

The Hornsey Vampires

(Season two of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 12 – Trouble In Udney

“A green gift box from the Victoria and Albert museum, perhaps Magda’s idea of a joke. Mabina opened it and removed a crystal the size of a grapefruit. Laura felt the power emanating from the crystal, before she saw the kaleidoscope of colours.”

»

Bill Jarrold was in prison, but that didn’t mean his reach wasn’t still long and often brutal. Steve knew that although Bill hated Tasha Wallis, she wasn’t to be touched. No twisted arms, no bruises in places that couldn’t be seen. Tasha was a rarity, someone he wasn’t allowed to thump. It appeared that Bill had other ways of hurting the woman who’d run off with his fiancé.

“I hope Tasha Wallis lives a long and healthy life.” Bill had once told him. “All the time knowing I killed her beloved Olivia, but unable to prove it.”

Steve wasn’t really into emotional and psychological pain, he preferred the type delivered with a hefty boot and sometimes a cutthroat razor. Tasha had a few living relatives though, including a sister. She’d eventually tell him everything Bill wanted to know.

“Look around Martin, but don’t damage anything.” He said. “Look in her bedside cabinet, I found some paperwork in there about a year ago.”

There was just him and Martin, but Tasha had never started screaming or fighting in the past. She knew the rules of the game, even letting them in without threatening to call the police.

“I’ve told you several times, I haven’t had a visitor in weeks.” Said Tasha. “I’ve a big job on with tight deadlines. There have been two or three delivery guys at the door, that’s it.”

“Oh Tasha, Tasha..... Why do you lie to me ? We have people watching you. It might be your neighbours or kids playing in the street, but you’ll never spot them or know who they are. They noticed a couple visit you, a couple with a young boy who didn’t look right. Tell me about them Tasha ?”

“It was just a freelance journalist thinking about writing an article on Olivia. He said the piece might not even get in the local paper, there’s no need to hurt him.”

“Bill isn’t into hurting journalists these days Tasha, he pays them enough to go away.” He said. “The German guy last year was rewarded with a nice new BMW for leaving out a few details from his story. I just want a name Tasha and an address to go with it. A phone number would be nice too.” Martin’s main skill was as a driver, he was the best in the firm. Not very bright, but you didn’t need to be Einstein to find a file in a bedside cabinet.

“I found this Steve, under a pile of old paperbacks.” Said Martin.

The freelancer had left her copies of all the old articles from the press when Olivia Reed had gone missing. Tasha seemed to be right, there was nothing new in the file, no mention of Bill. They might not even have to pay the guy off, a stiff warning might be enough.

“Nothing new here Tasha, though I’ll be taking the file with me.” He said.

“You won’t !” She snapped. “Bill won’t like you taking my things.”

Steve wasn’t sure, Bill could be a bit strange when it came to Tasha.

“Alright, keep the file, but I need a name for the journalist and his contact details.” Said Steve.

“I didn’t keep it.” She told him. “I screwed it up and threw it out.”

“More lies Tasha..... We both know the routine. You lie and I remind you about that aunt of yours in Skipton, the one with bad arthritis. So easy for her to have a bad fall... I need that name and number. Come on, he might be grateful of a few bob to keep quiet, with a disabled kid to look after.”

Tasha opened her handbag and took out a crumpled piece of hotel stationery. Only the first name Daniel on the paper, but there was a mobile number and a PO Box in Scotland. Mix all that up with a guest called Daniel staying at the hotel, and they'd have his identity and an address within the hour.

“See that wasn't difficult.”

“I want that back.”

Steve took a picture of the piece of paper on his phone, before handing it back to her. Steve didn't know why Bill wouldn't let them beat the crap out of Tasha, but Bill was the boss.

“Just don't hurt him.” She said.

“We'll just have a bit of a chat with him.”

~ ~

After a strange dream about running through tunnels under an Egyptian temple, Laura had woken sweating and feeling as though she hadn't slept at all. There had been a call to Tim, though she had no idea what time it was in London. It had been nice to hear his voice and she'd given him the hotel's phone number in case of emergencies. There would be no emergency, or at least not the sort he could help with. It had been her way of telling him he mattered.

“There, I can see the street name.” Said Mabina.

Despite hiring the Hummer, they were in a taxi, as they weren't sure about parking near Sam's office. Their driver had taken them by the scenic route, pretending to get lost twice. Liz knew the local languages, yet the man answered everything with grunts.

“That's the place, the modern looking building on the corner.” Said Brendan.

Mabina argued about the fare and the taxi driver suddenly understood English. Eventually they were all stood at the door to Sam's building, no one moving to press the bell. Liz pressed the bell button and a smartly dressed young woman opened the door.

“Hello, come in, you're all very welcome. I'm Judith, for those of you who haven't been here before.”

Laura hadn't known what kind of security Sam might have for the meeting. There was just one man delving into a filing cabinet, though there was the bulge of a gun under his jacket.

“Straight into Sam's office.” Said Judith.

Liz had told them about the artwork and antique furniture, but Laura felt genuine déjà vu as she walked into the room. She was there again, the room where she'd seen Sam in a dream and read his notes about the artefacts.

“I told you we should have printed name tags. Do the introductions Judith.”

Laura knew the voice, the small dark haired woman sat at Sam's desk was Magda. Judith introduced her and Sam.

“I know Brendan of course and Liz, but I'm not sure which of the other ladies is Mabina.” Said Judith. Brendan seemed to feel it was his job to introduce his queen.

“The lady in the blue jacket is my employer, Mabina Gladitch.” He said. “The other...”

“I am Laura Selway.” Said Laura.

“You are both very welcome.” Said Sam.

He shook hands with Mabina first and then her. He probably did have people at the airport, but he hadn't known she was a vampire, she was certain of it. Everyone noticed the slight coolness of her touch, but it had meaning for Sam, he reacted to it.

“Yes Sam, obtaining the artefacts requires a vampire.” She said. “Now you have two of us.”

“Wonderful.” Exclaimed Magda. “How do you know Mabina ?”

“She killed me.” Said Mabina.

A room full of startled expressions and Mabina was winking at her. Definitely a first score for the London team.

“Not round the table, let’s relax in the comfy chairs.” Said Sam. “Judith will get refreshments and as some of you know, she can produce wonders out of our toaster oven.”

Laura chose a high backed leather chair, as they all sat around a large coffee table. Judith fussed about and Sam was charming. After everyone had coffee and something to nibble, Magda placed a box in front of Mabina.

“You were promised this for coming to Jerusalem, it’s now yours.”

A green gift box from the Victoria and Albert museum, perhaps Magda’s idea of a joke. Mabina opened it and removed a crystal the size of a grapefruit. Laura felt the power emanating from the crystal, before she saw the kaleidoscope of colours.

“The Half Moon of Thoth is now yours.” Said Magda.

“Will it really make me how I once was, fully reborn ?” Asked Mabina.

“Yes, with the right incantation and the use of a few ingredients.” Said Magda.

“There will be a price for our help, though not a monetary one.” Said Sam. “No insult is intended, but we don’t know each other that well. Our help comes with conditions.”

Laura couldn’t help reaching over the table and touching the crystal.

“You feel it too ?” Asked Mabina.

“Yes, something powerful and incredibly ancient.” Said Laura.

“I felt nothing, what exactly do you feel ?” Asked Magda.

“Only someone who knows blood is..... Everything, would understand.” Said Mabina. “Come on Sam tell me your conditions for helping me. Be honest and open, I’m a lot less aggressive and hot headed than I once was.”

There was a polite chuckle around the table, even Brendan joined in.

“There are five artefacts to obtain, some for you and some for us.” Said Sam. “I will only tell you which ones are for you and why, once we have them all. Consider it all part of the getting to know each other process, a building of trust.”

“Fair enough, what else ?” Asked Mabina.

“The use of the Half Moon requires you to take the Psochic oath at some point..... You could take the oath of loyalty now of course, if you’d like to ?”

“Details Sam, tell me about the oath ? I’d never promise total obedience to anyone, or any organisation.”

“Not obedience Mabina, just an oath of loyalty and an agreement to obey our rules. Basically you’d give your oath as a queen, to never harm another member of the order, or divulge our secrets.”

Laura knew Mabina wanted to avoid such an oath for as long as possible, they’d discussed it at the hotel.

“As you said Sam, there is the whole building trust issue. First let’s collect the artefacts, are any in the Middle East ?”

“I understand the trust problem, the oath can wait.” Said Sam. “Our order took most of the artefacts back to Britain, though acquiring them still won’t be easy. One is still here in the Middle East, Egypt to be exact. Called an Egg, but actually a disc of metal. Seeking The Egg of Astaroth has taken the lives of many of my order, but they were human. I think two vampires should have no problem in recovering it from where it was hidden in Karnak.”

Laura not only remembered her dream of the night before, the details seemed to refresh themselves.

"Let me guess, the Egg is hidden deep below the ruined Temple of Thoth. It's at the centre of a maze of deep passageways and defended by something dreadful."

"How could you possibly know that?" Asked Magda.

"It's not only your order who have secret knowledge." Said Laura.

~ ~

It seemed to be easier to communicate with Bill Jarrold now he was in prison, than it had ever been when he was in the outside world. There had been Bill's love of boats, his mistress and at least four or five casual girlfriends. Plus his wife Helen had various interests she was always wanting to involve him in. In many ways, it was easier for his firm, having Bill bored and behind bars. Not that Steve would have mentioned that to anyone.

"Fly up there, Bill wants us to fly?" He said.

Cyril Carter calling him on a cheap mobile phone that would only be used for a few days. Cyril was the go between, picking up messages from Bill's contact on the inside, probably a prison officer. It was all incredibly fast and efficient.

"I know, you'd normally drive to avoid being on a passenger list, but Bill doesn't want this guy hurt. Obviously things can go wrong, but pay him off if you can. I can't see him asking for a fortune, not a guy living on a small holding in the middle of nowhere."

Steve didn't like using his passport for such things, it left clear evidence that he'd been in the area. Some of Bill's firm had been convicted on far flimsier evidence. They were in the car, Martin driving and mouthing the word 'flying' at him and shaking his head.

"You're sure Cyril? We can drive up there in less than a day, or there's the train." Asked Steve.

"Bill wants you there tonight, banging on this guy's door. Sorry Steve, but you know Bill."

"Yeah, I'll send Martin home to get his toothbrush."

"You'll need two others, Bill wants you to go mob handed."

"Why the Fu..... Why Cyril? It's an easy two man job."

"Easier to control the situation with four of you there. Think of it as Bill telling you to pay this guy off without bruising him. Don't bruise him Steve, Bill won't be happy if you do."

Christ! Someone else Bill didn't want him to thump. Sometimes it felt more like working for a UN relief agency than the firm he'd joined years before.

"I understand Cyril, we'll be there before this guy goes to bed."

The call ended and Steve went through his mental rolodex. The problem was that people available at short notice weren't usually the pick of the crop.

"Are we really flying to Scotland today?" Asked Martin.

"We are, drop me off and go home to pack your toothbrush. We need another two guys, anyone come to mind?"

"Not anyone decent, there is Cornelius." Said Martin.

"Don't call him that on the plane, we don't want him going psycho at forty thousand feet."

Cornelius hated his given name and liked to be called Connie. He was definitely crazy and probably border line psychotic, but he was good in a fight. Just the guy to have around in case Daniel had half a dozen hefty crofters with him when they arrived.

"Yeah, I think we'll take Connie." He said. "And Tony, he'll be sat at home waiting for the phone to ring."

"He's a bit young Steve."

"I know, but he has a nice smile and always wears a suit. He can ring the bell, they'll think he's come to sell them a set of encyclopaedias."

They'd arrived at his house and Steve was getting out of the car.

"I don't think they do that anymore." Said Martin. "Sell encyclopaedias on the doorstep."

"You're probably right....Something they did in the sixties. There are times Martin when I wonder if I'm too old for all this shit."

~ ~

Liz Grant had expected the entire day to be taken over by planning the trip to Karnak, or bringing Mabina and Laura up to speed. It had been quickly agreed that the four of them from London would be booked into one of the tourist hotels in Luxor. There had been a brief squabble when Magda had insisted on joining them.

"But you're well known among archaeologists." Sam had told her. "Your photograph is on the back of a few books you've contributed to."

"So, what of it? I've visited Luxor many times as a tourist. It'll be nice to show Liz and Brendan the temples, while Mabina and Laura find the Egg of Astaroth."

After that wine had appeared and Judith had gone out for more nibbles. The afternoon had become a bit of a celebration for their new collaboration.

"This means a lot to us..... To me." Magda told her.

Magda had a way of looking at her, which Liz recognised. She'd gone gay for pay quite a few times, she recognised the look of desire from another woman. Not that she was that way inclined herself, she was just a pretty good actor. Liz had even managed a few impressive orgasms for female clients who'd paid well. Magda wasn't unattractive and Liz wanted her help with something. Flirting a little wasn't a chore.

"We could go back to my hotel, if you'd like to?"

She'd expected the question sooner and kissed Magda on the cheek.

"I'd love to, but you must know that I'm Brendan's paid companion. It would be wrong in so many ways, for me to leave him on his own tonight."

"Is it money Liz? I'll gladly pay for your time."

It wasn't money and she felt a little insulted. She felt loyalty towards Brendan and still thought he might go to pieces if left on his own for a night. Liz hid her annoyance and held Magda's hand.

"No, it's not money Magda.....He needs my support. Brendan might be strong physically, but emotionally....."

"I understand Liz. There is somewhere here..... Locked and off limits, but I could get the keys. I know you're with Brendan, but you're entitled to a little free time."

"That would be very nice."

Magda talked briefly to Sam, who nodded his head and smiled. There was a little rummaging in the top drawer of his desk, before Magda was rattling a set of keys and leading her towards the elevator.

"This is a large building, but very few clients ask what's on the other floors." Said Magda. "They probably assume it's all storage for Sam's stock and most of it is, but not all of it."

There was a key hole at the top of the elevator panel. Magda inserted the key and twisted it, causing the elevator to go up.

"We're going to the top floor."

"What's up there?" Asked Liz.

"You'll see Liz, you'll see."

Mabina said it with a huge grin on her face, like a magician about to reveal their best trick. Liz had the impression she wasn't the first woman Magda had taken up to the top floor. She was ready to be impressed when the elevator doors opened, but they were in a room full of wooden crates.

"Don't worry Liz, we're simply passing through."

A door on the other side of the room, one requiring an expensive looking key. The self-contained flat beyond the door was functional rather than impressive.

"Sam created his home away from home in case of trouble, but he rarely uses it."

No asking if she wanted a glass of wine or a quick warm up snog on the sofa, Magda took her straight through into the bedroom.

"I don't think Sam has slept here more than twice." Said Magda. "I don't visit Jerusalem that often, but I've used this room more than he has....Erm, not that I sleep with many women.... I meant...."

Liz kissed her mainly to shut her up, allowing Magda to handle her breasts through her dress.

"You've got fantastic tits."

"Thank you, yours aren't bad either. I don't care who you've brought here Magda, or if you're married with six kids. We're just here for a bit of fun between consenting adults."

There was fun, Liz even managed to fake the earth moving for her a little. No money changed hands, but Liz was expecting payment in another way. They lay like spoons for a while after sex, Liz caressing Magda's back.

"I was hoping Liz.... When we're in the hotel in Luxor...."

"That's be nice."

Liz was good at ear nuzzling, clients had mention it quite a lot. She nuzzled Magda's ear, while her hand fondled her right breast.

"I still want to use the Half Moon Magda."

"No chance now, it belongs to Mabina."

"It's in the building, I saw Judith lock it away in a filing cabinet."

Magda turned and wiped her sweat drenched hair out of her eyes.

"You're serious aren't you ?" She asked.

"Of course I am, we can do it right now, while the others are getting drunk. I'm assuming you have plenty of the ingredients needed and know the incantation ?"

"Not by heart Liz, but I do have a written copy.... But you're human and the consequences aren't worth what you might gain."

"I really want this Magda and if you come to London, I'll show you my gratitude. Please, it really matters to me."

"Why ?"

"I'm not sure..... I can't remember wanting anything quite so much."

"It's being around them, the vampires. I'm sure we all feel a little inferior." Said Magda. "There are consequences though Liz. I'm not going to talk about heaven and hell, all religions view those ideas differently. I just talk about what I've seen and there are dark entities out there Liz, truly terrible creatures who inhabit the shadows."

"I'm not scared of them Magda, really I'm not. I've no intention of exploring anywhere dangerous."

"You don't understand Liz.... Use the Half Moon and you'll be noticed, your soul will be darkened.

There is a chance that you'll be changed forever into.... The dark entities were once people, you might become one of them. Vampires are already monsters, but you....."

"I'm still willing to take the chance.... Will you help me, tonight ?"

"Very well, but Sam must never know."

~ ~

The flight from London had taken under two hours, but there had been the usual forms to fill out to hire a car and then Martin had taken the wrong road to Pitmedden in the Parish of Udny.

“Parish of Udny, it sounds like something out of Game of Thrones.” Said Martin.

“Just don’t get lost again.” Said Steve. “We need to see him tonight and it’s already late.”

It wasn’t that far north from Aberdeen, but the SatNav in the hire car kept trying to send them across fields or into streams. Eventually Martin found what looked like a cart track.

“His small holding is at the end of this lane.” Said Martin.

“You may call it a lane.” Said Connie. “I call it a muddy track, probably leading nowhere.”

“Leave him alone Connie.” Said Steve.

There was a building at the end of the track with an old van parked in front of it. Martin pulled up some distance from the house and they all got out.

“What sort of a carrot cruncher would live here ?” Asked Connie.

“Maybe one with a shotgun, so keep quiet once we’re at the door.” Said Martin.

There was a small well-kept front garden and there were lights in a few of the windows. Strangely the front door had been left open and slightly ajar.

“Go and bang on the door Tony.” Said Steve. “Shout out that you’re here to see Daniel.”

“Are you sure ?” Asked Connie. “They might think he’s a bailiff in that suit.”

“Go on lad.” Said Steve.

Tony went up to the door and Steve had to admit he did look like a bailiff, or maybe a Mormon looking for converts. After a lot of banging on the door and shouting, Tony pushed the door open.

“Lots of lights on, do we go in ?” Asked Tony.

“Yes, but do it very carefully.” Said Steve.

The lower floor of the house was mainly taken up by a large lounge and the kitchen. Somewhere a radio was playing Radio 4 and there was a warm coffee cup on the kitchen table. As for any occupants of the house ? There was no sign at all.

“He might be out feeding the animals or something.” Said Martin.

“It’s a bit dark out for that.” Said Tony.

“Daniel, we’re just here to talk.” Shouted Steve.

Nothing, only the quiet sound of the radio. It looked like Daniel might have seen their car arriving and bolted. That would mean searching every barn and outhouse. There were stairs going up from the hallway and another set leading down from the back of the kitchen.

“He might have legged it Steve.” Said Connie.

“If he has it was probably because he heard you yelling.” Said Steve. “We’ll search the house thoroughly before we start on the outhouses. Martin and I will take the upstairs and you two search the basement. Do it properly..... Look in every fucking cupboard.”

“Ok boss.” Said Connie.

Steve went up the stairs first, trying not to think about how many farmers owned shotguns. Every light had been turned on upstairs, every door left open. He was rarely afraid of anything, but the empty house was beginning to look like a trap.

“Daniel ! Come out and talk. There might be a lot of cash for you, if we can come to an agreement.”

He’d been half expecting to see a crazed farmer in the main bedroom, a double barrellled twelve bore in his hands. If they’d come by car he’d have brought a couple of guns, but travelling by air meant that was impossible. The bedroom was empty, no sign of a crazed crofter anywhere. Martin opened two wardrobes, while Steve looked apprehensively at a hatchway into the loft.

"Do you know anyone up this way?" He asked. "Someone useful, with a few tough friends."

"There's a hard case called Neil in Glasgow. Do you want me to give him a call?"

"No..... Actually maybe Martin. If he's not in the house you can call Neil and we'll start searching outside tomorrow. I don't fancy trying to dig this guy out in the dark. Now, do you want to toss a coin for who goes up there?"

Steve pointed at the hatchway, before pulling at the thick pull cord attached to it. There were fold down steps to get up into the loft and they looked well used. There was a light switch just inside the loft, but neither of them were that keen on climbing up to use it.

"Of course we'll toss a coin." Said Martin. "Never volunteer for anything, my old dad used to say and he'd done national service in Malaya."

"A wise man was your dad."

Martin tossed a fifty pence coin, catching it and slamming it onto the back of his forearm.

"Your call?" He asked.

"Tails."

Damn it was heads, of course it was, he rarely won a coin toss. Steve climbed the steps and used the light switch. Much to his relief the space above him was instantly illuminated by the harsh white light of several fluorescent bulbs.

"I don't care what Bill wants..... If anyone but me comes down these steps....."

"Don't worry Steve, I'll beat the crap out of them."

Someone had once tried to organise the mess in the loft, before giving up and letting the dust and chaos begin. There were boxes with 'Udny Electronic' on the side and metal shelving full of kitchen gadgets, broken toasters vying for space with portable CD players. There was a whole shelf full of broken desk fans.

"Looks like you've got a bit of a side hustle going on Daniel." He muttered.

There was a workbench at the far end of the loft, someone had been using a soldering iron to repair a clock radio. Against one wall were two cabinets big enough to hold a man, but both had boxes stacked in front of them. Strangely there were a filing cabinet full of what looked like medical records. Steve walked back to the hatchway, to find Martin halfway up the steps.

"They seek him here, they seek him there.....He's not in the loft." Said Steve.

"I'll call Neil and get him to bring a few guys here by morning."

There was a sound Steve recognised, though it was impossible to tell who was screaming. He'd caused a lot of pain to a great many people, it was an essential skill if you worked for Bill Jarrold. There was a huge difference to the sound of screams for help, because of fear, or the screams caused by agonising pain. Someone in the house was being tortured, he was sure of it.

"Don't run Martin....Careful..... We'll go together."

The ground floor was still empty, someone on Radio 4 reading the news. The screams ended abruptly, but they could only be coming from one place. Before going down to the basement, Steve looked around the kitchen.

"Pick something, preferably something sharp and heavy." He said.

There was an old meat cleaver hanging on the wall, a heavy one with a well-worn wooden handle. Perfect, even if it was a blunt, a good solid blow would break bones. Steve felt happy with his weapon, until he saw the stainless steel thing Martin had found. It looked more medical kit than kitchen utensil, a heavy stainless steel handle with a sharp stabby end.

"No more trying to talk to Daniel." Said Steve. "If he's hurt our guys we'll kill him and burn the place to the ground, alright?"

“No argument from me.”

No tossing a coin, Martin seemed to know it was his turn to go first. They took it slowly going down the stairs, trying to walk on the edges of the steps to avoid creaking sounds. As in the rest of the house, every light was turned on, every door left open.

“Fuck.....Why do that to him ?” Asked Martin.

There was a medical table in the centre of the room and Connie was draped over it, his feet still touching the floor. He was dead, though only recently, there was a damp vapour rising from his hot blood.

“He’s been gutted.....The bastard will pay for this.” Said Steve.

Someone had dug deep into Connie’s guts, pulling out bits of his intestines and other unrecognisable organs. Steve now knew why his screams had been so intense. Connie’s throat had been ripped out too, a pool of blood was still forming on the floor.

“This was recent..... Really recent.” Said Martin.

“No sign of Tony.”

So tempting to simply torch the place and run for the door, but Steve had never abandoned a member of his firm in a fight. He’d brought the kid to Scotland, so he was going to do his best to take him home. The basement was longer and wider than the house above. A corridor went off to their right, a trail of blood leading towards one of several open doors.

“No talking now Daniel, it’s too late for that.” Shouted Steve. “Come out now and it’ll be just you and it’ll be quick. Piss us about and the woman and kid will die too.”

Nothing, no sound or movement from the any of the rooms. Steve moved first, looking quickly into the first two rooms. They looked like the examination rooms in a busy hospital. Beds, the machines to take blood pressure, even a box on the wall full of surgical gloves. Martin was giving him a ‘what the fuck’ look, but Steve could only shrug in reply. Whatever Daniel might turn out to be, he obviously wasn’t just a harmless farmer.

Steve followed the trail of blood, meat clever held up, ready to strike. It was a large room with what looked like a dentist’s chair in the centre. Tony was still alive and struggling while fixed in the chair with leather straps, his mouth covered in duct tape.

“Leave him alone and the woman can still live.” Said Steve.

An empty promise, Steve had already made up his mind to kill them all and it wasn’t going to be a quick painless death.

“You must be Daniel ?” Asked Martin.

No answer from the big man, though he did match the description given by one of Tasha’s neighbours. Daniel was huge and ugly..... No not ugly, his features just looked strange. The busy body neighbour had told them that Daniel had looked scary and Steve could see why. Daniel hadn’t said a word, the hate and aggression was all in his eyes. He leant forward and bit out Tony’s throat, right down through the windpipe.

“Fuck !” Yelled Martin.

Martin ran at the beast of a man, actually jamming the stainless steel spike into his upper arm. The strength and speed of Daniel though, it was like trying to stop a diesel train. Daniel grabbed Martin’s head, ramming it into the wall, cracking it open like an egg. Finally Daniel spoke to him.

“You, I’m going to keep alive for now.”

Daniel hit him with a single blow to the head that sent him sprawling into unconsciousness. Steve woke to find it was still night and he was in one of the small outhouses. He was lying on straw, his

wrists and ankles bound with what felt like electrical flex. There was a single low wattage bulb hanging from the ceiling, enough light to see he wasn't alone.

"Hello, don't worry about me old girl." He said.

Steve had once worked on a farm, he had no fear of the huge creature he was sharing the outhouse with. They were intelligent social animals and he was in no immediate danger. A few feet away from him was the largest female pig he'd ever seen.

~ ~

Simon was beginning to genuinely like Tim Chance. Not only had he turned up for what he knew was likely to be a dreadful dinner party, he'd even brought a stand in for Laura. He'd invited Grace who worked with both Clara and Laura at the hotel. A very bright and attractive lady who'd charmed Anthony, but who had no romantic attachment to Tim. Anthony was pleased there had been no empty chairs around the table and Laura had no reason to be jealous... Perfect.

"That went very well." Said Simon.

"It did, very well. Thank you for coming at such short notice Grace." Said Clara.

"I enjoyed it, Anthony and Nicola have a lovely home."

"And you Tim, service above and beyond the call of duty." Said Simon. "We both really appreciate you coming and I'm sure Laura will think of a way to reward you when she returns."

They were almost back at Laura's pimped SUV, which Clara was denying being in love with, despite finding excuses to use it all the time.

"How about drinks and midnight nibbles at our place?" Asked Clara. "We have room, you can both sleep over, if you like?"

"Sounds fun." Said Grace.

"Great, the food was alright.... But it didn't really fill up the gaps." Said Tim.

"We'll get pizza on the way." Said Simon.

It wasn't sensible to become so friendly with Clara's human work colleagues, but he was feeling insanely grateful to them for keeping Anthony happy. A moody and bitter Anthony was something best avoided at all costs. Clara's phone rang, the baroque ring tone she used for Daniel.

"Sorry I need to take this." Said Clara. "It's a relative who's been having a few problems."

She walked across Anthony's huge garden, stopping some distance from them.

"I'm sure he's alright, just a bit elderly and he lives in the middle of nowhere?" Said Simon.

"Whereabouts?" Asked Grace.

"Scotland, he has a farm."

Clara came back smiling, always a good sign.

"He's fine, just a few unexpected visitors." She said.

~ ~