

London's Night Stalkers

Chapter 19 – Clara's Weakness

“Was she being paranoid ? It just might be a routine Friday night stop and search. Wood Green didn't exactly have a squeaky clean reputation. Laura stopped on the widest part of the road, police cars close behind and in front.”

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The night before they flew to Aberdeen and Clara had decided to tell Laura about her worst error of judgement. There had been quite a few mistakes and regrets in her five hundred plus years of life, but Michael had been by far the worst. They had a glass of wine each and Simon was expected home with a takeaway in about an hour or so. Perfect, she never liked discussing her dalliances with Simon around, or her errors. If error was the right word, Michael Bennett fell more under the category of a weakness.

“I did promise to tell you about my Civil Servant, as Simon insists on calling him.” She said. “If you'd like to hear about my mistake ?”

“Oh yes Clara, can I take notes for my journal ?”

She thought Laura was joking, until a spiral bound notebook appeared on her lap.

“Really Laura ? Oh well, if you think it might be useful ?”

“Yes and my grimoire will always be kept secret.”

Grimoire, what a Daniel type word that was.

“His name was plain Michael Bennett then, though he did get a knighthood while I knew him.

Strangely enough I'd always avoided politicians and civil servants for my flings.”

“Too much in the public eye huh ?” Asked Laura.

“No, not really. Fashion in clothes, hair and makeup, change so drastically. I doubt if anyone from my past would recognise me. Unless I sat opposite them in a coffee house and looked straight at them, of course.”

They exchanged a smile. Clara had told her about seeing Gerald and feeling a certain amount of regret, even if the feeling was quite fleeting. Had that gone in her grimoire, to be studied and picked over, like the remnants of a bad meal ? Probably and that made her feel uncomfortable.

“No, I avoided politicians and government types, they always seemed so full of themselves. An occupational hazard I suppose, when you have to make your constituents love you every four or five years.”

“But Michael was different ?”

“Oh yes, he was different alright. It was the height of the cold war with the Soviet Union seen as the major threat to the west. One night out of nowhere, he calmly announced that if he lived in Russia, he'd probably rise to the top. 'I'd probably end up running the KGB Clara.' He told me, as if he was saying it was raining out.”

“Was he married when you knew him ?”

“Yes, with three children. It always felt as though they were part of some sort of cover though. He rarely mentioned them.”

“A cover for what ?” Asked Laura.

“I have no idea. It often felt like his whole public persona was a cover to hide something. He seemed to be hiding a darkness, an intensity of some kind. It's probably why he went from being an

enjoyable fling, to a personal weakness I needed to regularly indulge. There was a touch of something about Michael, something..... It was probably why it went on for so long.”

“But he wasn’t a vampire, or like Daniel ?”

“Oh no Laura, he was just an ordinary human. I needed him though, and I rarely feel like that about anyone other than Simon. No mobile phones in those days and I never gave him our home number. Once we’d had the almost obligatory blazing row and I’d stormed out, it should have been over. Yet time and again we kept meeting up..... As if it was Kismet.”

Clara expected Laura to prompt her, but she was sat there with her HB pencil, poised over her notebook.

“Eventually I became too relaxed around him and he saw something. Most men wouldn’t have put two and two together, but he was very clever. He began to ask a lot of questions and actually paid a private investigator to follow me around.”

“Crap ! What did he see you do ?”

“I never did love him, yet a lot of feelings had built up over time. We were in a really crappy hotel near Kings Cross Station. They had a folding bed in the room, the sort you rarely see these days. I think Americans call them Murphy beds. A big heavy thing he’d begun to pull down, before turning to talk to me. It was going to hit him, maybe kill him, almost certain to cause nasty injuries. I ran, as only a vampire can run and I pushed the bed back up. I made jokes about being stronger than I looked, but I saw the look in his eyes.”

“I can see why you had to kill him Clara.”

“I’d have simply fed on him and disposed of the body, but I wasn’t sure who else he might have talked to. A suicide seemed safest, so Simon helped me stage something quite like the disposal of your Mike Marcou. Cars were bigger then and didn’t accelerate as well. It worked though and as far as I know, no one ever came looking for me.

An Esso station out in South London, I even gave it a quick look over before ramming the car into it. They had a service bay with a huge Essolube sign over it. The office had a Greenshield stamp sign in the window and lots of Esso Tigers on key rings.”

She stopped and noticed the expression on Laura’s face.

“Don’t you look at me as though I’m your granny going on about the war. You’ll be ancient one day Laura, unless you annoy me too much.”

“Sorry, I was just trying to get it all down in my notes.”

“Anyway, it worked and seemed a good way to stage a suicide. And that dearest Laura, is the sad tale of Sir Michael Bennett, my greatest error.”

There was the sound of a key in the door, followed by the unmistakable smell of Thai food.

“Yay, Simon is home with our dinner.” Said Laura. “I’m starving.”

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Heathrow to Aberdeen in an hour and forty minutes, or so. It was wonderful as long as the ‘or so,’ didn’t include hours of delays and getting an overzealous security official. Not that Simon had anything to hide. He’d just had a few bad experiences with air travel, including a full strip search at Athens International Airport.

“I must have one of those faces.” He said. “I look guilty, even though I’ve done nothing.”

“You’re usually a scruffy lone male with stubble and bags of attitude.” Said Clara. “Wear a suit and instead of hassle, you might get the occasional free upgrade.”

He didn’t enjoy flying anyway; too much trust in the pilot, someone he’d never met and didn’t know. Still, it was better than a full day driving up to see Daniel, every three month. There was no ‘or so,’ or

flexibility at all on the three months. They were both worried about Daniel and his experiments. Regular inspections, thinly hidden under the pretext of Clara's concern for Daniel, were the order of the day. It wasn't all a lie of course; Clara did have a certain amount of affection for Daniel.

"He is pretty close to being a living family member." Said Clara, as they found their seats on the plane. "That is rare for..... Our kind." She added in a whisper.

It hadn't even been that expensive, for two decent seats on an airline neither of them had ever heard of. The cab at the other end was actually more expensive than the airfare.

"I don't mind flying straight and level, it's the up and down that I hate." He said.

Simon dug his nails into the armrest and clenched his teeth, as the plane left the ground and climbed out of Heathrow at a very steep angle. Clara patted his arm.

"Awww poor baby."

There was sarcasm in her voice, but he was feeling too nauseous to care. The aircraft levelled off and turned north, leaving him feeling shaken but relieved.

"By the time I'm feeling alright, the damn thing will be diving down to land in Aberdeen."

"It is the safest way to travel." Said Clara.

"Not safer than my preferred method of travel." He said. "I have never heard of a horse and cart crashing to the ground in a ball of flames."

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Laura finished work at four and was home by five thirty. She now had the house to herself for the weekend and her first thought wasn't stalking Susan Eversley, which surprised her. Patsy had started off as someone who was important to Simon, so no one would feed on her. That was it, the extent of any feelings Laura might have for the girl. Actually not quite true, there was gratitude in the mix too. Gratitude for helping them after Simon and her had been so badly injured by Mabina. Now though, Laura genuinely thought of Patsy as a good friend, who she enjoyed spending time with. After going into the kitchen and making the inevitable pot of coffee, she called Patsy.

"Hi, I've got the place to myself..... Fancy a pizza and far too much wine?"

"Hmm let me see.....I think I could cram that into my diary." Said Patsy. "I'll get a cab over at..... is eight ok?"

"Eight is fine. Don't get a cab, I'll drive over and pick you up."

Maybe it was being around Clara, but she was beginning to understand the pleasure of a leisurely bath. Wearing heels all day was doing dire things to her feet that half an hour in hot water, helped to cure. By the time she was dressed in jeans, trainers and a T shirt, it was time to fetch Patsy. Her SUV started first time, it always did.

"Please let my parking space be here when I get back." She muttered.

It was a route she knew well now. Laura was a regular at the Smart household, even getting on with Evie. There was no need to find a parking space, as Patsy was waiting by the garden gate, clutching a carrier bag.

"One of my regulars asked what I drank, so I said tequila."

Patsy shoved the bottle back in the bag and did up her seat belt.

"You're always being given presents." Said Laura. "All I get is the occasional creep trying to grope me."

"The benefits of being the only girl in the shop and behind a nice wide counter....Lots of nice presents, but no attempted groping."

They chuckled and Laura was taking no notice of the traffic at all. She was on auto-pilot, completely unaware of the two unmarked police cars, until their sirens went on for a few seconds. Blue lights too, small and in the rear window of the car in front.

“Bloody Fuzz.” Said Patsy. “You’d think they’d have enough to do, without annoying us.”

Laura’s only thought was that Susan was behind it. She’d intimidated her and now Susan was returning the favour, in the form of two cars full of plain clothes police.

“My SUV is clean, nothing to interest the police.” She said. “Have you got anything they might get excited about.”

“No, not even the smallest spliff.” Answered Patsy.

Revenge by cop had been threatened by Susan, so Laura had expected to be stopped, her car given a thorough search. Everything even slightly dubious had been taken to her new private den.

“Damn, let’s hope they don’t keep us here for hours.” Said Laura.

“It’s the car, you look like a drug dealer. You must get pulled all the time.”

“No, this is the first time.”

Was she being paranoid ? It just might be a routine Friday night stop and search. Wood Green didn’t exactly have a squeaky clean reputation. Laura stopped on the widest part of the road, police cars close behind and in front.

“Cops always make me feel guilty.” Said Patsy.

Four men in dark clothing approached her car, one coming up to the driver’s door. Laura opened her window as he approached.

“Yes officer, is there a problem ?” She asked.

“This vehicle fits the general description of one involved in various offences in the area. May I see your driving license ?”

There were probably SUVs involved in crime all over London. In reality she was being stopped for driving a pimpmobile, though they’d never admit it. The police officer was actually smiling at her, which softened her anger a little. He used a penlight to examine her license.

“Is this your vehicle Miss Selway ?”

“It is.”

“Can you tell me the registration number.”

She could and hoped that was that. Unfortunately the copper looked young and keen. He wasn’t going to let her get away that easy.

“We’d like to look in the back.” He said. “Could you unlock it please.”

Central locking made that easy and avoided the need for her following the police around, as they rummaged through her beloved SUV. The police officer left his men to it, still lurking near her door. Did he fancy her, or think she might run ?

“You don’t see many of these around here.” He said. “What is it, a Dodge ?”

“No Chevrolet 5.3 Litre V8.”

“Wow, I bet the miles per gallon is a bit scary.”

“Twenty three around town, better on a run. Costs a fortune in fuel, but worth every penny.”

The guys in the back were digging in the corners of her carpet, even using hand held vacuum cleaners. There was nothing, Tom’s guys were probably more efficient than the police. The more they looked, the more certain Laura became that Susan was behind her current predicament. All it took was one anonymous call, about a vehicle like hers in that neighbourhood.

The police didn't hide their disappointment at not finding a kilo of heroin in the back of her car. They shook their heads and wandered back to their vehicles. The talkative one even gave her a piece of paper, saying her vehicle had stopped and searched in accordance with..... yada yada.

"Sorry to delay you, have a nice night out." He said.

"He was very polite, though they never looked in our bags." Said Patsy.

No they hadn't. Patsy's bottle of tequila, could easily have been a block of cannabis or a hand gun. It seemed more like intimidation than a genuine stop and search. On the surface she remained calm, but underneath she was fuming. She was going to pay Susan a visit she would never forget.

"Usual pizza place?" She asked.

"Yeah, brilliant."

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It had been a good night watching DVDs with Patsy and drinking far too much. Patsy had stayed rather than getting a cab home in the early hours. The good intention of changing the bed had disappeared with their fatigue and Patsy happily used the sheets Daniel had slept on. Laura tended to have dreams when she'd been drinking tequila and wasn't surprised to revisit the Mayan pyramid, with its worshippers all too eager to be devoured by Q'uq'umatz, their feathered serpent God. Laura was used to the dream now, but still woke when the God devoured her.

"Oh crap, never mix warm cheese and tequila." She muttered. "Weird dreams."

She had to pee then of course and expected it to take her ages to get back to sleep again. Instead she was asleep within seconds of her head hitting the pillow and drifting into another dream. This dream was different, there was the sensation of going back, much further back in time than the Mayan civilisation. How far back in time did her kind exist? No one seemed to know, including Daniel with all his ancient books.

"Gudara, Gudara."

Laura's dream took her high over a forest that seemed to go for miles. All under starlight and a full moon, which seemed to be the only light in that ancient forest. The word Gudara meant nothing to her, but neither had the Mayan words, at first. As in all dreams, she was unable to control her movements. Laura drifted down through the trees and along a narrow pathway.

"Gudara, Gudara."

Flickering light from a fire ahead, just a little yellow glow through the trees. They were sat in a clearing, huddled at the foot of a lightning blasted tree. Laura knew that such places were holy to them, a place where the hand of a deity had touched the ground. With that knowledge came a memory, that Gudara wasn't a name. It was their term for a devourer, a feeder on blood, a vampire.

"Gudara caan se."

They weren't talking to her, or seem aware she was watching them. Laura moved among the people, like a ghost from the future. They were like humans, but different. The jaw a little more pronounced, the forehead raked back above the eyes. There might have been other differences to be seen if it hadn't been night and they weren't all sitting on the forest floor.

"Devourer come here."

Their words now made sense to her, though their language seemed more guttural than anything she'd ever heard before. There were five of them sat beside the long dead tree. All naked apart from a cloth held in place by a belt, which just about covered their genitals. An old man accompanied by two other men and two women. The old man seemed to be doing all the chanting and calling out.

"Devourer, we have an offering."

A vampire who knew she was dreaming, yet Laura felt fear as the female creature came out of the trees. It was a vampire, she knew that, but so ancient that it barely seemed to be the same species as modern man. Did her kind predate people? Was that even possible?

Hairy and walking upright, but with that forward stoop of big apes. Claws on her hands and completely naked. Fangs permanently on show and far more prominent than hers. The pre-historic devourer walked up to the old man, sitting in front of him. Incense was thrown onto the fire, filling the clearing with a scent quite similar to lavender.

One of the women passed the devourer a bowl full of liquid, which it happily drank. It was obviously all part of an often performed ritual, but Laura understood none of it. Her far distant ancestor fell forward, as if drugged and Laura found herself being pulled forward, towards the devourer. Another sensation of fear mixed with dread, until Laura was looking at the old man, through the eyes of the pre-historic vampire.

"Ahh, there you are." Said the old man. "I felt you there and I've noticed you before."

Even in her dream she knew the obvious questions were no use. Where she was, the year, how she'd got there. All pointless once she was in a dream about pre-history. All Laura knew was that she'd been trapped in some way, inside the body of the devourer.

"How can I talk to you in the past?" She asked.

The voice wasn't hers of course and the words felt unnatural, but the old man was smiling at her and looked friendly enough.

"In dreams there is no past, present or future." He said. "Only now. Surely your Seers in the future knows this?"

"We don't have Seers."

He nodded at her and looked saddened by her answer.

"Do you understand how you got here?" He asked.

"No, not really. I just have dreams sometimes, dreams of the past."

"I had hoped that you might..... but that can't be helped. Our devourer protects the village from our enemies and will wake in a moment, to enjoy her reward. I suggest that you allow yourself to enjoy the offering with her. You might find it helps, though I can't guarantee it. A future with no Seers..... Very sad."

"I have so many questions." She said.

"No time, the creature begins to wake..... We may see each other again."

"What is your name? Mine is Laura."

No answer, as the devourer woke up and reached for the old man. The people with him shouted at the devourer, pointing towards a young man some distance from the camp fire. Strangely the old man looked disappointed, as the creature left him alone and went for the younger, fresher meal. Laura felt free again and able to move away, but she remembered the old man's words and remained within the devourer, observing the world through its senses.

"Wiremi Laura, my name is Wiremi." She heard behind her.

The young man was sat on the ground, not bound or tied in any way. There was that look in his eyes, the same hope that she'd seen in Wiremi's eyes. It wasn't a thing to be dreaded, becoming the devourer's next meal. For some reason the tribe saw it as a huge honour. No pre-ambles or delicate holes made in his neck by fangs. The creature ripped out the young man's throat, drinking as the blood flowed like a river. Oh so wasteful, but glorious. Laura didn't feel any revulsion or horror. Instead she enjoyed the actions of the devourer, even when it began to rip the body apart and nibble on the still hot heart. That was new, or more accurately old.

She'd never felt the slightest inclination to eat any body parts from those she fed on. Or had she ? Deep down Laura knew she had felt a little temptation, but had buried it deep. Suddenly the body being torn apart was female and lying on crisp white sheets, in a modern bed. Laura saw nothing but blood and viscera in front of her, as she screamed and woke up.

"Oh Crap ! That was the worst yet !" She muttered.

Her head was jammed into a sodden pillow, her whole body covered in sweat. Her first thought was for Patsy. Had she ? Could she have ripped Patsy apart in her sleep, Simon's lover, her friend ? She stumbled out of bed, still trying to properly wake up. Her panties were damp. Crap ! She'd peed herself during the dream. In her confusion, she collided with her dressing table, knocking bottles of nail varnish onto the ground.

"Concentrate you idiot." She muttered at herself.

It wasn't far to the bedroom where Patsy had slept that night, but Laura felt drugged. It took her a long time to carefully walk to that bedroom door. It was slightly open and easily opened further, to show the bed. Laura crumpled to the floor with relief. Patsy's head was on the pillow, still deep in untroubled sleep. Laura heard her breathing and saw the heat from her body. That was new, yet she could use the sense as though she'd always possessed it.

"What the hell happened in that dream ?" She muttered, softly.

Not just her senses, something else had changed. Something felt odd about her hand, as she rested it on the doorframe. There were claws where her delicately painted nails had once been. Claws that gradually faded away and became nails again, as she watched. All still a residue of a dream of course, all of it, it had to be. Though she could still see Patsy's body heat, right through the sheet and blanket that covered her. Oh, Daniel was going to love hearing it all, if she chose to tell him ? For some reason it all felt like something intimate and personal.

"Far too intimate to share."

Wide awake now, she wandered back to her room, to find some clean panties, before having a nice long shower.

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Patsy called her mum as soon as she'd dressed and made some toast. She'd sent a text the previous night, but her mum thought of Laura as a bad influence. Rather ironically she trusted Simon and encouraged their relationship.

"So much for motherly intuition." She muttered.

Coffee went on, while she listened to Laura bumping about upstairs.

"I'm starving. Can I make a bacon sandwich." Patsy shouted.

"Only if you make me one too."

She knew how their TV remote worked by now and turned on a breakfast show that was full of politics. Too early for all that shit, she found a rolling news programme, which was showing an interesting story. Patsy had the volume up and two crispy bacon sandwiches ready, by the time Laura appeared.

"I think you knew the woman who died." Said Patsy.

"Why ? What happened ?"

"It's that police woman Simon told me about." Said Patsy. "Someone tried to burgle her house or something. It's dreadful, must have been a drug addict."

Breakfast was transferred to the coffee table, as they both watched the report. Other news seemed to have been forgotten, as the programme kept repeating the interview with a detective on the scene.

“This is the worst atrocity I’ve seen in twenty years’ service..... We desperately need the public’s help..... If you live in the area and saw anything.....”

His face said more than his words. There were hints about a particularly gruesome murder. Other police officers were seen, carrying a body bag out of the house. There were the usual neighbours who comment on these sorts of things. Usually over excited and barely coherent. Always making the deceased sound like a mixture of Bob Geldof and The Pope.

“Lovely woman..... Really nice neighbour..... Never had a bad word to say about anyone.....Always remembered to ask about my neuralgia.....”

Laura just seemed frustrated by it all.

“Yes she was a fucking saint, but tell us how she died.” Said Laura.

There were hints designed to titillate, even if all the announcers looked solemn. A serving police officer had been murdered under horrific circumstances and the media were going to milk it, for all it was worth.

“Terrible..... Ripped apart.” Someone said.

Laura wasn’t enjoying the show. Patsy actually hugged her, as she began to cry.

“I feel so guilty..... My fault..... I know it.... Clara will throw me out.”

“You were with me all night.” Said Patsy. “We even have a pull from the police to prove it. We had a pizza, got far too drunk and passed out. No one can try and say you did it.”

Poor Laura, she was actually shaking.

“I’m responsible..... I just know it.”

“You’re just feeling bad because you wanted her to die. That’s not the same as killing her.”

Patsy held her, until she knew Laura was going to be alright. That moment came when Laura asked her;

“Do you fancy another sandwich ?”

“When have I ever said no ?”

Ten minutes in the kitchen and Laura was fine again, though she did keep looking at her nails.

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Saturday morning in Daniel’s house in the Parish of Udney and Clara was glad they’d made the effort to come and see him. There was no vampire army or Frankenstein style laboratory in the lounge. Instead they’d found a rather depressed looking Daniel, wearing a shirt that looked like it had been worn for quite a while. That was then and he’d showered, changed and cheered up considerably since then. He’d insisted on porridge for breakfast, as if reinforcing loyalty to his adopted nation.

“Weren’t you born into a Jewish family ?” Asked Simon.

“I prefer to take my values from where I feel happy.” Replied Daniel. “And for the most part, I feel happiest when I’m in Scotland. It feels like home.”

“Go vegan if you like Daniel.” She said. “Just don’t expect Simon and myself to live on boiled oats while we’re here.”

Around a kitchen table and she could tell that Daniel was in the mood to talk. She wondered and not for the first time, how people resolved problems, before the invention of kitchen tables.

“I have toyed with many things, but being a vegetarian isn’t likely to be an option in my future.” Said Daniel. “I’d like one of you to make me one of you, a vampire. I’d prefer it to be you Clara, but Simon will do.”

“Oh, I’ll do will I ?”

“So that is why you were so keen to get a working test for vampire compatibility, or whatever you’re calling it.” She said.

“Vampire compatibility is as good a name as any.” Said Daniel. “I won’t deny that I was thinking of creating a small coterie of vampires, like a terracotta army buried under the pig pen. Absurd of course, I’d have been creating an army of enemies, more likely to drain my body of blood, than obey my orders.”

Clara was pleased that Daniel had seen the obvious problems with creating vampires, it proved he was still in possession of some sanity.

“So now you want to be one of us.” Said Simon. “Why though ? You’re already immortal.”

Daniel had his frustrated face on. It was unlikely he’d throw Simon out the house though, he needed them.

“Not immortal Simon, how often have I told you ?” Snapped Daniel. “You and Clara are true immortals, your bodies repairing and replacing cells forever. I am merely exceptionally long lived and that is a different thing entirely.”

“You once mentioned a life span of several million years.” Said Clara.

Poor Daniel, he hated having to explain himself. His cheeks were going red, his nostrils flaring.

“Yes, yes, you obviously have a very good memory.” Said Daniel. “There are other factors though, besides the likely length of my life. As a vampire my body will heal much quicker and I’ll suffer less from the cold. I’m often amazed that everyone who lives north of Fort William, isn’t permanently crippled with arthritis.”

She had to join Simon, who was chuckling at poor Daniel. Vampirism to escape the ill effects of the Scottish winter was a new one and they’d heard a lot of reasons for people craving immortality.

“Really Daniel, becoming a feeder on blood, just to have less achy joints ?” She asked.

She really did think he might throw them both out, but the anger in Daniel’s eyes quickly faded.

“I am not that shallow.” He barked. “There is also the regenerative ability of your cells. I still have scars on my back from saving your life over half a millennia ago. Becoming a vampire will finally give me relief from the pain and discomfort.”

Using that against her was low, too low. Her anger began to bubble up.

“I know I owe you Daniel, that’s probably why I’ve never ripped your head off your shoulders.”

She looked at Simon and he just shrugged, as though they were discussing what to watch on TV.

“I can’t see how Daniel being a vampire will cause us problems.” He said. “He’s right at the opposite end of the country and is already an expert at staying off the radar.”

“I am, in fact I taught you Clara.” Said Daniel. “I will go into one of the large cities to feed, leaving no trace afterwards.”

“No more stalking Laura ?” She asked.

“No of course not, I’ll have my own blood to experiment on.”

Another look at Simon and another shrug. He was really telling her that Daniel was her rather strange paternal figure and therefore her problem.

“I am assuming you did pass this test you invented ?” Asked Simon.

“Nothing is ever certain, but yes I did.” Said Daniel. “There is a ninety five percent chance that I’ll survive the change. That is as just about as sure a thing as anything in life.”

“Or death, nothing in your books can really prepare you for life as a vampire.” Said Clara. “But if you want it so badly.... Yes I will drain your blood and give you the gift of immortality. I will need Simon there though, for his experience in such things.”

Poor Daniel, happier than a child given the keys to a sweet shop. He’d learn though, why she might be offering him a curse rather than a gift.

“When ?” Asked Daniel.

“Tonight.” Answered Simon. “Like all things ungodly, it’s best carried out during the hours of darkness.”

“There is a price though.” She said. “I want a straight answer to a question I’ve been asking for five hundred years. Why did you give me to the vampires when I was a girl ? I’m not complaining Daniel, I enjoy my life, but I want to know why ?”

“Still ? After all these years.”

“Yes, or I’ll leave it to Simon to give you the kiss of immortality.”

Daniel actually cowered back. Did it matter if you didn’t like the vampire about to turn you ? It obviously did to Daniel.

“For the same reason that I obtained the scars to save you as a tiny child.” He said.

“If it’s private, I can go and feed the pigs.” Said Simon.

She nodded at him, knowing that Daniel would relax if there was just the two of them in the room. Simon put on a coat and went out of the back door.

“We’re alone now, so tell me why I was so important to you ?” She asked.

“You weren’t, I barely knew your family. It was a difficult time for me Clara. I was still trying to understand what I was and why I existed. It was still a time when I thought religion might provide the answers and of course, it never did.”

“But why go through all that pain, to throw me to the vampires ? It doesn’t make sense Daniel.”

“It did to me then.” He said. “You were this tiny, pretty little child. All smiles, when I was feeling totally alone. When the flour dust exploded, I decide to save that tiny thing of beauty, the way people save works of art during wars. No more than that or less.... You were simply too pretty to die in such an ugly and awful way.”

“But you then gave me to a brutal group of vampires, to be abused and killed. That still doesn’t make sense Daniel.”

“I watched you grow from a tiny child into a beautiful young woman. I saw the boys notice you and you noticing the boys. Soon you’d be married, pushing out a child every year for some mindless brute of a husband. Dead within twenty years, if you didn’t die in childbirth. I made a deal with the vampires to turn you, make you one of them.”

“They did terrible things to me.”

“I’m sorry for what they did, but they also gave you the gift of immortality. I just couldn’t let you be destroyed by the life you were destined to live. Was it that wicked Clara, to want that beautiful young woman to look beautiful forever ?”

She found herself holding his hand.

“I do enjoy being a vampire and have rarely thought of it as a curse.” She said.

“You’ve heard the truth, my reason for saving you from the fire and then from the squalor of the life you were likely to live. Will you now give me the kiss of immortality ?”

It made sense to her now and Daniel was finally being honest with her. Granted immortality for being tiny, pretty and probably a reminder of his own lost innocence. It wasn’t the kind of answer she’d hoped for, but it felt like the truth.

“Very well, we’ll begin at midnight tonight.” She said. “There are three of us in London and I will need to call Laura later and get her approval. She seems fond of you though, like you’re her immortal equivalent of Obi-Wan Kenobi. I can’t see her saying no.”

“She has been immensely useful in my research.”

“You do realise that test or no test..... This might be your last day alive ?”

“Yes Clara, I have left a will with a local solicitor.... Gwen and the boy get everything.”

~ ~

None of them had seen the news that day, though Daniel did possess a radio and an old TV.

“Steam driven, I reckon.” Was Gwen’s opinion.

There had been a lot to talk about and animals to be looked after. Daniel dug out a copy of his will to leave on his desk, just in case. The old coffin like chest full of books and records on vampires had been discussed and left where it was, for now.

“If the worst happens.” Said Simon. “We’ll make sure it’s moved to a new location.”

It was hardly surprising that Clara was unaware of the murder of Susan Eversley, when she called Laura after dinner. The conversation began in a way she hadn’t been expecting.

“I know what you’re thinking and it wasn’t me Clara..... Patsy was here all night.”

~ ~

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