eyes — once brown — were now the color of old bone.

She said no words.

But they heard him.

Every man, woman, and child in Bistritz felt their thoughts bend. Their memories shudder. Their knees weaken — not in fear, but in **recognition**.

The voice came not from her mouth, but from the walls.
The stones. The roots.
It was velvet soaked in blood.

**“You have kept the fire. I have kept the hunger.
We begin again.”**

Father Petru fell to his knees. The Dumitru twins rose from their beds. The crows did not return to the rooftops — they *entered* the homes.

And Beatrix? She stood in the village square, arms open like a crucifix drowned in shadow. Her lips moved in silence. Her breath left no fog.

The Count had no need to come in form.

He had come in **consent**.

And she — the woman who once bled to protect — was now the vessel through which the **age of feeding** would begin anew.

Bistritz did not burn.
It simply forgot the sun.

Thank You for Reading

We hope you enjoyed *The Threshold of Beatrix Renly*, a tale spun from the shadows of Bram Stoker's classic.

If this story stirred your imagination, there's more waiting beyond the grave.

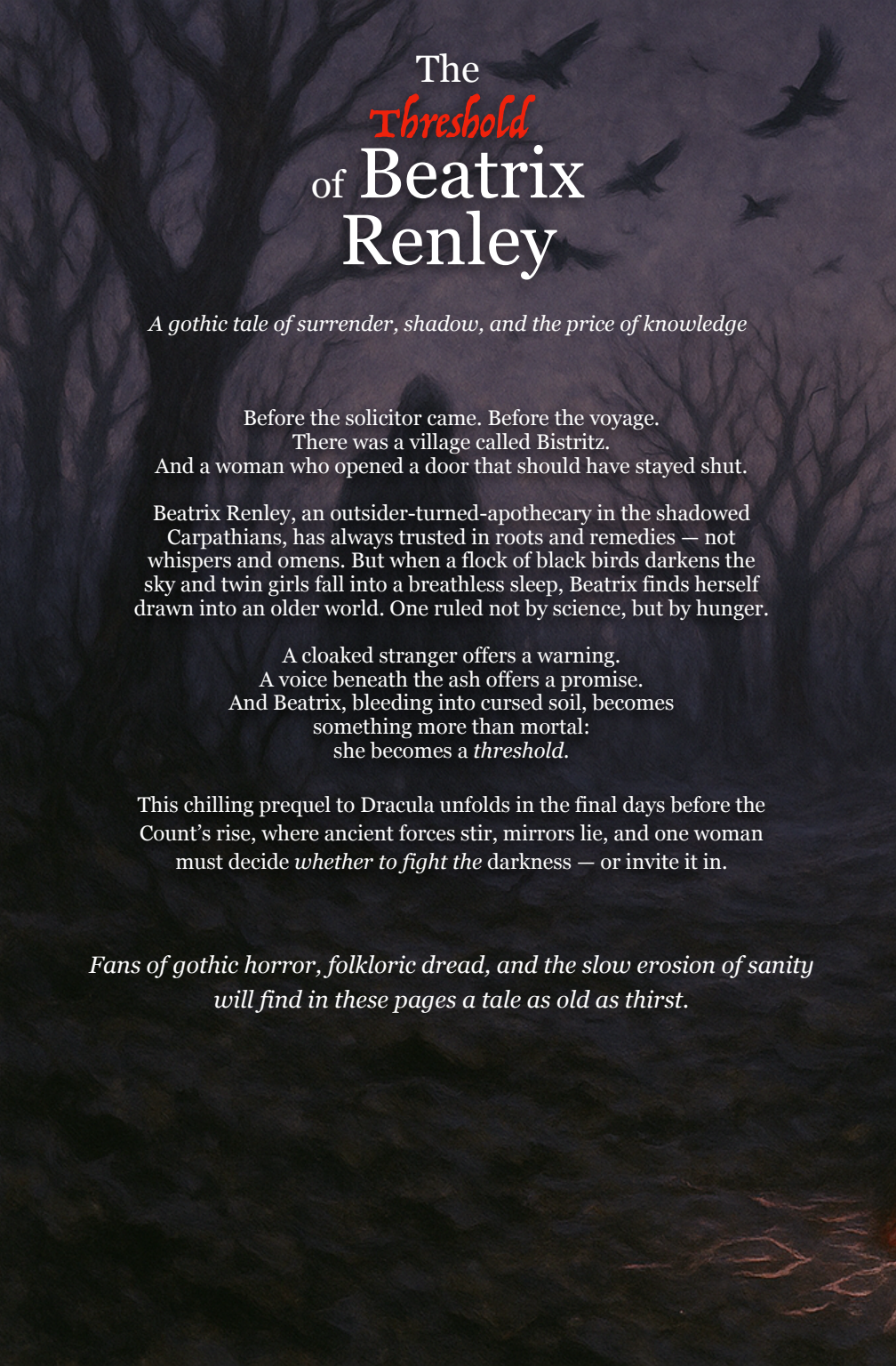
At **ReTell™**, we believe stories should be shared, shaped, and reimaged—by readers like you. Whether you want to explore new tales or co-author your own and bring them to life in print, we're building a platform for storytellers and dreamers alike.

Want in?

Scan the QR code below and join our waitlist to be among the first to create, collaborate, and publish stories powered by your imagination.



Your story deserves to be told. Let's ReTell it.



The *Threshold* of Beatrix Renley

A gothic tale of surrender, shadow, and the price of knowledge

Before the solicitor came. Before the voyage.
There was a village called Bistritz.
And a woman who opened a door that should have stayed shut.

Beatrix Renley, an outsider-turned-apothecary in the shadowed Carpathians, has always trusted in roots and remedies — not whispers and omens. But when a flock of black birds darkens the sky and twin girls fall into a breathless sleep, Beatrix finds herself drawn into an older world. One ruled not by science, but by hunger.

A cloaked stranger offers a warning.
A voice beneath the ash offers a promise.
And Beatrix, bleeding into cursed soil, becomes
something more than mortal:
she becomes a *threshold*.

This chilling prequel to *Dracula* unfolds in the final days before the Count's rise, where ancient forces stir, mirrors lie, and one woman must decide *whether to fight the darkness* — or invite it in.

*Fans of gothic horror, folkloric dread, and the slow erosion of sanity
will find in these pages a tale as old as thirst.*