

Excerpt from *The Vetala*
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One morning, walking into the outskirts of a village, they came to a small roadside temple with three men crouching silently in front, dressed in the standard white cotton farmer's costume of the countryside. The men looked up at them as they passed.

They had just slipped out of Nada's field of vision when one of the three men said, in Croatian, "What did you expect to find here that you couldn't have found at home?"

Nada felt her heart gripped by the cold nausea of fear. She and Zoran stopped, as if moved by the same impulse, and slowly turned to look back at the men. All three were staring up at them— or seemed to be, since the eyes of two of them were white blanks set in the harsh lineaments of their gaunt, sun-baked faces. The third had blazing red irises, and a young man's broad, full-lipped face. Lupine teeth shone in his unsmiling mouth.

For some time Nada and Zoran remained motionless. At last Zoran took two slow steps towards them. "Who are you?" he said in Croatian.

"Fellow travellers," replied the red-eyed one.

Now that they were standing still under its full force, Nada felt her head spinning from the already brutal sun. Things seemed unreal. The man went on, looking at Zoran: "I like your girlfriend. I don't like you. You won't make it out of here alive. But she and I will be seeing each other again." He chuckled darkly, the corners of his fanged mouth turning up in a smile.

Zoran's face twisted with anger. His body almost seemed to swell. Staring murderously at the man, he took one menacing, determined step forward, then staggered, collapsed, sprawled in the dirt before the three men, and lay still. Nada saw the red-eyed one rise, walk around Zoran, and slowly come towards her as the other two continued to look silently on. Darkness engulfed her. She felt herself fall.

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