

London's Night Stalkers

Chapter 15 – Two to Go

“Daniel is ten out of ten for strange.” Simon had told her. “But you can never fault him on the science. If he wants you to defile a church, you can be sure he has a good reason.”

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Laura entered the postcode into her car's satnav out of habit, the route was simple and the traffic was usually light at that time of night. It had been raining; a greasy dampness still covered the roads. Not a problem as long as you drove sensibly and Laura saw no reason to exceed the speed limit. Along Green Lanes, past Manor House Station she drove, just skimming the edge of the Finsbury Park area. Laura liked Finsbury Park, the way a grassland pride of lions likes the local watering hole. It was ideal hunting territory and she was constantly looking for streets with just the right feel about them.

“It's all ours now.” She muttered. “Every square mile of it.”

With Vlad and Mabina gone, Greater London really was theirs. Everything inside the M25 was their hunting ground, maybe even a few miles beyond London. She was gaining confidence every day, knowing that no human was a match for her, no matter how well trained they might be. Laura smiled when she went round the roundabout at Old Street Station. It was the area she'd chosen for her next kill, another lone male this time. That would be in a few days' time though, for now helping Simon was why she was there. She slowed down and spotted the grey door, a large brass number confirming it was the right door, next to the right shop. She parked on the other side of the road, about twenty yards away. CCTV everywhere in that part of London, she pulled her hood right up and stretched it over her forehead. She looked in the door mirror, as she got out of her SUV.

“My own mother wouldn't recognise me.” She mumbled.

Personally she thought Simon was a bit over cautious when it came to the ever present camera surveillance in London. He had been around for over seven hundred years though, so she accepted his rules of behaviour, for now. She pressed the button on the entry phone box, noting a small camera lens.

“I noticed your wheels go past.” Said Simon. “Come on up, I'll be at the apartment door.”

There was the obligatory buzzing sound and the door opened to her push. On the way up the stairs, she put on a pair of surgical gloves, without having to think about it. Simon was out on the landing, waiting for her. Neither of them said a word, until they were safely behind a closed door.

“Wow, you got a big one.” She said.

“Laura, meet the late Nigel Sands.” Said Simon. “Domenic Crossley is in the bedroom, though he liked to be called Dom.”

Laura knew Simon was strong, but Nigel had been a mountain of a man.

“I'm impressed, though getting him out to the SUV will be a challenge.” She said. “Is Dom a big guy too?”

“No, small, he'll be an easy drunk walk, using the service elevator.” Said Simon. “First though, you must have a look in their fridge. I know you're always hungry.”

“I am always hungry. You should see the food the hotel gives us. We had the uneaten breakfast buffet for lunch the other day. Crumpled up, four hours old bacon !”

She went into the kitchen and opened the fridge. Their own fridge wasn't that badly stocked these days, but the inside of Dom's fridge looked like the Harrods food hall.

"Oh Simon, packets of salad that aren't all yellow and curled up. Is there a plate?"

He handed her a plate, which she filled with some of her favourite cold foods. Simon had coffee ready, by the time she sat at the kitchen table with her supper.

"I'm definitely going to get fat." She said.

"We can't get fat, or so Daniel says. It appears we burn off any excess while we sleep."

"Really?"

"Yes, Clara went through a bit of a thing for ice cream once, eating large tubs of Häagen-Dazs every day. She never put on an ounce."

Crap! That was important information, she should have been told. Laura almost went back to the fridge, but decided there was enough on her plate. She glared at Simon, which he completely ignored.

"This is a really nice apartment." She said, between mouthfuls.

"Yes, I think Dom and Nigel financed it with some sort of scam. I have no real idea what it was though. They certainly lived well."

"Anything worth packing up and taking?" She asked.

"Have a look round, there are some expensive watches in the bedroom. You can probably sell them fairly easily, just don't bring them to the house."

"I found somewhere safe Simon, a sort of sanctuary."

He smiled at her and topped up her coffee.

"And I guarantee you won't want to tell Clara or me about it." He said.

"No, you're right, it's private. I'm going to keep my guns there too."

Simon went to the fridge and bent down, pulling a tub of ice cream out of the freezer unit. He put the tub and a spoon in front of her.

"Dessert." He said. "I had one and they're delicious. I heard guns Laura, do you have more than one now?"

Damn, she felt anxious around Simon! Was it always going to be like that? He had turned her, changed her from a puny human into an immortal. She felt herself blushing, but was determined not to be apologetic.

"I now have two Glock G32 pistols." She answered. "I like them, just carrying one of them makes me feel more confident. I might not need them forever, but I do now."

"Are you carrying one now?" He asked.

She nodded and placed her new G32 on the kitchen table. Simon put his hand out, but stopped a few inches from her gun.

"May I?" He asked.

"Yes, of course."

He spun it around in his hand, obviously getting a feel for the weight and balance, before giving it back to her.

"I've used guns in too many wars to remember." He said. "Practising will be a problem for you of course, but you did a good job of killing Mabina."

"She was very close."

"Then get close Laura, get as close as you need to be. Keep your guns, if they make you feel more confident, just keep them somewhere else as much as possible. I doubt if the police will ever search the house, but a burglar finding one, could be just as catastrophic."

She put the Glock back in her pocket and dug into the softening tub of ice cream. Simon was right, it was delicious. Laura nodded in the direction of Nigel's dead body.

"How do we get them out to my SUV?" She asked.

"I don't think the other two flats are let yet, haven't heard a sound from either of them and no lights showing under their doors." Said Simon. "Bring your SUV round the back and we can put them both in the service elevator."

Laura did a far better job of searching the apartment than Simon and she left it looking tidy. There was a holdall in a cupboard, which she filled with quite a lot of gold jewellery and small items of value.

"Your Dom liked his bling."

"Lift the mattress, I never got round to it."

Not a fortune, an envelope with about twelve hundred pounds in it, probably Dom's emergency funds. Once that much money would have seemed the stuff of dreams, but the haul at Vlad's house had spoiled her. It was all so easy, once they'd worked out that the elevator needed some sort of key card. It had been in Dom's wallet and there had been no further problems.

"They're the first in my new pimped beast." She said.

"First of many." Said Simon.

In the back and covered in a blanket, even someone right up against the window, would have seen nothing to get excited about. Simon settled back into the passenger seat, as she turned round in the width of the street and headed back towards Old Street roundabout.

"Nice paint job by the way." He said. "Very nice."

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Mike Marcou was sat in his own car with a large bottle of diet coke and several packets of junk food. The only surveillance equipment he possessed was a cheap dashboard camera, which one of the tech guys had helped him fit. His bowels could go for days if necessary, but he had to pee occasionally. He'd rigged up a weird device that included an old plastic container, some piping and a funnel. It was crude, undignified and slightly smelly, but it meant not having to leave the car for hours. Mike was good at routine surveillance, one of the best during his years in the lower ranks. He was still alert, when Laura's freshly pimped SUV drove past him.

"Laura Selway returned home at four twenty am."

He spoke into his own phone, now used in the roles of recording device and photo surveillance. It was all a bit Mickey Mouse, but he needed some sort of records, just in case he disappeared. Not just his own anxiety, Susan had told him to check in regularly.

"Stuart Martin has vanished off the face of the earth guv." She'd told him. "He might be on a beach in the Caribbean, or he might be in a ditch somewhere."

There was the dash cam too, which had hopefully picked up the number plate of the passing SUV. It wasn't exactly high definition though and the yellow streetlights, didn't give off much light. He knew he was taking a chance, as he opened his car door and walked towards the house in Wood Green.

"There are no old bold coppers."

One of the trainers at Hendon had constantly told him, all those years ago. He wasn't paid enough to be a hero, no copper was. Something made him put one foot in front of the other though and walk up the street. He crouched behind a grubby delivery van and watched Laura and Simon, as they got out of her vehicle. He was just close enough to hear them, as long as they spoke clearly and the wind didn't pick up.

"Well, what do you think?" Asked Laura. "Go right round, get a proper look."

She was showing off her the new paint job, both of them walking round her Chevrolet and behaving like excited kids. Mike took the opportunity to carefully move closer, kneeling behind an old VW Beetle. He'd stick out like a sore thumb if a nosey neighbour looked out. They were few and far between at four thirty in the morning though, so he kept still and listened.

"It is very impressive and the alloy wheels are really cool." Said Simon.

"So you'll be on my side, If Clara pesters me to get rid of the flames?"

They were walking away from him, almost at the stairs up to their front door, before Simon answered. Mike was to play the next part of their conversation back in his mind a thousand times, wondering if he'd heard it correctly.

"And sleep on the couch for a year." Simon replied. "I'll remain neutral, which is the best I can do. Clara does have a point though, it does stick out like a sore thumb."

"I'll be careful, we didn't have any problems tonight." Said Laura.

"We were fine tonight Laura, but if the police start to hear about an SUV with a custom paint job, showing up when people go missing..... You know what we think about giving the Van Helsings anything to get excited about."

They were near their front door, Laura sticking her hands up like claws and hissing at Simon.

"Ahhh my dear Simon, no one can beat the Van Helsings."

Simon opened the door and they were gone, leaving him curious and confused. Had he just heard an admission of murder, maybe several murders? Mike sat on the grubby tarmac and rested his head against the rusty bumper of the old VW. Laura's words certainly fitted in with the disappearance of her boss, but he had no recording and it wasn't even an official investigation.

"And what was all that Van Helsing crap about?" He muttered.

He couldn't report any of it officially, he'd be given some sort of compulsory therapy. He could hear his boss now, accusing him of lying and recommending early retirement. No, he had to find out more about Laura, she was the key to it, whatever it was.

"I'm going to be your shadow, wherever you go at night." He mumbled.

It took a woman walking a dog to make him move, before she saw him sitting in the road and set her terrier on him. Mike carefully used the cars for cover, in case anyone was watching from Laura's house. He went round the back of a white van and crossed the road, heading back towards his car. He'd made up his mind to follow Laura everywhere she went after she returned home from her job at the hotel. Every trip to the shops, every run out in her colourful SUV. He was going to become her stalker, until he found out why Simon was worried about the police taking an interest, the Van Helsings. Yes, he'd cracked their code, he understood who they were talking about.

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The next morning brought a visitor to Vlad's house, who might have caused Mabina's decaying body to be found. The local postie with a recorded delivery, who didn't want the hassle of filling out the usual 'we tried to deliver' card. Albert Bignall, Bert to his friends, was old school, he took an interest in the people he delivered to and knew that Mabina was a doctor at the local hospital. He wasn't too keen on children's entertainers, but he wasn't about to hold it against Ms Mabina Gladitch, the name on the large brown envelope. There was a certain camaraderie between those who served the public and the return address on the envelope, was the local NHS trust. Bert rang the bell again and thumped on the door with the flat of his hand.

"Recorded delivery for Ms Gladitch." He called out.

Mabina had actually organised her finances extremely well. Not that she expected to be dead in her own cellar though, her body liquefying and oozing into the compost floor. It was just that she tended

to work the night shift at the hospital and vampires did get injured while hunting. On one occasion, Mabina had needed three days to heal up from a shot gun wound. Plus Mabina had been a control freak, something she'd never wanted to admit to anyone, even herself. All the household bills were paid for by direct debit and she'd arranged for her bank to pay various other items. The rent wasn't being paid of courses, but she owned the company, who owned the house. She was hardly likely to evict herself. A bank account with plenty of money, with instructions for it to be topped up from her long term deposits, if funds were required.

"Ms Gladitch !" Yelled Bert.

There would be something to cause a bailiff or the police to enter the house though, there was always something. The local council would get the direct debit wrong on her council tax, or the water company would need to dig a hole somewhere. The number of people with a statutory right of access was huge and one of them would need to get in, eventually. Bert's knees weren't as flexible as they had been, he was only eighteen months from retirement. He knelt on the doorstep though and prepared to look through the letterbox.

"You could get sacked for this Bert, you old fool." He muttered.

He knew that banging on a door only meant that he wanted to deliver something and the person inside had no obligation to open the door. For all he knew, Doctor Gladitch was standing at the end of her hallway, dressed only in her panties. It happened, he knew other posties who'd got into all sorts of trouble. She was a doctor though and he liked doctors, everyone liked doctors. Albert Bignall ignored years of experience and training, by lifting the letterbox flap and looking into the house.

"Doctor Gladitch ! Are you there ?"

It took a few seconds for his eyes to adjust to the gloom in the hallway. There was a long line of coat hooks and the hook nearest the door was empty. To his right was a small table, with a metal tray on it. The tray had several piles of neatly stacked coins on it, but no car keys. Bert was no Sherlock Holmes, but he knew the lady of the house had gone out. If Bert had looked downwards, he might have seen the growing mountain of post and junk mail, but he didn't look down. His right knee made a crackling sound as he stood up, retirement couldn't come soon enough. He filled in the card to tell her he'd tried to deliver a recorded delivery item, and went back on his delivery round.

One day someone was certain to enter the house. For now though, Vlad and Mabina's home, remained secure and unmolested.

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William Jarrold had a visitor that morning and he was only ever called Bill by a select few friends. Even the warders at the top security jail, called him Mr Jarrold or William if they wanted something. Actually visitor isn't really the word, he'd summoned Tom, sent a couple of his boys to give him the official invitation. No one refused a summons from William, no one.

"I'm surprised they let me in," said Tom, "known associate and all that crap."

"I did a favour for someone in admin." He replied.

Strangely enough not the usual envelope full of used ten pound notes. The wife of the guy who signed off visitor passes, had been having a bit of extra marital fun with a guy too big to be thumped. William had sent a couple of his associates around to talk to the would be Romeo and convince him to stop screwing the guy's wife. Now William could see who he wanted, with just about zero supervision.

"Always good to see you Bill." Said Tom. "What's the food like in here ?"

"Whatever I fancy Tom. I've done a lot of favours over the years, for a lot public employees."

Was Tom on his list of people allowed to call him Bill ? They had known each other for years and he did like Tom. They both smiled as Bill waived the warder nearest to them away and he actually moved well out of earshot. It was time to get down to the nitty gritty, the reason he'd been so keen to see Tom face to face.

"Who the fuck is Laura Selway Tom ?" He asked. "My solicitor, the detective who put me in here, all wanting to know about my dealings with a Laura Selway. It appears she's even driving around in my brand new Chevrolet Suburban."

"I sold it to her Bill, for a good price. You wanted it sold and she was looking for a new set of wheels. I gave the money to Helen."

"Yeah, I remember her saying about getting some cash."

Helen was not only his wife, but also the official owner of half his legitimate operations. He vaguely remembered her mentioning receiving an unexpected bundle of cash from Tom.

"Well, actually he bought it for her." Said Tom. "Simon from North London. I know I've told you about him before."

"Yes, it sounds familiar. A small time drug peddler, probably connected to larger outfit. Not really someone likely to be of interest , as I'm not into drugs."

"He might be into more than just drugs Bill, and his lady friends."

Bill tapped his fingers on the table and gave Tom his disappointed look. East End hard men had told him their secrets because of that look, Tom didn't stand a chance.

"And you're only telling me this now, because ?"

"He didn't seem to be involved with anything you'd have a problem with Bill. He paid for a few cars to disappear and sold me a some cheap drugs. And, well.... He was a good supplier Bill."

"Plus you're a little scared of him."

"Me Bill ? Scared of a him ? No way, no fucking way."

Good words, but said to hide real feelings. Bill had run protection rackets and several loan companies that lent money to clients, who didn't like paying up. He knew the sound of a scared man when he heard it. It worried him that Tom might be more scared of Simon, than he was of him.

"So Tom, why do you think they're into more than just drugs ?"

"Clara has been bringing in the cars to be crushed lately and most of them have traces of blood on the seats, sometimes on the carpet. Beetle noticed it and thinks they're assassins or something."

They both chuckled.

"Drugs can be a tough business." Said Bill. "Maybe they were dealing with a competitor ?"

"Maybe, but they all have this.... Attitude. Laura wanted a gun, exactly the same as the one she already owned. Now I've sold a lot of guns to hardened criminals."

William had to smile at that. He'd noticed over the years that no one ever thought of themselves as a hardened criminal, it was always the other guys.

"Like us you mean ?"

"Yeah, ok, point taken Bill. There is always a seriousness about buying a gun, they always go sort of quiet. No one is casual about buying a gun. Apart from Laura, who treated it like buying herself an early Christmas present."

A senior officer entered the room and the warder casually walked back towards them. Bill talked to Tom about how Chelsea were doing, they were both fans. The senior warder pointed at his watch and left the room.

"Sorry Mr Jarrold, but your time is up, your visitor has to leave."

"Can you give us just another five minutes ? It would be appreciated."

“Yes of course Mr Jarrold.”

The warder moved away again and William made a mental note to have a little extra added to his next payment.

“Ok, Tom.” He said. “We need to get this sorted out and I can hardly ask Simon to come here, or Laura. My solicitor just gave the police a written statement that I have had no dealings with any of them.”

“What do you want me to do ?”

What indeed ? The friendly warder was looking at his watch. William didn’t want a war with any of the major drug cartels. He was locked up at least until his appeal. Plus he had to admit to himself, that his operation wasn’t what it had been. Still the legendary gangsters of certain areas of London of course, but no match for the overseas boys. No, there could be no war.

“Have a word with him for me.” He said. “Tell him drugs are fine, but no moving into our areas of business, unless I give permission and receive a cut. Be polite, but tell him there will be serious words between us if he doesn’t follow the rules. Really serious words. Can you tell him that ?”

“He won’t like it Bill.”

“Do I look like I give a fuck ? Will you tell him that ?”

“Yes Bill, of course I will.”

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It was quite weird to pick up a jug of her own urine and fill three small bottles from it. Laura had bought the jars from a craft shop, probably intended to hold creams and ointments. The important thing was that they all had tight screw up lids and appeared to be water tight. Urine tight actually, as she held each bottle upside down. No leaks, though it felt really odd to hold a warm bottle of her own pee.

“Think of it as a science project.” She muttered.

Simon had already helped her to fill a few tiny vials with her blood. They’d liberated several boxes of blood testing paraphernalia from Vlad’s house and Simon had been quite keen to see them used for something.

“Daniel is ten out of ten for strange.” Simon had told her. “But you can never fault him on the science. If he wants you to defile a church, you can be sure he has a good reason.”

Defile a church ! Laura looked in the bathroom mirror and remembered the one rule that all sensible vampires obeyed. No one was sure why, but feeding on holy ground could be fatal and fatal in a very painful way. There were other problems too, Clara had mentioned nearly passing out at a christening.

“Might have been the font.” Clara had told her. “All those gallons of holy water.”

And Laura was about to defile the oldest church in North London, with her blood and urine. She drew her new gun out of the holster under her left arm, pleased with how quick her draw had become. Just holding the weapon made her feel good.

“That is everything.” She muttered.

Daniel had given her a list of essentials to take and few items that might be useful. Being thorough, Laura had packed everything on the list, into a case on wheels. She could easily carry the case, but Simon had told her that people expected girls to pull cases on wheels. Simon was still out, but Clara was in the kitchen, making something to nibble in front of the TV.

“The offer still stands.” Said Clara. “I’ll happily come and stand guard.”

“No, I’d be too embarrassed with you there.”

“What does Daniel want you to do with all that pee ?”

“Don’t ask Clara, don’t ask.”

Laura set her SatNav to guide her to the church she was going to defile and drove north. St Mary’s Church was a common name for places of worship, but only one claimed to be the oldest church in North London. It was actually right on the Hertfordshire border, a good long drive from Wood Green. She pushed her Ipad into the docking station on the SUV’s sound system and selected one of her playlists at random. Cyndi Lauper began singing ‘Girls Just Want to Have Fun’ at her, which seemed appropriate. Eventually the SatNav took her past a line of houses and on, into what looked like farmland. The church had once stood on the main road into London, which was now just a quiet country lane.

“Nice and dark, perfect.” She muttered.

Laura had done her homework, lots of searches on Google and a few items from web sites on historic buildings in the London area. She knew there was housing on the far side of the church and a large tavern that had a good reputation for Sunday lunch. There were a few cars parked near the tavern and Laura parked in the shadows, behind a Range Rover. The blessings of rural England, little street lighting and people too polite to be nosy.

“Let’s get this done.”

She grabbed her case and wheeled it along the road, looking like any other harmless girl visiting someone. She didn’t need housebreaking tools, she had vampire strength. If she couldn’t force a door open, then it wasn’t going to be opened by a crow bar. Too dark for CCTV to be of use and there was no sign of an alarm system. At one time fear of eternal damnation kept churches safe from thieves, now the silverware was locked away in a safe at the vicarage. Laura moved into the shadow of a large silver birch and watched for a few minutes, looking for anything that might be a threat.

“I think Daniel would approve of my choice.”

St Mary’s Church hadn’t always been catholic. It was the current occupier of what had been a significant crossroads on the way to London. One church built over the site of another for centuries, going way back before Henry VIII and his reformation. One article said the foundations of a Roman temple had been found in the church basement. If St Mary’s didn’t have enough stored spiritual energy for her science project, nowhere did. Laura hadn’t seen so much as a cat go by, so she walked slowly towards the rear of the church. There was a lit noticeboard near the front of the building, but the rear was in complete darkness. Vampire senses were better than a human’s though and Laura managed to reach the stairs down, without bumping into anything.

“Hmmm, this is new.”

The pictures on Google were obviously old and someone had decided the stairs down to a rear door, were just too inviting. There might have even been rough sleepers using the cosy hole in the ground. Whatever the reason, a gated fence had been built around her preferred point of access to the church. No razor wire on the top and not even that high, the fence was no real obstacle. Laura climbed over it and stood in front of the door. She had her usual bundle of surgical gloves in her pocket, but breaking and entering required something more hard wearing. Laura had bought a pair of gardening gloves with extra finger protection. She put them on, pulling them back so that they fitted her perfectly.

“Do you open inwards ?”

Reinforced with iron banding, the door moved enough for her to tell it opened inwards. Easy to open if you had her kind of strength and were happy to make a bit of noise. The church was some distance from the nearest house, so she was going to risk it. Laura had spotted six fairly easy places to beak in

on the online pictures and the partially hidden door had been her favourite. She moved back slightly, bracing her feet against the stone floor.

“Don’t shatter door, please don’t shatter.”

Laura rested just her fingertips on the door. Not on the centre, but right above the lock, the part of the door that needed to be forced away from the frame. She went back slightly, before hitting the door hard with the palms of her hands. Simon had taken her through the theory of how and where to apply force to the door, but this was her first time of putting that theory into practise.

“Wow ! That worked a bit too well.”

The door had crashed back against an inside wall, bits of door frame and lock flying into the dark interior of the building. The noise seemed deafening, but might not have travelled that far. Laura stood and waited for the sound of an alarm, or barking dogs. Both might mean her having to retreat and find another church. She heard nothing and walked into the darkness beyond the door. Once walking into the dark would have terrified her. Now she was the type of creature that humans were scared of finding in dark places. No light yet, not until she had the door closed behind her.

“Not a perfect fit.” She muttered. “But it’ll look perfect from outside.”

The door was back in place, even if there was a slight wobble on one of the hinges. After a minute her eyes weren’t adjusting to the darkness, which meant there was no light at all. No light penetrating from outside, meant no one would see the beam of her penlight. Laura turned it on, seeing a corridor full of wood fragments from the doorframe and bits of metal lock. Doors either side of the corridor, which didn’t interest her at all. She needed to get up out of the basement area and into the main body of St Mary’s. A thought occurred to her.

“I’m actually enjoying this.” She mumbled.

A large unlocked door at the end of the corridor, took her up a single flight of stairs and into a room with a little light coming through two stained glass windows. Laura turned off her penlight and quickly became used to seeing in the gloom. It looked like a storage room, full of folding chairs and a huge pile of union jack bunting. The communion wine was probably somewhere in the room, but Laura wasn’t on a sack and pillage mission, not yet anyway.

“Crap, which way ?”

Four ways out of the room, five if you included the stairs leading down. Laura tried the first door on her left and found the cupboard where the cleaners stored buckets and an old Dyson cleaner. The next door took her out into the main body of the church, with its high ceiling and large stained glass windows. The glow of nearby street lights barely lifted the gloom, but to a vampire, it was like moving around in full daylight. Laura removed her gloves, the next part of her mission required bare hands and maybe a little pain.

“It might sting a little.” Daniel had told her. “Nothing agonising, just a little pain.”

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Mike Marcou had lost Laura’s SUV, somewhere at the bottom end of Hertfordshire. She’d stopped once and had a good look around, which had made him nervous about following too close. He’d dropped back and two turns in the road later, she’d gone.

“Where the crap am I ?” He muttered.

There was a huge old church and a tavern with a few cars parked outside. The tavern had a notice board with a few spotlights pointed at it and seemed the only place he might find a proper toilet and some refreshments. He noticed Laura’s SUV by chance, as he drove towards the tavern. If it had still been its original black, he’d probably never have noticed it. The red flames seemed to almost glow in the lights from the tavern car park.

“A long way to come for a carvery meal Ms Selway.” He mumbled.

She had to be having a meal in the tavern, it was the only place she could be. He drove past her car and parked in a position, where he could see her SUV in his door mirror. He had to fiddle about with the mirror a little, but he soon had her newly pimped SUV, in the centre of his mirror. She’d know him if she saw him looking for her in the tavern, so he settled down to wait for her to return.

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Daniel had told her that holy ground was the only place to fear. Simon had told her the story of Ludmilla dying because her body decomposed around her. Agony as a punishment for a vampire feeding on holy ground. It was a crazy thing to take chances with, yet her main emotion was excitement. Laura left her case near the pews and looked up at the carved cross behind the altar. It had the effigy of the crucified Christ carved on it, right down to the nails being in the wrong place. “They knew he wasn’t nailed up by his palms even then.” Daniel had told her. “It just looks better from an artistic point of view.”

There it was the main symbol of Christianity, the figure of Christ on the cross. She pulled her case nearer to it and had a close look at the wood. It was surprisingly grubby, the paint peeling off in places. To her it seemed that Christ was badly in need of a repaint.

“This isn’t personal.” She muttered.

The next bit was hard, like trying to remember a really cute guy while masturbating. Laura wanted her fangs to drop, so she thought of feeding on her old boss, Stuart. She closed her eyes and pictured him, his neck held up to her by Clara, his voice scared, while he begged for mercy. It worked, her fangs dropped down, wet with the toxin that made humans so docile. There had to be more fluid though, so she worked her saliva up into a spit ball, before spitting the entire mess into the palm of her left hand.

“Fuck..... Oh, fucking hell !”

Stinging a bit she was ready for, not the agony as she’d placed her saliva soaked palm on the wood of the cross. Laura wanted to scream, but realised that was a bad idea. She clamped her jaws closed and opened her case, looking for the bottle of water she’d packed. It was the near bottom, so she tried to calmly remove everything from her case, while it felt as though her hand was burning in white hot flames. Bottles of urine, vials of blood, emergency dressing. It all came out, to be carefully placed on the stone floor. Eventually she found the water, though removing the top caused her more agony.

“It might sting a bit eh ? Wait until I see you Daniel.”

She used half the bottle, washing off her own saliva, which was acting like acid, burning her flesh. She wiggled her fingers to make sure they still worked, which caused enough pain to make her cry. More water, which brought the agony down to a nasty throbbing pain. The skin had gone from her palm and a fair amount of the flesh beneath. She was lucky to have a hand that still worked. Laura wound a clean dressing round her palm, pulling it as tight as she could tolerate.

“I think we can tick the box about there being enough spiritual energy.”

The wood where her saliva had touched was giving off the smell of burning flesh and steam was still rising into the air. Laura decided to move to the other side of the cross to carry out the blood and urine testing.

“Use clean areas of the cross for each test.” Daniel had told her. “Make sure the results don’t get contaminated.”

Laura moved all her precious bottles of bodily fluids, well away from where she intended to carry out the first experiment with her own blood. She actually felt nervous, as she poured a tiny amount of her blood, over the surface of the cross.

“Christ !”

She looked up.

“Sorry, just a word used out of habit.”

Her blood had gone, boiled away into an evil smelling vapour, as soon as it touched the wood. Heat had been produced too, enough to be felt by the skin on her face. Laura risked a few seconds of proper light, examining the wood with her penlight. Her blood had actually melted the cross, burning a narrow groove into the wood. It was amazing, yet not what Daniel needed.

“I know your blood Laura, every cell, every mineral, every trace element.” He’d told her. “Work out what spiritual energy removes from it and it gives us a clue, to why holy places can be fatal to your kind.”

When he’d phrased it like that, how could she have refused ? He’d made it sound like the whole fate of vampire kind, was in her hands. Only now there was no residue to test, all the blood in the vial had been vaporised.

“Improvise Laura, improvise.” She mumbled.

She had several spare urine sample bottles, all clean and sterile. She poured all the blood out of her remaining vials into a urine sample container and it still didn’t look much. Laura bit into her own wrist, deep into her own veins. She’d heal before suffering any real harm, but she managed to fill the sample container to the brim.

“Is that too much ?”

She licked the blood off her wrist, actually enjoying the taste of her own blood. When her wrist stopped bleeding, she decided to risk putting too much vampire blood on the cross. There was a chance there might be an explosive reaction, she just had to take that risk. Laura poured about an eighth of a pint of her blood, over the wood of the cross.

“Wow, if only Hollywood knew the truth.” She muttered.

It would have looked so cool in a movie, her blood causing the wood to give off a pale red glow. There was steam and the usual foul smell, but not all her blood was vaporising. It was burning a channel into the wood, a bubbling black residue of liquid, running down the wood. Laura caught as much as she could of it in a sample bottle.

“Got you !”

She looked at it the way Stanley must have looked at Livingstone. She’d succeeded in getting a sample for Daniel. Urine next and that worried her, the samples were all quite large. True, it was unlikely to react quite so energetically, but there was so much of it. Laura packed everything she wasn’t likely to need, back into her bag. The precious bubbling residue of her blood, she wrapped up in a clean dressing, to stop it bumping about. She wheeled her case some distance away, before opening the sample of urine. The cross already looked a mess and how to clean it off hadn’t been part of her plan.

“Crap ! Everyone is going to notice that amount of damage.”

Gouges in the wood, burn marks and a fair amount of her skin, all now marked what had been a priceless carving of Christ. She really had succeeded in defiling the church. She’d worry about that after finishing her experiments. Laura placed an empty container, where she hoped her urine would drip off the cross.

“Same routine.” Daniel had said. “Pour the urine and catch the residue to see what the spiritual energy removes.”

Laura closed her eyes slightly, as she began to pour her urine sample, over the carving of Christ.

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It was a good thing that Mike Marcou was an old hand at surveillance; many others might well have fallen asleep. The tavern had closed hours ago, the customers noisily shouting their goodbyes, before driving home. A few cars were left in the road, but there was now no other vehicle between his and Laura’s SUV.

“Where the hell are you Laura Selway ?” He muttered.

It was a quiet rural area that probably didn’t even have a proper name. There was the church and a tavern that boasted about being there for two hundred years, according to its sign. There was nothing else, unless she was visiting one of the houses. Mike waited, he was good at waiting, could have won medals for it. Quite by chance, he was looking in the right direction, to see her walk out of the churchyard. It was close to two in the morning and Laura looked awful, actually limping.

“What have you been doing ?” He muttered, softly.

She was pulling a case on wheels, across the road, passing under a street light. Laura looked like a woman who’d taken a beating and her left hand was covered in bandages. The case had to be the key, she might even have dug it up from somewhere in the churchyard. He was close to leaving his car and arresting her on the spot. Doubt stopped him though, the chance that Laura had a friend in the area and the case held nothing but dirty laundry.

“Another cock up and I’ll be on traffic duty.”

The girl did seem to lead a charmed life, while lately his own luck, had been consistently bad. Mike took his hand off the door handle and watched. He’d made his mind up to follow her to wherever she took the case. If it was full of Class A drugs and he caught the person she was delivering it to. It just might put his career back on track.

It took Laura a minute or so to put the case in the back of the SUV. He could actually see her wincing, every time she needed to use the fingers on her left hand. Gone was the vibrant girl he’d interviewed, she looked dead on her feet with fatigue. Eventually she started her car and put it in drive. There weren’t many Chevrolet Suburbans in North London, he’s noticed that the layout of her rear lights was fairly distinctive.

“You go ahead Laura, I’ll catch up with you on the London road.”

She drove right round the church and as he suspected, turned right to get on the road that would take her south and into London. He counted to ten before starting his own car and following her. As he drove round the church, he noticed a slight flicker of flames, coming through one of the large stained glass windows.

“Christ ! Was that her doing ?”

All sorts of weird conspiracy theories filled his head and Laura was at the centre of all of them. He really did have a duty to call the emergency services, but that would make his life a little awkward. There would be questions about why he was there in the early hours of the morning. There would be another note in his file, another question mark about his reliability.

“Someone else is bound to call it in.” He muttered.

As he turned right, he saw the flames illuminating the entire rear window of the church. It looked bad, but no one was likely to be inside the old building in the early hours of the morning. Mike chose to ignore the growing conflagration and carried on following Laura’s distinctive tail lights.

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