

## London's Night Stalkers

### Chapter 11 – A Rescue

**“He moved back and melted into the shadows. It was no vampire’s trick, just the skill gained from centuries of experience. Simon had once been an assassin for the House of Medici, he knew how to stay hidden.”**

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Laura hadn’t told them about the gun. All three of them were busy trying to get ready in record time and Laura had been looking for the dagger Simon had given her. There it was though, the Glock automatic she’d found in a drawer at Vlad’s house. It looked brand new, even had a spare clip full of bullets. Simon and Clara didn’t like guns, so she’d kept it hidden.

“They’re noisy Laura, certain to get the attention of the police.” He’d once told her. “There are noise suppressors or you can low load the cordite in the bullets, but that ruins accuracy. We’re better off hunting with our fangs and blades.”

It was alright for Simon and Clara, they’d had hundreds of years to learn their fighting skills. Laura didn’t feel like an almost unstoppable killing machine. Not yet anyway, time and experience were what she needed. She looked lovingly at the matt black handgun. There had been no opportunity to test it, but it looked as though it should fire.

“It might not work anyway ?” She muttered.

“What might not work ?” Asked Clara.

Laura decided on her own first rule for living with other vampires. Never mutter anything, they’ll hear it. Clara was at her bedroom door. Laura picked up the dagger Simon had given her, waving it about.

“Just feeling nervous.” She said.

“You’ll be fine, just hurry up. We’re leaving in about five minutes.”

Yes, speed was needed, Simon had mentioned something about not using their own vehicles. The Van Helsings were watching them, so they’d be using a minicab to get to Fulham. Something occurred to her, probably more obvious to her than two vampires who’d been without a family for centuries.

“Where did this Patsy live ?” She asked. “Was she still living at home ?”

“I’m not sure,” answered Clara, “I expect so. Why does it matter ?”

“Because her mum is likely to call the police, when Patsy doesn’t show up for breakfast.”

“Of course ! You’re right.”

Clara was gone, shouting something at Simon in the kitchen. Laura kept the dagger, fixing its sheaf to her belt. She also put the Glock into her inside jacket pocket. She did a quick twirl in front of the mirror. There was a bulge, but it could have been anything. Pretty girls were harmless, Clara was always telling her that. They certainly never carried loaded handguns around in London.

“Come on Laura, we’re going soon.” Simon was calling. “And don’t forget the bag of jewellery and Mabina’s journal.”

The spare clip went in her jacket pocket and Laura felt much braver. Vampires were tough, but a bullet or two in the heart, or the head and they were dead. Not undead or likely to return dead, just dead. Laura wasn’t sure if she could point the gun at Mabina’s face and pull the trigger. A heart shot was different though. The shots needed to be close, Laura was no gun expert, hadn’t actually ever

fired one before. Could she put it against Mabina's chest and pull the trigger three or four times ? Oh yes, no problem. She turned her bedroom light off and went downstairs.

"What is her mum's name ?" Clara was asking.

In the kitchen, everything seemed to happen in their kitchen. Simon's bag of ancient weapons was on the table, which meant they were going to war.

"Erm... Mum I guess." Answered Simon. "I never needed to know."

"Oh Simon, you are such a..... Guy ! You know the guy at the minicab office on first name terms, but don't know the name of your girlfriend's mum."

"She's not my girlfriend."

"You know what I mean. Call the house and hope they have 1571 turned on. Leave a message that Patsy is staying at your place today."

Laura ignored their bickering, it was just the way they communicated. As for their unorthodox relationship ? She couldn't share any guy she loved, but if it worked for them, she wasn't going to comment on it, ever. Simon called Patsy's house and left a message on the voicemail.

"Mrs Smart, this is Simon. Patsy isn't feeling too well and will be staying over here tonight. Nothing serious and I'll make sure she's home tomorrow."

Unless she was dead of course. No one said it out loud, but the sombre expressions shouted it out loud. They were ready to go, but it was likely that both cars were full of Van Helsing installed trackers and bugs.

"We'll be seen going out, but we can move far quieter and more quickly than the police realise." Said Simon. "Cut through the side streets and council housing and meet up at Saleh's."

"Who's Saleh ?" She asked.

"The guy who runs the seedy cab place near Wood Green Station." Answered Clara.

"Oh right, yes I know it."

Everyone did in North London. All they needed as an address was the seedy cab place near Wood Green Station. More infamous than famous, but there was always a queue of people there on Friday night.

"Try and stay with me." Clara told her. "If we get split up, go to the cab place."

"I'll be fine."

Out of the door as though everything was normal, Simon even turned on the alarm system, making sure the peeping sound went off as he locked the door. Then they were across the road and gone, merging with the shadows. If any Van Helsing had been awake enough to see them leave, he was probably shouting down his radio by now. Anyway, taking a walk in the early hours wasn't a crime. Carrying a loaded Glock was though. She'd googled it on a computer at the hotel, knew how to move the safety catch and push in a full clip. She was far from being an expert, but if any Van Helsing got too close, she might get some much needed practise.

"This way, through the fairy houses." Said Clara.

It was their name for the social housing built up on the back of the shopping city. Lots of small flats, built along narrow walkways. The lights along the walkways did give it a look of fairy lights on a Christmas tree. Gates of course to keep out the undesirables and the chuggers. Not that a few locked gates bothered them. Clara went first, hardly slowed down by the seven foot high gates. Laura followed, still amazed at how well her body dealt with such obstacles.

"This way." Whispered Clara.

No one on the walkways, though they did see movement in one or two kitchen windows. There was the unmistakable sound of a police radio, the hiss of poor quality comms. Clara knelt down below the walkway wall, bringing Laura down with her.

"We've a disturbance on Green Lanes, might be them."

"Ok, on my way."

The sound of feet, as the Van Helsing walked off towards whatever was occurring in Green Lanes. It wasn't them though; the police were going the wrong way, which was pleasing. Clara was pointing straight ahead.

"I'll go towards the shopping city." She said. "Kick a few bins, scare a few cats. Once I've drawn them away from you, I'll back track to the cab place."

She then pointed towards another walkway, one in almost total darkness.

"That way will take you straight there. Don't dawdle !"

"I won't !"

Laura waited until she was on her own, before turning left and walking along the walkway. There was another gate that went right up to the ceiling, but she simply went round it. It was laughably easy to hang out over the ground below and swing around the obstacle. It was darker; very few of the flats had any lit windows at all. She went past a set of lift doors and heard them begin to open. Easy to enter an area of shadows near a stairwell and wait.

"No, no ! Listen to me. They're not pissing about in Green Lanes. Get everyone back here."

It was him, Mike Marcou, hissing commands into a police radio. The detective in charge, wandering the streets of Wood Green in the small hours. He was mumbling to himself, actually swearing about the uniformed police. Poor Mike, he seemed to be taking her case rather personally. Laura was gaining faith in her own ability to hide and keep still, hardly breathing, her heart rate right down. He'd have to turn and walk several paces towards her, before seeing her and he didn't seem likely to do that.

"I'm going across to the shopping city. Meet me there." He ordered.

It was tempting to use her dagger on him. Ram it up under his chin, pinning his tongue to the roof of his mouth. A quick shove up into his brain, a little twist for good luck and Mike would no longer be a threat. So easy, but she'd follow the rules Simon and Clara had taught her about avoiding the Van Helsing, unless there was no other option. She watched Mike walk away from her, as he headed towards the shopping city.

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Patsy's first look at her captor, was when a dark haired woman came through the doorway into the cellar. She looked ordinary, waving a smartphone that Patsy recognised. It was hers, tucked inside the bright pink cover that Gina had bought her. That cover had been a bit of a joke, but Patsy could always find her phone among a pile on the table.

"Good you're awake. I just called your boyfriend and he's on the way here."

"Who are you ?" Asked Patsy. "What do you want from me ?"

"You're bait my dear, just bait. Be well behaved bait and you'll leave here without a scratch."

Her captor looked middle aged and quite short. She even had a slight limp in her left leg, though it might have been an affectation. She'd certainly moved fast enough when she'd run at her in the street. The woman opened a large bottle of water and brought it over, pushing it against her mouth.

"Drink, you must be thirsty. Then if you promise to be good, I'll make you more comfortable."

The woman had dark eyes to match her dark hair. When Patsy had taken several mouthfuls, she put the bottle on the ground next to the chair.

“To answer your question, my name is Mabina. Not the name I was born with, but it has served me well for several hundred years.”

“What has Simon done to you ? Why do you want him to come here ?”

Mabina ignored her, going to the table and picking up a jumbo size bag of junk food.

“Salt and vinegar crisps ok for you Patsy ?”

“I suppose.”

Mabina dropped the packet back onto the table and walked back towards her, looking her up and down.

“I’ll untie most of you, leaving just a few loops round your ankles. You need to promise to behave though. Then we’ll have a civilised conversation, I want to know all about your Simon. You ask me a question, then I ask you one. You need to be a good girl though. Do we have a deal Patsy Smart ?”

“Ok, fine.”

It was such a relief as the ropes were removed from around her throat. Her hands next, tied so tightly that she had really bad pins and needles after they’d been removed. Mabina even removed the ropes from her ankles, re-tying them with a single loosely tied loop of rope. Lastly her arms were freed from being lashed to the arms of the chair. Mabina looked her over and actually clucked at her, like some ageing grandmother.

“There my dear.”

She went to the table and came back with the huge bag of crisps, which he put on her lap. A roll of loo paper too, which went next to the crisps.

“You may stand to wipe, but that is all. Do you understand ?”

“Yes.”

“You asked why I want Simon to come here. He killed Roy, the man who shared my life for a very long time. I can perhaps understand that, our kind are always fighting. What I cannot forgive is theft, thieving like a gutter urchin. He took my journal and some jewellery that is precious to me. He is bringing those items to exchange for my bait, you Patsy.”

“Your kind ! What do you mean by your kind ?”

Mabina sat herself on the floor that looked like damp compost, ignoring the effect it might have on her immaculate pair of light coloured trousers. She shook her head.

“Conversation Patsy, it’s my turn. You obviously know he lives with someone, do you think his Clara knows about you ? They’ve taken in some stray too, like taking in a child to bring up. Laura is her name, does she know you ?”

Clara ! A name to add to the feelings of guilt she already had, for sleeping with another woman’s man. Was Clara going to arrive with Simon to rescue her, or be another enemy ?

“She doesn’t know about me and I didn’t know her name until you mentioned it. We don’t talk about his home life at all.”

“Good, so he might actually come alone, though I’m not going to assume that. We know what they say about assume Patsy. Assume makes an ASS out of U and ME. I’m determined Simon isn’t going to make an ass out of me.”

“What is your kind Mabina ?” She asked.

Mabina leant toward her and Patsy felt two sharp fangs, being dragged over her cheek. Mabina wasn’t a kind, she was a creature, a monster. She leant back and smiled, as though nothing had happened.

“I’m sorry Patsy, but a little demonstration tends to answer the question. We’ve had many names over the years. Undead, Nosferatu and many others. The romans even called us Lamia for a while,

devourer of children, though we never deserved that name. I am a vampire Patsy, as is your Simon. Clara too and the strange girl child they seem to have adopted.”

“Are you going to kill Simon ?”

“Bad girl, it’s my turn to ask a question. Where did you first meet him ?”

“It was on the Piccadilly Line one Friday night. I was on the way to a party.....”

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There wasn’t a queue at the cab place, which meant no crowd of intoxicated people to use as cover. Clara had found a dark corner to hide in, just a few yards from the minicab office. There were a few used condoms on the ground, she wasn’t the only one to have used the gap between the buildings for privacy. She saw Laura coming up the street. Good girl, she was using every shadow, every dark place between parked cars to hide. Laura had been a gamble, but she seemed to be learning fast. Clara moved towards her, anxious to keep their conversation to a whisper.

“Simon is inside,” she said, “arranging something with Saleh.”

Laura was looking back the way she’d come.

“I saw him, Mike Marcou.” Said Laura. “He has a lot of uniformed police with him.”

“Where were they going ?”

“To the shopping city. There was also an incident in Green Lanes that sent some of them scurrying off. Was that you ?”

Clara had to smile.

“Yes, I set off a few car alarms. We’ll soon be in a cab and on our way to Fulham. I just hope we don’t have to move from the house, it feels like home.”

“Sorry, it all seems to be my fault.” Said Laura.

“Nonsense, it was my idea for Stuart to be your first kill. You were connected to him, but I knew that. We’re not about balancing Karma, but ridding the world of that creep was a good thing. If we have to move we’ll find somewhere just as nice and make a new home.”

“Will you take me ?”

“Of course Laura, you’re one of us now, family, one of the Scoobies. We’ve no intention of going anywhere without you.”

On the way to a hunt didn’t feel like a good time to hug, though she did kiss Laura on the cheek.

“I suppose my new van will have to go ?”

“Maybe not, Tom can work wonders. After the heat has cooled down of course. He can probably pimp it with lowered shocks, alloy wheels and a custom paint job. Rough it up a bit and give it the plates from a written off SUV. Even Chevrolet won’t recognise it after Tom is finished. You might even prefer it with a bit of the gloss knocked off.”

“Oh yes, can he really do that ?”

“He can, I promise. Back to the job in hand, Simon just came out.”

As Simon arrived, a rather grubby Ford Galaxy pulled up, the driver waving at them.

“It’s ours,” said Simon, “Saleh said we can trust him.”

There was plenty of room in the back, among the empty fast food containers and vague smell of something musty. Simon muttered a few words at the driver and handed him quite a few twenty pound notes.

“We’re up on their board as a trip to Heathrow Terminal five.” Said Simon. “He’ll back up that story if anyone asks him.”

“Where is he going to drop us off ?” She asked.

"I told Saleh somewhere near the Chelsea ground. Best if we choose a quiet looking residential street and walk the rest of the way. In case things get a bit....."

She knew what he meant, in case everything went pear shaped and they ended up on the run from the police. Saleh's driver might turn a blind eye to a little criminality, but he was guaranteed to tell the police everything, if they mentioned investigating a cellar full of dead bodies.

"How do we get home?" Asked Laura.

"If all goes according to plan, we'll shower and get a tube from Fulham Broadway." Said Simon.

Plan? There was no plan, though Clara refrained from mentioning it. She often complained about Simon not thinking ahead, steaming in and hoping for the best. Somewhere deep down she loved it though and the green tint in her eyes was becoming more vivid.

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Evangeline was the name that Patsy's mum had been christened with, though even her father hadn't understood why.

"That's a really grand name for such a tiny baby." He'd commented.

Her mother, Patsy's grandmother had dug her heels in and Evangeline was the name on her birth certificate. Only ever used for passports and other official documents of course, friends and family called her Evie. She was having trouble sleeping since her husband had died. Being alone in bed was something she wasn't used to, she still expected to see his head on the pillow. Evie saw the phone by the bed light up for a while, as the base unit in the lounge gave a few quiet rings. She tried to get back to sleep, but it was no use.

"A call at this hour is never good news." She muttered.

There was a way to access the voicemail from the bedroom phone, she just hadn't learned how.

She'd tried it once and wiped everything, including half her contact list. She got out of bed, hearing a thump as Timothy jumped off the bed to follow her.

"Don't you dare expect breakfast at this time."

The cat rubbed against her legs as she went downstairs. Evie knew when she was beaten, heading straight for the kitchen and his tins of cat food. It was almost morning anyway, she thought as she filled the kettle and put two teabags into the pot. Toast too, her usual morning routine, though the toast would come after Timothy's ten minute fuss and cuddle. She filled the teapot, while something nagged at the back of her mind.

"The telephone Timmy, the message. I'm becoming so daft these days."

He didn't care, up to his whiskers in his food bowl. Evie went into the lounge and opened the curtains. There was a slight yellow glow in the East, but it was still a good hour away from full dawn. She went to the phone base unit and pressed the 'Play' button. Evie didn't believe her daughter was unwell, she wasn't born yesterday.

"She just wants a full night with her boyfriend." She muttered.

Evie didn't begrudge her or think it shocking. Times were different from when she'd been young, people were generally more tolerant. She sat in her favourite armchair, intending to only be there for a minute, before making toast. She fell asleep of course, within about two seconds of getting comfortable.

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All three of them stood under a tree in the small park opposite Vlad's house, watching the sun come up. There was a car on Mabina's driveway, a rather dented old Vauxhall Zafira. It seemed that the ancient vampire queen, had bought herself another set of wheels.

"We need to move, before the early morning dog walkers wake up." Said Simon.

Laura wasn't scared, not even a little bit. There might be all sorts of traps and nasty surprises waiting in that house, yet all she felt was excitement. Simon led, crossing the road and ignoring the front door to Vlad's house. He took them through the unlocked door in the garden wall, stopping in front of the back door.

"The lights are on." Said Clara.

"She said they would be." Replied Simon.

He was looking at her, his hands held out.

"I'll need the jewels and her journal now."

They had a few copies now, yet it still bothered her to give up the original journal. Daniel was right of course, he did need to see it and hopefully unlock a few of its secrets. If Mabina died they'd get it back of course, but what if she didn't die? It took no effort at all to give Simon the jewels, but handing him the journal almost brought her to tears.

"What do you want me to do?" She asked.

"Kill her, anyway you can." He replied.

"We'll keep back a little and watch for an opportunity." Said Clara. "Simon will look after Patsy."

Laura understood the pact that had been made, even though not a word had been spoken about it. Patsy was the complication he'd brought into their lives, his human female. It fell to him to save her or die in the attempt.

"Mabina Gladitch must die tonight." Said Simon.

He led again, through the unlocked back door, not even bothering to avoid creaking floorboards. Mabina was one of them, she'd know that three vampires were on their way down to the cellar. Someone was going to join the other bodies under the compost floor that morning and Laura just hoped it wasn't her. No worrying about creaking stairs, or noisy doors. Simon led them down and across the cellar, until they were stood opposite Mabina. Clara had hung back slightly, but only a few feet. Laura kept further back, looking for any exits they might have missed on their first visit.

"Simon you're late." Said Mabina. "I'd almost decided to see what her blood tastes like. She's so fresh, so unspoiled. I'm guessing she tastes of sugar and spice."

It was going to happen and happen soon, Laura knew that. Like in the movies though, Simon and Mabina had to go through the process of threats and insults. No one was watching her as she moved towards the table covered in junk food. Not a single eye so much as flicked in her general direction.

"Are you alright?" Simon asked Patsy.

"Yes, so far."

"Enough chatter!" Snapped Mabina. "I can see you have the possession stolen from me. Bring them to me."

It was exciting, Simon and Mabina were the big act, everyone ignoring her. Laura had heard something when she'd spent an hour or so exploring, while Simon had been stitching up Clara's wounds. Traffic noise where it had no right to be. Plus Mabina looked to have wedged herself into a corner and she seemed much too bright for that. Laura moved forward until she was near the door to the second cellar, the one where they'd found the journal.

"That's close enough." Said Mabina. "Put my thing on the floor and back away."

"Only after I see Patsy walking this way." Replied Simon. "Untie her ankles."

Crap! It was going to kick off at any moment and she still hadn't found Mabina's emergency exit.

Laura trusted to luck, assuming Mabina didn't consider her much of a threat. She moved right up to the door and looked up. She saw Clara look at her, but the others were too wrapped up in their own drama. It was there, the vent high up on the wall. High up on a wall isn't a problem if you have

vampire strength and it was much too big for an air vent. It was the back door, Mabina's way out with her precious journal, once she'd killed Simon.

"No !" Shouted Mabina. "Put my things on the floor. Then I'll cut the rope. Move back, or I'll cut your whore's throat !"

Any second and Mabina would be running for the door she was guarding. Laura didn't know how she was going to stop a very strong vampire queen, but she was going to do her best. Even if Simon and Clara were dead, she was going to kill Mabina.

"Simon, she has a sword !" Clara shouted.

"No, please ! No !" Patsy was yelling.

It was confusing, too confusing. Laura brought out the dagger Simon had given her, holding it up high, waiting for a chance to use it. More shouting, Patsy screaming and Mabina was running at her, heading for the escape hatch. She had the journal ! Vlad's wife had the journal in her left hand. Simon had to be down or dead, she hadn't heard him shouting for a second or two. She stabbed downwards and missed.

"Out of my way !" Shouted Mabina.

A long thin blade followed the words. It shone like polished silver, as it entered the left side of her chest. It went in deep, Laura feeling the pain as it carved a hole through her lung. Mabina left the dagger there, shoving Laura aside, desperate to escape. Clara wasn't out of the game, she was wielding her curved sword, her Yemeni Janbiya and coming after Mabina.

"You're not leaving here alive." Shouted Clara.

Vlad's wife turned to face Clara, ignoring Laura now her dagger was in her chest. That annoyed Laura, more than anything had annoyed her in quite some time. She was being ignored, considered no threat at all. Laura brought the Glock out of her pocket, remembering to use her thumb to flip the safety catch.

"Vampires don't fight by any code." Clara had once told her. "There is no notion of a fair fight, no rules of engagement. We kill our enemies, any way we can."

Laura put the muzzle of the gun against the top of Mabina's head and pulled the trigger.

'Bang.'

The noise in the confined space was deafening. She saw Clara jumping to one side, throwing herself on the ground. Laura wondered why, until she remembered she'd just fired a bullet in that direction. Blood was flying out of Mabina's head, lots of it. Bits of other stuff too, tissue, bits of gristle. Nothing recognisable, which was a blessing. Simon had imparted words of wisdom to her before the fight with Vlad.

"Vampires are tough. Keep hacking and stabbing until you're certain they're dead."

Hacking was out of the question, but she still had a lot of bullets. Mabina was falling away from her, but only by a foot or so. Even she couldn't miss at a foot. She moved her aim down a bit, pointing the gun right at the centre of Mabina's head.

"Bang."

More blood flying away and pieces of bone, some quite large. Patsy was screaming, which at least proved she was alive. Mabina had to be dead, her body was almost on the ground, but Laura wanted to be certain. What could a vampire survive ? Somewhere a part of her hoped a dagger in the lung wasn't always fatal.

"Bang."

Mabina's body was on the ground by the time the bullet made a neat hole in the back of her neck. Laura wanted to empty the entire clip into Vlad's wife, but she was beginning to feel drowsy. There

was a lot of blood on the dirt floor of the cellar and a lot of other things too. She had to be fucking dead ! There was no way the bitch could have survived her brain being spread over the floor. Laura wanted to shout it out loud, it would have sounded so fucking cool. She was tired though, oh so tired. She dropped the Glock and fell to the floor.

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Daniel stood outside his house, looking at the two battered cases on the ground. Did they exceed some sort of weight limit ? It had been quite a while since he'd entrusted his truly ancient body to air travel. Flying faster than a bullet, in an aluminium tube full of kerosene was his idea of insanity. He just didn't want to spend days travelling to London and back.

"The car is late." He muttered. "All that expense and it's late."

The airfare was expensive enough and the car to the airport was far from cheap. He looked at the cases again, still worried about being charged an excess weight fee. It wasn't that he couldn't afford it, but he'd had experience of having no money. Not little money, but literally nothing and an empty belly. He'd seen a lot of wars during his unnaturally long life and famine tended to follow war. He'd known destitution and hunger and dreaded going through it again. He wasn't tight fisted, he just had the common sense attitude, of not splashing out on things that weren't really necessary. Gwen had left early that morning to make sure the boy got his breakfast.

"Where is that damned car ? The money I'm paying, the driver should have been here early, laying a red carpet from my door to the car."

He hadn't even thought about asking Gwen to drive him to the airport, she had the boy to look after. True the boy was a grown man, but he'd always need someone to look after him.

"About time."

Car headlights on the road that only led to one place, his house. Daniel hoped he didn't get a driver who wanted to talk all the way. There was little worse on a long drive, than a garrulous driver. The car came in sight and Daniel cheered up. A woman driver he'd used before, almost as miserable and taciturn as himself. She pressed a button and her window lowered.

"The airport is it ?" She asked.

"Yes."

She looked up at the sky, almost scowling at the clouds.

"Let's hope the weather holds." She said.

She put his cases in the trunk and opened a door for him, but that was it, the full extent of her usual interaction with him. Anyone devoted to customer care would have cringed, but it suited him.

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Laura knew she was alive by the pain that occasionally hit her senses with no warning. There were no dreams, yet part of her knew she was alive and unconscious. She nearly woke up once, but the pain sent her conscious mind scurrying for cover. When she did wake up, Patsy was the first thing she saw.

"She's waking up." Said Patsy.

They were in a large car and someone had messed with the seating, so that Patsy was sat facing her. Laura vaguely remembered Mabina having an old SUV on her driveway and assumed they'd stolen it.

"Properly waking up this time ?" Asked Clara.

"I think so."

They'd wedged her up in a corner at the back, a seat belt going right over where it hurt the most. Clara driving, but what about Simon ? Even turning her head hurt, though she didn't remember

Vlad's wife stomping on her. Simon was wedged in the other rear corner, a blanket covering most of him.

"How are you feeling?" Patsy asked her.

"Awful, I want to throw up."

They'd wrapped her up in a blanket from feet to neck. She wanted to see the wound though and shift the seat belt a little. Laura began to pull the blanket away from her chest.

"No, not a good idea." Said Patsy.

"If we get stuck in traffic and someone sees two bloody people in the back of a Zafira." Said Clara.

"They'll call the cops. Leave the blanket alone Laura."

She didn't care about common sense or anyone calling the Van Helsings. Laura pushed Patsy away and undid the buckle on her seat belt. The need to vomit wasn't waiting for a more convenient time. She leant forward and emptied her stomach over the floor. There was an instant shock of pain from her chest, but she actually began to feel a little better. No fighting with Patsy, as she wedged her up in the corner again and put the blanket over her.

"Feeling better?" Asked Patsy.

"Yes, much. How is Simon doing?"

"I don't really know." Answered Clara. "I'm pretty certain she clipped his heart with her blade, but he's still alive. I have no idea if he'll stay that way, we can hardly take him into the nearest hospital."

Patsy was giving her a bottle of water, when she noticed that she too had a wound. There was a large dressing on her neck, its edges stained with blood.

"Mabina got you too?" Laura asked.

"Yes, but not that deeply. I think she was concentrating on killing Simon. She was certain that he'd killed her husband."

"It was a bit of a group effort." Said Clara.

Laura felt so tired, she just wanted to climb into her own bed and sleep for a year. She didn't even object, when Patsy started use wet wipes to clean her face. Clara was chuckling though.

"Little Miss Twinkle toes has been fussing over you and Simon, like a mother hen." She said. "I think she'd make a good nurse."

Patsy blushed a little, but didn't seem to mind the praise. An awful thought entered Laura's mind.

"I did kill her didn't I?" She asked. "Mabina is dead, permanently dead?"

"Oh yes, you got her." Said Clara. "She's still in the cellar, though they'll have trouble identifying her. Too dangerous for us to go back, so Mabina Gladitch will decompose where she dropped and ooze into the dirt floor."

"Good!" Snapped Patsy.

All those loose ends and the noise of her gunshots. Laura had so many questions to ask, but her mind just wanted to rest.

"Hey, don't go back to sleep. I need your help when we get there." Said Clara.

Get where? It was no use, her mind was tired and overloaded with more worries than it could cope with. Laura didn't pass out, she drifted off into a reasonably natural deep slumber.

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Clara new the old paintworks quite well, though she hadn't been there for a few years. Nothing in the news about the discovery of decomposing bodies in the area, which usually meant the site hadn't been redeveloped. The gate was new though and the sign warning about security patrols with guard dogs. Probably a lie, the signs looked as old as the chain on the gate. In a match between a rusty chain and a vampire, the chain always loses.

“What is this place ?” Asked Patsy.

“They used to make paint here once.” She replied. “Simon can rest here for a few hours.”

Or he’d die, though she wasn’t going to tell the girl that. Humans had a whole gamut of emotions, most of them over the top and pointless. The last thing she needed was a hysterical human female on her hands. Clara drove into one of the ruined buildings, parking the Zafira as far away from the entrance as she could, partially hiding it behind a half collapsed wall. The sign looked old and there were probably no patrols, but she wasn’t taking any risks.

“I’ll carry Simon, while you wake Laura.” She said. “Get her awake, tell her I need her.”

“Ok.”

She heard Patsy persuading Laura to stay awake, as she carried Simon to a relatively clean space, against a solid looking wall. It was all relative, nothing looked particularly clean or safe. There were even a few old syringes in one corner, the new fence was probably to keep the junkies out. It was a truly dreadful place to bring a seriously ill loved one, but it was the best she could think of. She leant Simon against the wall, covering him up with the blanket. She knew Laura was behind her, before she’d said a word.

“Is he going to be alright ?” Asked Laura.

“Yes, a few hours sleep and he’ll probably be fine.” She lied.

The lie wasn’t for Laura, but meant for Patsy. There was no telling what she might do, if she thought Simon was dying. Clara felt Simon’s neck, feeling the slow and uneven pulse. He had a deathly pallor and his breathing was erratic. He was probably going to die and Clara wanted to be alone with him when that happened.

“Can you watch him Patsy ? I have some family stuff to discuss with Laura.”

“Yes of course, but what if someone comes ?”

Clara had put the Glock back in Laura’s jacket pocket. The weapon that had killed Mabina hadn’t change her mind about guns, but it was Laura’s. She hoped Laura might decide not to carry it, but she was an adult and the choice was her. Clara took the gun and flipped off the safety catch, before placing it on the ground next to Simon.

“It’s ready to use.” She said. “If anyone comes, pick it up and use it.”

“Really ? Shoot them ?”

“Yes, shoot them.” Said Laura, nodding at her.

Clara led, as they went right through the ruined factory, coming out next to a deep pool. It was almost idyllic after the squalor of the factory. The pool was fed by a clean stream, with green plants at its edge. There were even a few moorhens, pecking at something in the water.

“The pool is deep.” Said Clara. “A few of the humans I’ve fed on are here. Simon will go into the pool too, if he doesn’t survive. I didn’t want to tell Patsy how bad he really is.”

“What are his chances ?”

“I’m not an expert on our bodies, no one is. His heart was damaged and might heal, or it might not. At the moment I’m expecting he won’t be leaving this place.”

They hugged and cried, both of them. Tears that could never be shed in front of a human, poured down their faces. The pool actually looked nice, far better than the last time she’d been there. She wanted Simon to live, yet there were worse places to end up than the pool, with its moorhens.

“I know a spot, high up in the building, almost impossible to reach. I’ll carry him up there and wait for a while to see if he survives. If Simon heals, I’ll bring him home. If not.....I’ll be home in a few days.”

“I’ll wait with you, we’ll all wait.”

“No, drive Patsy home. If she’s not home today her mum will call the police. Another report about our house and the police will go through everything. That can’t happen.”

Laura pulled back her jacket and blouse, exposing the still livid hole in her chest.

“It’s healing, though I’m not sure if I can drive.” Said Laura.

“You have to Laura. There is a SatNav to use and Patsy will give you directions. Keep the car for a while, it might be useful. Park it a good half mile from the house and move it about.”

“I know Clara, I’m not stupid.”

“No, you’re not. I’m not sure I liked your way of dealing with Mabina, but it was effective.”

They hugged again, before beginning the walk back to where Patsy was looking after Simon.

“Are you sure you don’t want me to come back for you ?” Asked Laura.

“No. If Simon dies, I want some time.....”

“I know, sorry.”

She thought Patsy might be awkward, perhaps refusing to leave. She wasn’t and actually helped Laura to plug her postcode into the rather elderly SatNav. They left, Clara putting the chain back across the gate after they’d gone. She went back to Simon and sat looking at him until the sun went down.

“Please don’t fucking die ! I love you !”

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