

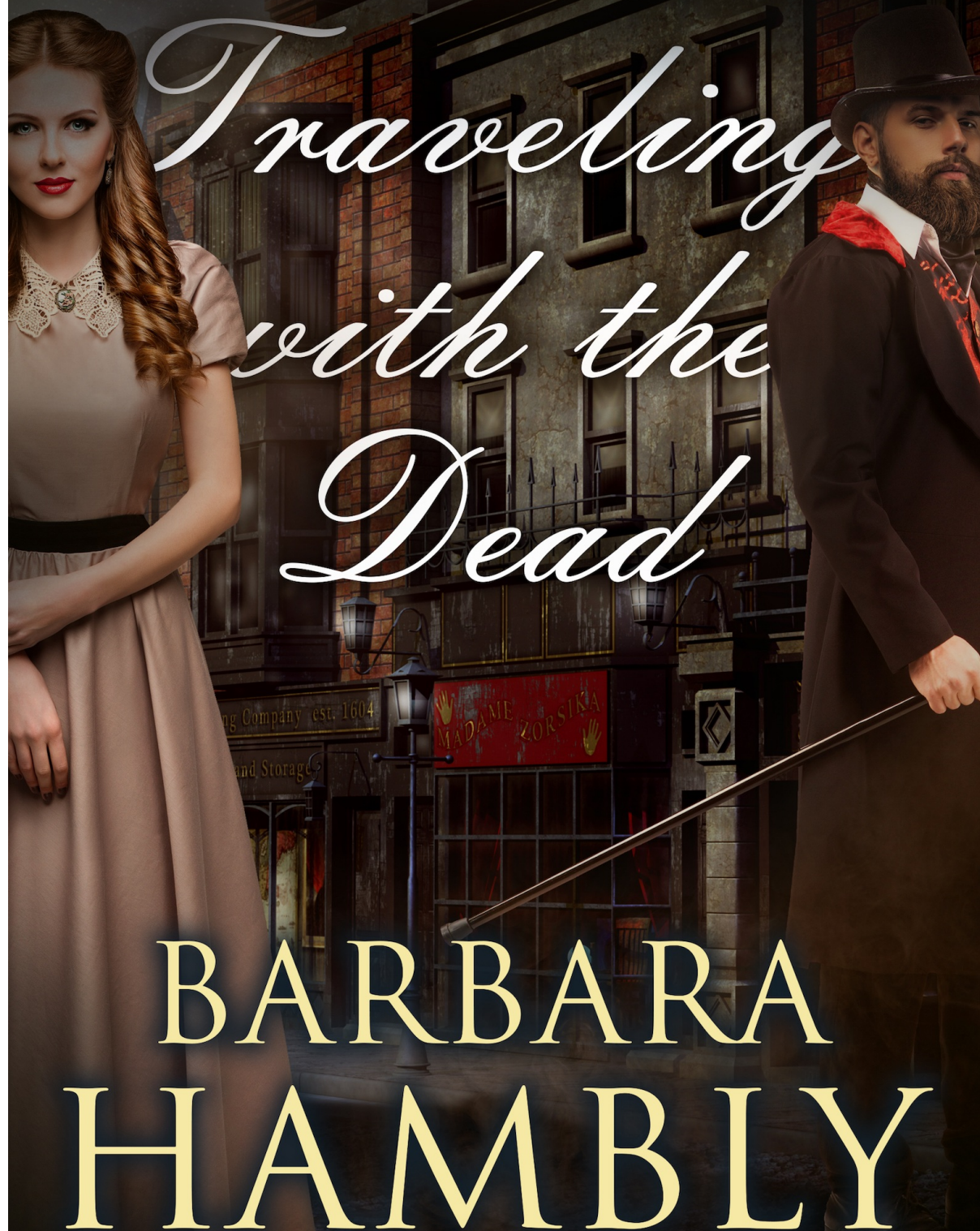
A JAMES ASHER VAMPIRE NOVEL

*Traveling
with the
Dead*

BARBARA
HAMBLBY

New York Times—Bestselling Author

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Traveling with the Dead

Barbara Hambly



For George
With a prayer in the shadow of the Aya Sofia

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A BIOGRAPHY OF BARBARA HAMBLBY

PROLOGUE

THE HOUSE WAS an old one, inconspicuous for its size. Curiously so, thought Lydia Asher, when she stood at last on the front steps, craning her neck to look up at five stories of shut-faced dark façade. More curious still, given the obvious age of the place, was the plain half timbering discernible under centuries of discoloration and soot, the bull's-eye glass of the unshuttered windows, the depth to which the centers of the stone steps had been worn.

Lydia shivered and pulled closer about her the coat she'd borrowed from her cook—even the plainest from her own collection would have been hopelessly fashionable for these narrow, nameless courts and alleys that clustered behind the waterfront between Blackfriars Bridge and Southwark. *He can't hurt me*, she thought, and brought up her hand to her throat. Under the high neck of her plain wool waist she could feel the thick links of half a dozen silver chains against her skin.

Can he?

It had taken her nearly an hour to find the court, which by some trick of chance had been left off all four modern maps of this part of London. The whole yard was adrift in fog the color of ashes, and at this hour—Lydia heard three o'clock strike in the black steeple of the crumbling pre-Wren church that backed the old house—even the little remaining light was bleeding away. She had passed the house three times before truly seeing it, and sensed that had the air been clear, it would somehow still have been difficult to look at the place. She had the absurd impression that by night, lanterns or no lanterns, streetlamps or no streetlamps, it would not be visible at all.

There was a smell about it, too, distinct and terrifying, but impossible to place.

She stood for a long time at the foot of its steps.

He can't hurt me, she told herself again, and wondered if that were true.

Her heart was beating hard, and she noted clinically the cold in her