

London's Night Stalkers

Chapter 16 – Second Rule

“Centuries of creating their own crime scenes, meant more expertise at analysing what fitted and didn't fit, than a whole room full of police experts.”

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Mike Marcou followed Laura, as she turned off the route that would take her home and instead, headed towards Watford. He should have sent a text to Susan of course, but not reporting the burning church was beginning to weigh heavily on his conscience. Mike didn't even record what he was doing on his phone. Somewhere deep inside, he knew he was taking absurd risks with his safety and his career. He didn't care though, not reporting a burning building had crossed the line. “Stanmore.” He muttered as she headed south. “Who the hell do you know in Stanmore ?” Through Stanmore, Laura drove carefully as they reached Edgware, as if uncertain about where she was going. He took the risk of following her more closely, as she seemed busy trying to find somewhere. The tail lights of her SUV eventually turned off Hale Lane, quite near Mill Hill Broadway Station. She had to be making for the M1, but no, she turned to her left, driving into what looked like a disused factory yard.

“Crap !”

Follow her and she was bound to notice, yet he hated pulling up and letting her drive away. There wasn't much there though, the M1 was like a barrier, stopping her from driving far. He turned off his lights and saw the glow of her rear lights, turn a few times before stopping. He took the chance of driving after her with no lights on, relying on the glow of street lighting on that section of the M1. He was at last, sensible enough to pick up his phone.

“Following Laura Selway into a factory yard, just off Hale Lane, Edgware.” He recorded.

He saw her SUV and pulled up, parking and turning off his engine, without making a sound. As the door of her Chevrolet opened, he heard Muse playing fairly loudly and knew she was unlikely to have heard the slight rumble as his wheel had touched the curb.

“Laura leaving SUV and heading towards the arches under the M1.”

He debated taking his phone with him, but decided to leave it in the car. There wasn't much point in an insurance policy, if you carried it around with you. Mike didn't open his car door, until Laura was vanishing into the gloom under that section of the M1, where it zoomed over North London on miles of flyovers.

“I'm too old for this shit !” He muttered.

By the time he'd carefully followed her onto a grubby area of concrete, right next to several huge motorway support pillars, Laura had almost opened a gate. There was a wired off section, next to a building less than twenty feet along each side. It was difficult to make out details, but he saw Laura open a gate in the wire and go inside the fence.

Mike waited, taking in the general seediness of where he was. It looked like the sort of place where winos camped out around a fire made from garbage. It was grubby, full of discarded junk. The perfect place to ambush a cop who was being too nosy. He wiped that thought from his mind; he was following just one young woman.

“She might have a few accomplices.” He muttered. “Perfect place for a drugs sale.”

Mike decided to be a bold cop, which would have really annoyed his instructor at Hendon. He approached the wired off compound and saw the warning signs about high voltage and danger of death. It was, or rather had been, an electricity substation at some point in the past. The usual hum wasn't there though, the giant transformers had long gone. Such places tended to be inside buildings now. No longer a threat to the curious, or likely to turn a kid trying to get a ball back, into a pile of burned ash. He'd seen a kid who's stepped on a live rail on the railway once, not something he'd wish on anyone. The gate was chained, though the padlock hung open and loose.

"Well, you've come this far."

Mike opened the gate without making a sound, carefully replacing the chain. The signs obviously still worked, there was no junk inside the wire, or graffiti scrawled on the building walls. There was only one place to go, the heavy metal door was still slightly open. He opened the door and tried to look into the darkness inside. No good, he'd need light.

"Where is that damn flashlight icon."

One of the young women PCs had shown him how to turn his phone into a light, even saving the icon onto his phone's screen. It was like that now, the future wasn't only female, it was tech savvy females who'd end up running the met. Stupid he knew, but he turned his phone into a flashlight and entered the building.

"Laura Selway ?! This is the police, show yourself !" He yelled.

Her case was there, a light blue case on wheels, right in the middle of the room. There was racking down either side of the room, though the electronics it had once held, had been removed. Several old wooden chairs and a desk, but no sign of Laura. There was another door, another room where she had to be. He pulled the door open.

"Laura, it's no use trying to run." He said. "You need to explain yourself."

She was there, looking completely unconcerned. She actually smiled at him, a disconcerting smile. He wanted to caution her, but for what ? It was fairly obvious that something heavy was about to occur, he just didn't know what.

"We'll start by looking in your case." He said.

She moved so fast, too fast ! One moment he was on his feet, the next he was thrown against a wall and falling to the ground. Her foot was the last thing he saw, as it smashed into his face. That brought him the peace and quiet of unconsciousness.

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Some of the staff at the hotel must have guessed, though Clara hadn't actually told anyone. Not that telling people she was screwing Felipe would be embarrassing. The last time she remembered being genuinely embarrassed was in about the year seventeen hundred. Clara just liked to keep her private life private. After all, the clue was in the words, private life. All those hundreds of years and literally thousands of lovers and she did almost blush, as Laura came into the room, where she was going down on Felipe.

No time to get naked, she was giving him a quickie, while he sat in a comfortable armchair. Luckily Felipe had his back to the door, though he had his eyes closed anyway. Clara felt him begin to tense for the big finish, just as Laura looked into the room. Clara simply lifted her left hand and waved, receiving a smile and a wave in reply. It was odd, actually really odd. Felipe had gone away happy, with a promise that it was her turn on his next visit to the hotel.

Clara had gone about her duties, not wanting to make a huge thing about Laura walking in on her. Laura knew that she and Simon had a relaxed attitude to each other's indiscretions. After all, they

were both immune to the more common side effects of casual sex, babies and annoying infections. It was nearly lunchtime, before she found Laura covering the front desk, on her own.

"I did mean to tell you about Felipe." She said. "It's just that it never seemed to be the right moment."

"I do understand, Simon has Patsy." Said Laura.

"No, it's not like that, I'm not doing it because Simon is shagging Patsy. I just have a need for a little variety in my sex life."

Laura actually leant towards her and kissed her on the cheek.

"I don't really understand how you and Simon can do.... What you do, but I will never judge either of you. You're family now, you're my sister. I still have a hope of finding something approaching love, though I know I may never find what you and Simon have."

"Do you.... Have anyone ?" Asked Clara.

"There was Anthony's friend, who I did see a few more times."

"The rugby full back ?"

"Yes, that's the one." Said Laura. "The trouble is that I meet a guy who seems nice and isn't too ugly and I get confused. I have desires and needs, but sometimes I don't know if I want sex, or to stick my fangs in their neck."

"Oh, I still get those feelings Laura, they never go away. You need to be quite disciplined about it and decide early on if they're a fuck or a meal."

They chuckled for a few seconds, before Clara had to ask about Laura's science project for Daniel.

Luckily it was that quiet time of day, when new arrivals had been dealt with and those leaving, were busy packing cases and stealing towels. Even so, Clara kept her question to little above a whisper.

"How did last night go ?" She asked. "The church defiling for Daniel ?"

Officially they weren't supposed to use the internet for non-work related matters. That really meant not looking at porn, which had been a bit of an issue at one time. Laura looked quite upset, as she loaded the BBC website, clicking on one particular news item.

'Oldest church in London gutted by blaze.' Was the headline.

"It wasn't intentional," Said Laura, "though it did solve the problem of all the damage I'd done to the cross behind the altar."

Clara read the article, which didn't really say much. The most encouraging thing was that local youths were being blamed. There had been quite a few acts of vandalism in the area.

"Wow Laura and I thought my news about Felipe was exciting. How did you unintentionally burn down a church ?"

Poor Laura, she looked so upset.

"Don't tease me Clara, I feel dreadful about it. All that history, all those beautiful windows.... Gone and I caused it."

"I'm not teasing you, honestly. I have met some vampires who'd almost worship you for what you did. How did it happen ?"

"My blood was fine in the end, though it did burn grooves in the cross." Said Laura. "I had a sample of my de-whatevered blood for Daniel. My pee kept boiling away!"

None of it made any sense, so Clara made her go over everything, from the moment she'd pushed open the outside door to the old church. It made sense then, sort of. Clara had decided to call Daniel and tell him off though. Holy ground was dangerous, Laura could have easily been killed.

"Oh Laura, you're so lucky to be alive." She said. "Daniel should know better than sending you off to do things like that. So, how did you deal with the urine problem ?"

"I remembered opening a door to where the cleaning staff kept their stuff." Said Laura. "I borrowed a plastic bucket and..... Well it had been a while since I'd been able to pee. The bucket was rather full."

"Oh no Laura ! I'm calling Daniel tonight, you could have been killed. Pouring blood and pee over the cross in a church ! I really don't understand how you're still alive."

"No please don't call him, he won't ask me to do other things and it's important."

Clara really wanted to rant at Daniel, maybe call him there and then. She let her temper cool though.

"Fine Laura, but you need to talk it over with me in future and Simon."

Laura was nodding furiously.

"I will, promise."

"So, you poured a bucket full of pee over the cross ?"

"Not full, but there was quite a bit." Said Laura. "I'd already made a groove with the other samples, so I put a bottle under it, to collect what wasn't boiled away. I found a chair in a back office and stood on it, to pour the contents of the bucket onto quite high up on the cross."

"Oh dear Laura, how are you still alive ?!"

"I did feel really ill after I'd done it Clara. Putting everything back in my case was such hard work. Then climbing over the fence outside..... I felt like death by the time I got back to my car."

"Are you alright now ?"

"Yes fine, back to feeling my old self. I got the sample too, half a sample bottle of this brown sludge. I can't wait to send it off for Daniel to analyse."

"So, what happened when you poured the bucket ?"

"I feel so stupid."

"You were trying to help Daniel, tell me ?"

"The cross had glowed red before, so I took more notice of the drips ending up in the sample bottle. The bucket was almost empty, the sample bottle half full. I thought everything was going fine."

"Until ?"

"Then the cross exploded into flame, like something out an old Hammer Horror film. I was knocked off the chair and ended up landing hard on the stone floor. The fire was already taking hold, so I put the top on the sample bottle and began to put everything in my case. It was then that I began to feel ill, and guessed I was suffering some kind of divine punishment. It may have been for the best Clara, I had done quite a bit of damage to their ancient cross."

Clara was torn between horror at how close Laura must have come to destruction and an emotion that was almost hero worship.

"Oh Laura, Simon will want to buy champagne and as for Daniel....."

"Will he be angry ?" Asked Laura.

"Angry ?! You must give him a full account, which he will tell others of our kind. Laura Selway, you are going to become a vampire legend."

"Me ?!"

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There were lots of small business units not that far from where Laura had imprisoned Mike Marcou. She'd broken Simon's second rule of Vampire Club, she'd hunted a Van Helsing. Mike's car was still outside the vacant business unit, next to a white van that hadn't been there the previous night. Laura didn't panic, the small parking area was probably used as free parking by a lot of people. "At least it looks like no one had found his car." She muttered.

Surely the police had to be searching for him by now ? His car had to be on a list, probably several lists of vehicles the police were anxious to find. She drove on, ignoring his car for now. She'd removed his phone and notebooks from it the previous night, even wrenching out the dash cam. "I should have told Clara."

She'd had the chance, plenty of chances to tell her. It was knowing Clara and Simon would be disappointed in her. Her father had punished just about everything with his disappointment, she couldn't take it from her new family.

"I'll tell them when it's done."

Laura parked her newly pimped SUV, between a BMW and an AUDI, which were outside a very tidy looking business unit. Her vehicle would fit in and it was just about the right distance from the disused electrical sub-station. Too close and it would be all on its own in a street that looked like something out of Mad Max. Too far and she might get someone interested in where she was going, with her ASDA carrier bag.

She waited in several places, where the shadows were dark enough to hide in. There was no one following her, or waiting to arrest her near the sub-station. She'd known Marcou had been following her, almost as soon as she'd driven her car to the end of her street. Part of her wanted him to follow her though, digging his own grave. The chain was how she'd left it, no one had entered the wired off compound, with its notices that threatened painful death from by electrocution. She hesitated before opening the door.

"He tried to get you arrested, even spied on you." She muttered. "The bastard deserves it."

It was dark inside; she'd left him in total darkness with no food or water. That wasn't the worst thing though, she'd left him tied to a chair, the way Mabina had tied up Patsy. Laura hadn't deliberately copied Mabina's style, it was just the only experience she'd had of holding someone captive.

"Are you awake ?" She asked.

No answer, but he might well have decided to ignore her. A child's battery operated nightlight was in the ASDA bag, along with bottled water and a few packets of junk food. She was going to let him eat and drink before punishing him.

"If you're ignoring me, there will be consequences."

Nothing ! The nightlight was designed to put a revolving constellation of stars onto a bedroom ceiling. It probably looked great in a child's bedroom, but added a rather sinister atmosphere to the empty racks and dilapidated feel of the old electricity sub-station. Maybe Mike was dead ? She had left him tied to a chair for close to a day. Laura walked over to where he was tied. A chair with the bottom knocked out, his trousers and shorts pulled down around his knees. It was the way Mabina had bound Patsy, except Laura hadn't carried a bucket in her vampire's hunting kit. He wasn't dead, just sleeping. A steady pulse in his neck meant he was alive. That and the smell of urine coming up from the floor. She slapped his face.

"Come on Mike, wake up ! I have food and water."

The gag ! Of course he couldn't have replied, even if he'd been awake. Laura cursed her own stupidity, but she had been tired the previous night and not feeling her best. She'd jammed a wad of kitchen towel into his mouth, before tying it in places with a good length of bandage. His eyes were open now, glaring at her, as she undid the gag.

"Scream and I'll hurt you.....Seriously hurt you."

Again a line Mabina had used on Patsy, which worried Laura, a little. She wanted to be tough, yet didn't want to end up like Mabina. Of course Mike tried to shout, the instant the ball of wet towel came out of his mouth. Laura clamped his jaws together with her hands.

“One more piece of disobedience and I’ll break one of your fingers.” She hissed. “Not just snap it, but crush the joints, turning them to nothing but bone dust. I’m assured that is incredibly painful. When I run out of fingers, there are your toes and then the bones in your feet. A lot of pain, all of it guaranteed not to kill you..... Do you understand Mike ?”

His head nodded at her and Laura’s fangs dropped down. It had been an unconscious act, yet it was perfect timing. She pulled her gums back into a snarl and showed him her fangs, glistening in the glow of the nightlight. She leant forward and ran them over his cheek, being careful not to pierce the skin. None of the drug that pacified for her captured Van Helsing. He had to be awake and alert for everything.

“Now you understand what I am, don’t you ?”

His head nodded again, so she let go of him. No attempt to shout or scream, he was learning. She saw the look of surprise on his face as she untied him.

“You’ll never make it to the door Mike, so don’t try. Remember what I said about fingers.”

She went back to the carrier bag, which she’d left on the old desk. Of course Mike Marcou ran, the moment he’d pulled up his trousers and done up his belt. Laura would have lost respect for him, if he hadn’t run. She didn’t even hit him. Laura simply grabbed him round the shoulders and shoved him back on the chair.

“First finger Mike ! Little finger left hand.”

Laura held his mouth closed with her right hand and easily held his left wrist with her other hand. She didn’t pull his little finger back, as he’d probably been expecting. She crushed the largest joint between her fingers, feeling it crumble into tiny pieces of bone. It must truly have been agonising, enough pain to cause her Van Helsing to pass out.

“Crap !”

Laura sat cross legged on the dusty floor, looking at him. He was no good to her unconscious. He had to be aware, know that she’d not only beaten him, but thoroughly humiliated him. Then she’d kill him. Laura had once seen a documentary on a tribe in Africa who actually stole food from hungry lions. They’d wait for the lions to have a successful hunt, before stealing their meal from them. Not a hundred tribesmen armed with assault rifles. Just two or three of them, armed with old fashioned bows. All done by acting confidently and heaps of bravado. Something had been affected inside her by that documentary, something deep and primal. Mike Marcou was her great beast of a lion, even if he was unconscious. He had to be aware in a way that gave him a chance, even if it was a slim one. Laura poured a little water over his face, leaving the bottle on his lap. She added a few packets of crisps.

“Come on Mike, wake up. Eat and drink, you must be dehydrated.”

He drank and ate a few mouthfuls of salt and vinegar crisps.

“What are you going to do with me ?” He asked.

She pulled her gun out its holster, making a point of releasing the safety catch in front of him. She aimed her favourite toy at his head, enjoying the fear in his eyes. So predictable, that fear of modern weapons.

“A vampire with a gun Mike ! Now you really do look scared. Not that I mean to kill you with it.”

She released the clip, showing him the bullets, before standing up and placing the gun on the edge of the desk. It was an unspoken challenge, his chance to beat her. Not much of a chance, even if he did get to the gun quickly enough. Head or heart he’d have to hit, to stand any chance of leaving the building alive. It wasn’t much of a chance, but far better than no chance at all. A better chance than

most human hunters granted their prey. Laura went back to sitting on the floor, taking his phone out of her pocket.

"Firstly we need to talk about Susan Eversley." She said. "How much have you told her?"

"Nothing, all my texts are on the phone. I never even told her about the conversation I overheard. To be honest, I thought I must be going crazy, until now."

His voice was strong and clear, the water had restored a little of his spirit. Good, she didn't want him to be too docile.

"What conversation?" She asked.

"You and Simon, talking about Van Helsings and missing people."

Christ! How had they been so careless? No matter what he said, she'd already made up her mind that Susan had to be her next victim. An accident though, nothing to get the other Van Helsings excited. Simon had intended to put her off hunting the police, with his stories about their power and vast numbers. Instead he'd turned them into her ultimate prize, her pride of savanna lions.

"So all this was just some sort of personal grudge against me?"

Mike nodded.

"I liked and trusted you." He said. "And felt betrayed when I realised you'd fooled me."

It was her turn to nod, while looking at her feet.

"A loss of face. I can understand that Mike. Your wounded pride led you to this place Mike, so what good was it to you?"

Mike was good for his age, he'd probably enjoyed a bit of rough stuff in his days as a young copper. He threw the bottle at her face, before leaping for the gun. He almost made it, actually had two fingers on her beloved Glock. Laura broke his wrist with a single blow, before pulling him back to the chair. There was a lot of pain in his eyes, as she squeezed his throat, stopping his screams.

"You're beaten Mike, it's time."

She pulled her fangs over his neck, just leaving a scratch. That would be enough to get her toxin into his bloodstream, making him less likely to struggle or scream.

"You're the guy who nearly beat me to death Mike." She said. "You're my father who buried me under layers of disappointment. You're also Mabina, who taught me how to keep someone captive, by doing it all to Patsy. Most importantly you're my great lion, my right of passage."

He didn't understand of course, or maybe he did, a little bit. Laura sunk her fangs into his neck and fed. His blood was no different to any other human blood, but the hunt, the acquiring of it, made it taste much sweeter. She actually cried after he died, sitting on the floor in front of him. Not grief really, just the outpouring of so much that been kept locked up for so long.

"Now I need a little help." She muttered.

Not Clara, she'd be far too disappointed with her behaviour. She called Simon, knowing he'd be angry, but also knowing that his anger would blow itself out fairly quickly. He might even give her a few bruises, but those would hurt far less than Clara's disappointment.

"Simon, can you talk?"

"Yes."

"I broke your 2nd rule Simon. I'm sorry, but.... No I'm not sorry, but I need your help."

She could hear a TV in the background, it sounded like he was at home.

"Hmmm you must have realised Laura that I sort of make up these rules as we go along." Said Simon. "Rule two might be keeping your room tidy one day, or avoiding shouting at chuggers on the doorstep, the next. Can you be a little more specific?"

“The big rules Simon, the ones that never change. The rule about who we can never give cause to get interested in us. The rule about who we must never, ever hunt. I did hunt one Simon, tonight, now.”

The TV went silent, he must have moved somewhere, maybe into the kitchen.

“Oh wow Laura. It happens, I did it once and Clara has come close to it a few times. Where are you, I’ll bring Clara and we’ll help you clean up. Are you hurt ?”

“I’m fine, not a scratch. Don’t bring Clara, please. Just come on your own.”

“Can’t do that Laura. You’re going to get shouted at quite a lot, but you deserve it. Trust me, Clara will shout at you for days, but she’ll do whatever’s needed. Now, where are you ?”

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Simon took things in quickly and knew that Clara did the same. Centuries of creating their own crime scenes, meant more expertise at analysing what fitted and didn’t fit, than a whole room full of police experts. The nightlight, Mike Marcou tied to a chair. It wasn’t the scene of a vampire being stalked and found by a dedicated police officer. Laura had lured him there, which meant she’d deliberately hunted a Van Helsing. He kept back, while Clara examined the dead cop.

“How long did you keep him here ?” Asked Clara.

“Just one night.”

Mike Marcou had obviously managed to avoid opening his bowels, but the entire room stank of stale urine. Simon had gone through his own period of torturing humans, so he recognised the smell of a day’s urine.

“Why ?” He asked. “Why not kill him the night before ?”

“I wasn’t ready.” Replied Laura. “There wasn’t time to.....”

“Do a proper job of killing him.” Interrupted Clara.

Simon thought he needed to try and cool the atmosphere a little. Clara could be headstrong and say or do things that were hard or impossible to undo.

“We’ve both been through that phase.” He said. “Torture, I mean. In the end there are only so many ways to make them scream. It becomes boring.”

Clara ignored him, advancing to within a foot or so of Laura, leaning into her personal space. Simon waited and hoped he didn’t end up having to pull them apart. They were both strong and he might be the one to end up being injured.

“So, you lured him here, the night you burned down the church ?” Asked Clara.

“Yes, but he followed me.”

“But you knew he’d follow you.”

“Yes Clara.”

Clara just kept her face right up against Laura’s, like a cat defying a mouse to run.

“What is this place anyway ?” Asked Simon. “Is this your private den or something ?”

“No.... Well it was going to be, but I looked over lots of places.” Said Laura. “I found somewhere better, less likely to get vandalised.”

“Makes a good spot to quietly kill someone.” He said.

Clara gave him a dirty look, so he fiddled with the dead detective’s phone, which Laura had left on the desk. It felt light, she’d obviously removed the battery, which pleased him. Far too easy to trace a modern smart phone.

“Good, you took the battery out.” He said. “Any useful information on it ?”

“Stop trying to shift the conversation.” Said Clara. “She knows what she did. We’ve lived in London since the war, always staying hidden, keeping away from the police. Then she decides to hunt one of them.”

“He followed me.”

“Shut the fuck up !” Yelled Clara.

Simon moved quickly, without making it too obvious. Clara was quite capable of tearing Laura apart, even if she would agonise about it for decades. He put his arm round her shoulder, kissing her cheek. Cold, like ice, actually pulling away from his embrace.

“Yes, she’s been behaving like a spoiled brat, but we do have a problem to sort out.” He said. “We need to know who else he told about us and what information he passed on.”

Laura was nodding furiously at him.

“Yes, he was running his own unofficial investigation.” She said. “His boss threatened to sack him over it. It’s was all on his phone, all the texts to Susan Eversley. When we kill her, the trail of information dies with her.”

He felt Clara tense and decided to hit Laura himself. One good hard blow to her cheek, which sent her sprawling into the corner of the room. She was angry and dusty, a livid mark already forming on her face.

“I thought we were family ?” She hissed.

“Family don’t put each other at risk.” He yelled. “We survive by being invisible and you drive a car with flames painted on the back. You’ve burned down a church and hunted a member of the police. Worst of all you want us to kill another cop. No Laura, family don’t do that to each other.”

He almost saw the tension going out of Clara’s muscles, as she helped Laura to her feet, using her hand to brush some of the concrete dust off her clothes. They both turned and glared at him. He was going to be the villain of the house for a while, which he could live with.

“One more warning Laura and it is a final warning.” Said Clara. “We both think of you as some sort of wayward child, but all children need to grow up. We’ll help you sort out this mess, but it must be the last Laura created problem. Put our home at risk one more time and you’ll have to leave. I’m sure Simon agrees ?”

Poor Laura, she was looking at him with such sadness in her eyes. Bad parenting to hit her of course, but she had to learn that her behaviour had consequences. He’d made his own share of mistakes as a new vampire, but now wasn’t the time to tell her about that.

“I do agree.” He said. “You can’t help accidents, but deliberately put us at unnecessary risk again and you’ll have to move out. Right out of our territory of course, right out of London.”

Crap ! It was like an intervention on a bad daytime TV show. Laura did seem to finally get the message though.

“I don’t want to leave the house.” She said. “I’ll be good, I promise. No more bending the rules, no more doing projects for Daniel, without telling you guys first.”

“No hunting Van Helsing again, ever !” He prompted.

“No, never, I swear it !” Said Laura. “I’ll even get rid of the SUV if you like ? I’ll sell it and get a rusty old van that no one will look at twice. Don’t throw me out.”

Clara softened, he guessed she would.

“No, you love that ridiculous monster of a car.” Said Clara. “Keep it, just see Tom about having the flames painted over in black.”

“I will.”

Clara sat on the floor, head on her knees. He copied her and all three of them ended up, sat looking at the body of Mike Marcou.

"Firstly no more dead coppers." He said. "We need to give Marcou a convincing accidental departure from this veil of woe. That will stop this Susan Eversley from stirring things up."

"A suicide." Said Clara. "Do we have the battery for his phone."

"Yes, it's in the carrier bag." Replied Laura.

"Good, he'll need to send a long and rambling final text, that leaves no doubt that he took his own life."

"You're good at car suicides." Said Simon.

"I've done one and got my hair singed then. About time you learned to drive Simon."

They had the start of a plan and he could guess where it was going next.

"Is his car an automatic?" Clara asked Laura.

"I'm not sure."

"Then go and find out, by driving it here. Park as close as you can, I don't fancy carrying a stiffening corpse over a long distance."

"Now?"

"Yes now, and drive carefully."

Laura went and Clara kept muttering about what a mess it all was. They found Mike's jacket on the old electrical racking and his tie. It was hard work to bend his body enough to dress him properly. It would all go up in the flames, but getting the details right was important.

"What do you think?" She asked.

"He looks like a dead copper with a bad case of rigor mortis." He answered. "Still, with luck the fire will leave little for them to analyse."

"Thank you..... For hitting her. If you hadn't..... I might have....."

"I know."

"Though I'm still going to give you a hard time about it."

"I know."

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Having three cars and only two drivers had proven to be a headache. Clara had once insisted that Simon learned to drive, but gave up after about his sixth accident in a driving school car. It took a lot to crash a dual control car, but Simon had managed it. She still had a suspicion that he'd deliberately been useless at the lessons, because he simply enjoyed being driven about.

Laura had driven her SUV a little closer to The Broadway and walked back to the old electricity sub-station. Half a can of petrol and the building had gone up in flames, destroying any evidence. It was doubtful if anyone would bother investigating what would appear to be, just another act of vandalism. Eventually Laura had driven her Peugeot 208, while she drove Mike's fairly elderly car. It did have an automatic gearbox though, which made her plan much easier.

"There's a service station on the A12." Simon had suggested. "Quite near the turnoff for the A120. It's perfect for what we want to do. Quiet area, little lighting."

Vampires did that.... Stored up memories of useful places to dump bodies, torture people or simply stage a suicide by burning car. Even Laura didn't seem surprised that Simon could remember the spot in great detail.

Laura had sent the text to Susan, a long, self-pitying series of texts that didn't mention suicide, but hinted at it quite strongly.

'..... I can see only one way out of this.' The text had ended.

Now Clara was alone in the driver's seat of Mike's car, with his dead body leaning against her. It wasn't pleasant, but she'd been through far worse. His body wasn't decaying yet, but there was an awful smell of urine and unwashed body, filling the inside of the car.

"Here we go Mike, your final grand gesture to an uncaring world."

Simon was with Laura, waiting for her in a layby, about half a mile away. Clara didn't want to sit for too long in a stationary car, people might notice a female in the driver's seat, which would ruin all their efforts. She started the car, accelerating hard, far harder than poor Mike was ever likely to have pushed it.

"Never again." She muttered. "Next time Laura can do this bit."

As the car picked up speed, she saw the sign for the service station, pointing to her left.

'Not 24 Hours.' It said.

Good, she didn't want to turn a busy building into an inferno. There was a ramp up to the service station, a gentle gradient that went on for a good hundred yards. Clara had used a brick the time before, but bricks didn't burn that well. Last time it had been called the tragic suicide of a senior civil servant but this time someone might well spot a brick. She wedged herself against the car door, shoving Mike's leg hard onto the accelerator. It worked, the car was going far too fast to make the turn at the top of the ramp.

"Crap ! This is too fucking fast !"

There wasn't far between the top of the ramp and the pumps. The car had to be travelling at nearly sixty and bouncing over rough ground. Clara gave the steering wheel a last slight turn to the left, aiming to hit all the petrol pumps, square on. She then opened the car door and jumped, rolling perilously close to the service station.

She ran, looking back as the car with its hot exhaust, ignited the fuel left in the pumps. That was quite an explosion of yellow flames, but she knew the underground tanks would go up next.

Thousands of gallons of highly inflammable fuel, just waiting to explode. She ran as only a vampire can run, yet the blast still knocked her off her feet. She lay on the ground, looking at the mushroom cloud of fiery heat, as it rose over what had been a quiet part of rural Essex. Five minutes later, Laura opened the door of her car, ready to let her drive.

"Oh, your poor hair." Said Laura.

Clara got behind the wheel of her car, shoving the rear view mirror around, to see her own head. Her fingers had already found the bald patches, but seeing her ruined hair with her own eyes.....Clara actually felt like crying. She didn't of course.

"Always my hair." She said. "Next time Laura can do it."

"Yeah, great !"

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