

London's Night Stalkers

Chapter 20 - Awakening

“He'd gone on to curse Hollywood and accuse her of looking for somewhere to turn into the sort of vampire lair from a film or TV show. There was some justice in his comments, but she wasn't going to be happy with a dank hole beneath a graveyard crypt.”

»

A few minutes before midnight and Clara was watching Daniel get more than a little drunk. It was his way of preparing for something which was guaranteed to be painful and unpleasant.

“Go easy with the scotch Daniel.” She said. “It might interfere with the process of turning you into one of us.”

No use, he'd drunk half the bottle and was way past the point of being someone who could be reasoned with. Clara enjoyed a drink herself, but she was rarely as drunk as Daniel.

“I see no reason why it should.” He yelled.

He was bellowing everything too, as though she and Simon had suddenly become deaf.

“Anyway, I need something. Must be agony, having your throat bitten.” Bellowed Daniel.

“It is, we've been through it.” Said Simon. “It's no picnic.”

“Do you want an injection of local anaesthetic ?” Asked Clara

Daniel was drinking straight from the bottle. He became so agitated, that he nearly dropped the bottle of expensive single malt.

“No, no..... That might slow down the change. Not booze though, booze good.”

He tapped the side of his nose in an annoying way, or at least annoying to her.

“I understand you see.” He said. “I know things.”

He did of course, which made his attitude even more irritating.

“I could knock him out. Just say the word.” Said Simon.

Daniel put his fists up, before falling off his chair and finally passing out. Clara didn't stop him from falling to the floor, he deserved a few bruises.

“We needed him on the floor anyway.” Said Simon.

“Help me get him on his back and straightened out.”

They pulled and tugged, until Daniel was in the middle on an old rug, right in front of the fireplace.

At exactly midnight by her quartz watch, she leant over Daniel. Clara paused and looked up at Simon.

“Do we want him as a vampire ?” She asked. “He'll want to be king of all the vampires within a year, we both know it. He'll have told Gwen he's involved in something dangerous. His death won't be unexpected to the few people who know him. This could be our last chance to solve the problem.”

If Simon had given her one of his shrugs, she might have hit him. He didn't though.

“Daniel is a nuisance, but he is a paternal influence in your life, even if you don't want to admit it.”

“Nonsense.” She snapped.

“Fine, go into denial about it. Daniel did find something to get me on my feet quicker and although he has been a problem..... On the whole I think he's more help than hindrance.”

“Only very slightly Simon.”

“Come on Clara, life would be pretty dull without Daniel around.”

Simon was grinning at her and she knew that for better or worse, she was going to do her best to turn Daniel into a vampire. She leant forward again and drove her fangs into his neck. It was a

wonderful feeling, that split second when fangs penetrated skin. Almost sexual, though the feeling didn't last.

"Don't drink too deeply the first time." Said Simon.

It was so hard to pull back, when all her instincts told her to drain every drop of blood. Clara wasn't like Simon, happy to rip his wrist apart with his own teeth. She used a scalpel, to dig in deep before moving it up, opening up a good two inches of a major vein.

"Drink Daniel, drink or die." She yelled.

Could he hear her through his self-inflicted drunken coma? Swallowing was instinctive anyway. Clara pushed the wound in her wrist against his mouth, watching the precious liquid turn his teeth bright red.

"He swallowed Clara. I saw his throat move."

She drank from him again, taking much more of his blood than the first time. His skin was beginning to feel cool against her cheek, as his body began to go into shock. Once again she poured her own blood down his throat.

"Drink Daniel. Please don't let this all be for nothing."

Clara felt his throat move, as his body instinctively swallowed her blood. The last time to drain him of his life's blood, the time to drain until his heart could beat no more. Clara drank and drank, Daniel was a big man with a lot of blood in his veins. As his heart stopped, she sat back and allowed Simon to wrap a tight dressing round her wrist.

"Now we wait." Said Simon.

"Roll him on his side." She said. "After going through all that, I don't want him choking on his own vomit."

Daniel was dead and despite his test, he might well remain that way. She was going to give him no more than twelve hours to awaken, before disposing on the body.

"We could watch TV for a few hours." Said Simon. "His set is old, but it does pick up BBC 1 quite well."

"I'm not that bored....Talk to me Simon. What do you think of Laura and the very conveniently dead police woman?"

"Susan Eversley was her name. I met her when she was interviewing Laura. They didn't like each other from the start; the atmosphere in the room could have been cut with a knife. But we've both heard Patsy say that she was with Laura all night. So much as she might have liked to.... Laura can't have butchered Susan Eversley."

If only Clara could have shared his certainty. It wasn't that far from Wood Green to Kingsbury and Laura had deliberately led Mike Marcou into a trap. She was quite capable of pretending to be drunk and leaving the house once Patsy was asleep.

"It's only about ten or eleven miles from our house to Kingsbury, twelve at the most." She said. "An hour there, say fifteen minutes to rip the lady cop apart and then an hour back. She is capable of doing it, we both know that."

He was pulling a face and now she'd spoken her thoughts out loud, it sounded unlikely to her.

"You can't pretend to drink a bottle of wine and half a dozen shots of tequila." He said. "Patsy would have realised what was going on and there is the amount of blood.... Laura would have been covered in the stuff."

"She might have stripped naked like Lizzie Borden." She said. "Done the deed, washed and put her clothes back on."

“Really Clara ? Does that sound like our impetuous and aggressive kid to you ? Now if Eversley had been taken out by a sniper rifle.....”

“Alright, fine Simon. I don’t really think she did it. I imagine that she feels guilty, because she’d probably rehearsed killing that cop, over and over in her head. Patsy probably got it right, by saying a local drug addict was looking for money and went a bit crazy.”

No movement or signs of life from Daniel. She went over to him and put her cheek against his mouth.

“Anything ?”

“No, he’s still dead.”

Simon moved into the kitchen and she followed him. Coffee was required, they seemed addicted to the stuff these days.

“It’s Laura and her various dramas.” She said. “All those years we’ve lived in London, never once being noticed by the police.”

“We could just move without telling her.”

“Or give her a packed lunch wrapped in a road map and hope she gets the hint.” She added.

They both chuckled, though they knew Laura was now a permanent part of their lives. The problem was that Laura knew it too and threats of throwing her out, were unlikely to work.

“We should look at alternative places to live though.” She said. “Take our rebellious child with us of course, but a contingency plan is a good idea.”

“Definitely a good idea, especially as the police are almost certain to want to talk to Laura again. That’ll be yet another time our address gets a tick on a database somewhere. Where were you thinking of moving to ?”

She’d been thinking of places for quite some time. Ever since the first visit by Mike Marcou.

“We don’t need to move far.” She said. “The good thing about the anonymity of London, is that you can move three streets away and literally vanish. I know you’re not keen, but I still fancy going a bit further north into Winchmore Hill.”

“Too well to do Clara. They’ll all be busy bodies thinking they have a right to know our business. How about Green Lanes somewhere ? Hornsey is more our kind of area. A nice ethnically diverse area, with neighbours we’re never likely to see.”

“Hmmm Laura likes Green Lanes.....”

Damn she’d said it. Like all doting mothers, she’d thought about what her adopted kid would like. Hornsey did have the same train service as Wood Green and the same tube line.

“Alright I like the idea of Hornsey.” She said. “Let’s begin looking in Estate Agent’s windows.”

“Online Clara, everything is online now.”

Simon the technophobe had actually dared to say that to her. She was about to yell at him, when there was the sound of coughing coming from where they’d left Daniel. They found him alive and well enough to be up on his knees and coughing loudly.

~ ~

Laura spent Sunday in fear of the police, the news and just about everything else. She knew with absolute certainty, that the devourer had killed Susan, even if it was downright crazy and impossible. Luck was never that kind or convenient without a little nudge and Wiremi had talked about looking through the eyes of the devourer as being ‘helpful,’ though he had said only maybe.

“Well, let’s see them trying to get a conviction in court for that.” She muttered.

Her phone off, no TV in fear of catching a news headline. Laura had even ignored three or four calls to the house phone. It was infantile and she knew it, but she just wanted a quiet Sunday to get her

head together. Dinner was three tins out of the cupboard, poured into a saucepan and heated. Ratatouille, tinned potatoes and a tin of marcedoine were to be her dinner. No meat, more out of laziness than choice. It was just luck that she wasn't heating up a mess of peaches, custard and beef stew. Just as the mixture had been bubbling long enough to be ready to eat, the doorbell rang.

"Fuck."

She ran to the kitchen window, but whoever it was had reached the recessed front door. The doorbell rang again and someone was shouting through the door. Crap ! Her first thought was of the police, but she didn't really think they'd come round in person on a Sunday evening. She crept into the hallway, in time to see eyes looking at her through the letterbox.

"Laura ! Let me in."

Patsy outside, a voice she recognised. Laura opened the front door and let her in, wondering if she'd forgotten to pick her up or something.

"Sorry, did we have plans ?" She asked. "My mind is a bit too full with problems and a hangover from last night."

"No, but you're not answering your phone, or the landline. I left you lots of messages."

"I'm avoiding the phone today and emails and just about everything. Tomorrow I'll start dealing with things. Tomorrow the hangover will be gone, I'll have energy again. But not today Patsy, not today." There was the unmistakable smell of burning food from the kitchen and the smoke alarm began making its raucous noise.

"Fuck ! I'll deal with my burning dinner." Said Laura. "You can waft a tea towel in the direction of the alarm."

"Sorry did I ruin your dinner ?"

"It was shit anyway. Let me throw it away and we can get a pizza. Do you fancy pizza ?"

"Are bears in the woods catholic ?"

"Huh ?"

"Doesn't work does it ? I'll order pizza, while you find a TV news channel. There is good news about Susan Eversley."

"What good news ?" Asked Laura.

"Just find the news and watch it."

Patsy even took the pan off her, throwing the contents into the kitchen swing bin. Laura went into the lounge and set the TV for the BBC rolling news channel. There was an item on a piece of toast that seemed to have the face of the Virgin Mary on it. It seemed that rolling twenty four hour news, was quite difficult to fill with news.

"The crap they call news." She muttered.

"Be patient Laura. Do you want your usual meat feast pizza ?"

"Does the Pope shit in the woods."

"Ewww."

She could hear Patsy ordering far too much from the local pizza place and then the next news item caught her attention.

'..... The police have announced the arrest of a local man in connection with the brutal murder of Susan Eversley.....'

"See..... Good News." Yelled Patsy from the kitchen.

The police seemed pretty certain that a local man called Richard Thistle had committed the murder. The news team were all over his life and his love of horror fiction. He'd had a drug problem once it

appeared and was known to the police. By the time Patsy came into the room, Laura was certain the police had found a convenient misfit to charge with the crime.

"You don't have to worry." Said Patsy. "I doubt if the police will even want to interview you now."

"He never did it. They're just pinning it on the local weird guy. Trust me Patsy, when the fuzz start saying someone has a large collection of Stephen King books, they're grasping."

"Do you care ? He's not a nice guy and probably guilty of something."

Did she care about an innocent guy being fitted up for the murder ? Not really, her mind no longer worried about justice and fairness. It did mean that she still might be guilty of the murder though, even if by some sort of supernatural means.

"I don't give a crap about this Richard Thistle." She said. "But it does mean that I might still be responsible for Susan's death. That worries me because whatever happened, was something strange and outside of my control."

"But I was here with you, the whole time." Said Patsy.

"Oh Patsy..... If you only knew where my dreams take me."

"Then tell me, I'll keep it to myself, promise."

"You don't tell Simon everything ?"

"Give over."

There was something about the look on Patsy's face that made her believe her. Besides, she needed to tell someone, before her head exploded.

"We get weird dreams, vampires I mean. Mine started at a Mayan pyramid....."

She told Patsy everything, only stopping briefly when the pizza and garlic bread arrived. She told her about the Mayan serpent God and all about the trip to the forest and how the world had looked, through the eyes of the devourer. The truth was like champagne though, once the cork was out of the bottle, it kept pouring. Laura told Patsy of her dreams about her childhood and the reaction of her father to the things she had done.

There was no putting the cork back in the bottle. Laura carried on, telling everything about what really had happened to her in the basement of the copier repair shop in Wood Green. Patsy was actually crying, as she finished telling her about all her dreams.

"It's all real isn't it ?" Asked Patsy. "They're dreams I know, but they're dreams of real events."

"Yes I believe so. The Mayan girl was one like me and the dreams of my childhood are of memories my mind decided to hide away. As for that bastard who kept me prisoner....."

"And now you remember it all ?"

"Not all, but most Patsy. I think that once you become a vampire, the locks dissolve, all the memories gradually returning. I still have the problem of firmly believing I caused Susan's death in some way and everything that implies."

"But you hated her. You're unlikely to start sending the ghost of the devourer to wipe out the neighbours."

That was exactly what she was scared of, though her idea of the devourer wasn't of a ghost, but a part of herself that could move unseen.

"I do worry about that Patsy, it worries me a lot."

"Then you must will yourself to dream of the forest again. You must find Wiremi and ask him how to control your new gift."

Gift indeed ! Though Patsy did have a good point about finding Wiremi in the dream world. He had told her about seeing her a few times before.

"That is sensible." Said Laura. "But not tonight, I need a solid eight hours."

~ ~

Simon was back from Scotland and just finishing a call where someone had sworn at him. It seemed to depend on the weather, the public seemed more prickly on gloomy sunless days. The third rude response that morning and he was about to pick up the phone again.

“Can we have a word Simon ?” Asked Anthony. “Outside, I’ll buy you lunch.”

Was it that time ? Simon looked at the clock and was amazed to find it was just after one. It had been a terrible morning, without a single sale. He was glad to get out of the office for an hour or so. “Fine, but not the crappy Italian place again. They undercook everything.”

“No, I was thinking of a decent restaurant. A bottle of wine and something expensive and properly cooked. My treat.”

“Great.”

Simon saw the hate in the eyes of the other sales people. To them a sandwich from the boss would have been something to their friends about, maybe even their mum. Anthony drove out to a swanky new restaurant near Tower Bridge. It sat about two hundred people and charged a fortune. Absolutely zero atmosphere, but the food was supposed to be superb.

“Crap Anthony, is this a sympathy treat ? Are you sacking me ?”

“No you idiot. Let’s get in and order and we can talk about your future.”

A table near the bar, with other diners close enough to hear every whispered word. It was a great barn of a place, but that didn’t seem to put off the business crowd. The place was crowded.

“I like this place.” Said Anthony. “The menu is in English and there’s none of that nouvelle cuisine crap. Good portions of grub I recognise.”

They were probably about to spend more than the average weekly wage on lunch. Not that Simon cared, he wasn’t paying. Anthony waited until the main course had arrived, before getting down to the purpose of inviting him out for lunch.

“I take it Laura mentioned my visit to the house, while you were away ?”

“She did and the hint at a directorship in a few years. Don’t worry, I won’t keep reminding you about it or anything.”

He saw the look in Anthony’s eyes and knew he’d hit the nail on the head. Simon was certain he knew what was coming next and it might be another reason to move to Hornsey.

“I have big plans Simon. I want to move out of our shitty little office and into somewhere bigger. Somewhere with a brass plaque in the lobby, go a bit more legit. I see you as my Sales Director, on a really good salary and all the usual perks. I need that commitment Simon, what do you say ? I really do need some commitment from you.”

It was awful, but he was obviously supposed to be overjoyed. Vampires didn’t do directorships. Crap, his real name wasn’t even Simon Atherton. That had been a wartime invention, based on character names in a play he’d seen. His real name was now just a vague memory from 13th Century Italy. No, no and no again, there could be no directorship. He had talked to Clara briefly about an alternative though, one Anthony might go for.

“No Anthony, a directorship isn’t going to happen, but I have talked to Clara about an alternative.” Oh dear, Anthony was giving him his famous disappointed look and Anthony didn’t like being disappointed.

“Go on Simon, I’m listening.”

“As you know, a close relative recently died. They left some money to myself and Clara. I was thinking of buying in to your new venture. Say a third of the shares, at an amount to be agreed.”

Laura would need to agree to of course, but she'd been bought her pimpmobile out of Mabina's cash. He couldn't see her objecting.

"That is commitment Simon. It'll be expensive though, a good fifty of sixty thousand."

"I can afford that."

"Well yes then, I'm happy for you to buy in to the new company. At least I'll know you can't go home one Friday night and never come back again."

Simon managed not to chuckle, at what was a perfect description of why he loved the job and had put up with Anthony for so long. Anthony was obviously pleased, ordering the best bottle of wine on the list.

~ ~

Patsy had been right; the police didn't even contact her about the horrific murder of Susan Eversley. Over a week since the crime had been all over the news and the phone hadn't rung, no heavy set men on their doorstep. It was wonderful and marvellous of course, but the whole Wiremi business still worried her. Daniel and his research had left her with a desire to know more about herself and the discipline of being organised. After a few nights of trying unsuccessfully to visit Wiremi in the forest clearing, she'd decided to give things a little push.

"I'm going to try a little experiment." She'd told Clara. "I'll sleep in my den on Thursday night."

"More research for Daniel?"

"No, for myself. I will tell you all about it, but not now. After I understand it, I'll tell you and Simon."

Clara had actually kissed her on the forehead.

"Just be careful Laura."

Finding a secret den had been harder than she'd imagined, or maybe she'd just been too fussy. Simon had hinted that his was in a crypt in an old and neglected graveyard. That didn't appeal to her at all. Laura wanted somewhere she could make her own, a real home from home. It had to be dry and preferably above ground. Somewhere she could put a bed and a little furniture.

"It's just a lair, somewhere to keep your stuff Laura, don't over think it." Clara had told her.

Clara didn't help though, refusing to give any hints about how she'd decided on her own lair. Laura didn't like the word lair though, den sounded warmer and more cosy. She'd looked at several abandoned buildings, like the electricity sub-station under the M1. They were all due for demolition though, sooner or later. She wanted neglected, but unlikely to be pulled down anytime soon. There were hollow sections inside structures like motorway flyovers, but they took quite a lot of skill to clamber into. Not very practical if you'd set your heart on a huge sofa in your den. Even Simon had begun to get fed up with her questions.

"Oh, haven't you found somewhere yet? Listed buildings tend to be neglected for years, but never actually demolished."

He'd gone on to curse Hollywood and accuse her of looking for somewhere to turn into the sort of vampire lair from a film or TV show. There was some justice in his comments, but she wasn't going to be happy with a dank hole beneath a graveyard crypt. The idea of a listed building had stuck though and she could be very methodical. Laura began looking over just about every listed building within a five mile radius of Wood Green.

The old house at the back of the park had attracted her from the start. Not the house itself though, that was open to the public, bless em, and far too busy. There were several other small out-buildings though, all showing signs of recent refurbishment. Money had obviously been an issue and the building work was minimal, just enough to keep the buildings upright and not looking too

dilapidated. One building looked to have a large downstairs area, with no means of access at all. Perfect, or at least it would be, once she'd found a way in.

Laura had gone back that night with a backpack containing a few DIY tools and two flashlights. Some duct tape too of course, everything seemed fixable with duct tape. The outside door was secure enough to deter rough sleepers and young people looking for a love nest, but not a vampire in search of a den. Laura opened it without damaging the doorframe that badly. Once closed, the door showed no signs of being forced open.

Upstairs was just an empty attic, with a large disused water tank in the corner. Laura dug out a section of plaster board behind the tank and entered the room below. She still remembered the elation of finding a large empty room, which suited her needs perfectly. It had taken her just one more night to create a proper trapdoor and fit a new lock on the outside door. She had her den, her home away from home. Even if someone found she'd tampered with the outside door, they were still unlikely to discover her trap door. Her den was as secure as it could be and she'd gone out and bought a sofa that just about fitted through the trapdoor and a pine bed that came in bolt together sections.

"Damn you're still alive." She said.

Peter was his name and she'd gone to sleep in her den, hoping to find him ripped apart the next morning. It would have been a lot of mess to clean up, but it would have been worth it. She'd forced herself to hate Peter, before duct taping his feet and hands together and leaving him on her sofa for the night.

"I hate you Peter ! You're all that's wrong in my life !"

She'd yelled at him, while he looked at her as though she was a crazy person. He didn't understand the experiment of course. Build up enough hate in her mind and surely the devourer would rip him apart. It seemed logical and would give her a way of controlling all that wonderful destructive potential. Only Peter was alive and she really was beginning to take that personally and hate him for real. Not only alive, his eyes were watching her.

"You know the rules. Make a sound and I'll hurt you."

He nodded at her, so she ripped the tape off his mouth, causing him to gasp. Next the tape on his wrists and finally his ankles.

"I need to pee." He said. "Really badly need to pee."

"You know where the bucket is."

He'd been reluctant to pee in it the previous night, but now almost ran towards the bucket in the corner of the room. She could go for an entire day without peeing, if she had to. The bucket had seemed an essential addition to her den, if she wanted to bring her food home.

Poor Peter, she had hurled a lot of abuse at him the previous night and jammed a knuckle into his ribs a few times. Getting him through the door and down the trapdoor had required a little encouragement. He was hovering around the back of her sofa.

"Sit down, no more hitting, or wild woman impressions." She said. "It was all to try something out, that hasn't worked."

He sat down, but didn't lean back or get himself comfortable.

"I don't really hate you."

He tried a smile.

"Good."

She didn't, which was probably why he was still alive. Peter was a young guy who'd fallen for her damsel in distress routine. He was attractive, with a nice warm smile. He was the sort of guy she'd

dated, before becoming a vampire. Laura got up from her bed and sat next to him, actually holding his hand.

“Now I’m just hungry.” She told him.

There was no malice, no urge to cause pain. Peter was just food, like a lunchtime sandwich from Pret a Manger, but far more essential for her survival. She pulled him round a little, ignoring his struggles. He became completely docile as her fangs entered his neck. He was as good as dead now, a safe recipient of her plans and secrets.

“It has to be genuine hate Peter, I realise that now. I’m going to tell the others about Wiremi and my suspicions about Susan’s death. Then I’m going to carry on working out a way to control this..... Thing inside me.”

She carried on talking to him long after his heart had stopped and she’d ceased drinking his wonderful blood.

~ ~

It wasn’t a leaking pipe or a council tax error, which caused two police officers to turn up at Vlad and Mabina’s house in Chelsea. A broken upstairs window had been the culprit, probably caused by the recent gales, or a young vandal. The window hadn’t been repaired and there had been quite a few rainy days. A neighbour had become concerned and reported the unrepaired window to the police.

“You can probably guess what we can expect to find.” Said Police Sgt Steven Bell.

“Husband ran off, not seen at work for months.” Replied WPC Elizabeth Goddard. “She’s probably dead and oozing into the carpet by now.”

Steven didn’t like that kind of talk and would have phrased it differently, but Elizabeth was probably right. He’d been given the job of checking up on the missing doctor, a Mabina Gladitch. Bringing a WPC was standard routine, in case they found a woman in distress, rather than dead.

“They should have called in a locksmith to come with us.” Said Elizabeth.

“We’ll be alright. I’ll do the letterbox test first and get an idea of what we’re dealing with.” He said.

They both knew what he meant. Elizabeth was fairly new, about eighteen months out of training.

New coppers picked things up quickly though. He knelt on the front doorstep and opened the letterbox, taking in a large breath through his nose. There is an unmistakable smell from the corruption caused by death.

“Nothing, just a little musty.” He said.

“That’s a relief.”

He tilted his head, expecting to see a growing carpet of mail behind the door. Nothing, no yellowing copies of the local papers, no mountain of takeaway menus. Someone was home, or had been quite recently.

“Doctor Gladitch ! This is the police. Please come to the door.” He yelled.

Elizabeth joined in, banging on a downstairs window.

“Doctor Gladitch ! This is the police.” She shouted.

Two or three more shouts and it was obvious no one was going to come to the door.

“We need that locksmith Sarge.”

“Let’s try the back. The door might have panels we can kick in.”

He’d had to do it before. The mess caused was minimal and it was easy to board up after they’d finished. He just hoped it wasn’t another dead body inside. He’d already found three that year.

“No one seems to have friends and family anymore.” He muttered.

“I’m always calling my Gran.... Imagine just lying there for months.”

He led the way, through the unlocked garden wall door and into the back garden. As he'd hoped, the back door was one of the new double glazed plastic jobs. It would make a hell of a lot of noise kicking it in, but better than breaking open the front door.

"Is it wrong to enjoy this part?" He asked.

"Not at all Sarge, not at all."

For some reason he tried the door handle and it opened. Steve stepped into Mabina's kitchen.

"Doctor Gladitch! Don't be alarmed, we're the police." He yelled.

"Your neighbours are worried about you." Added Elizabeth.

No answer and the dishes in the sink looked to have been there a long time. There was always the chance that the deserted wife hadn't taken her own life of course. They might well be about to enter a crime scene.

"Disturb as little as possible." He said. "Remember it's not a race. We'll keep together and thoroughly check every room."

"Ok Sarge."

He found the light switch, filling the kitchen with a bright light from two fluorescent tubes up against the ceiling.

"Doctor Gladitch! Do not be alarmed. This is the police and we are about to search the premises."

"I'm not a doctor, just a senior nurse."

There was a moment when he thought he saw something terrifying enter the room. He felt ashamed of his own fear, as he realised it was just a very sick looking woman stood in the kitchen doorway.

Dressed only in a gown, she looked so frail and unwell.

"Are you Mabina Gladitch?" He asked.

"Yes I am. I was asleep until your very noisy arrival."

Elizabeth did what he should have done. She moved forward, helping the frail woman to sit at the kitchen table. Steve didn't think he could move closer to Mabina Gladitch, if his life depended on it. There was something there that his eyes couldn't see and he was terrified.

"I can put the kettle on if you like? Nice cup of tea?" Asked Elizabeth.

Tea the great cure all for every unpleasant even in life. He was relieved when Nurse Gladitch shook her head. He wanted to complete the formalities and get out of the house.

"I just want to rest. I have been very ill, but I'm mending."

"Your neighbours noticed a window has been broken for a while." He said. "We can give you details of people who can repair it for you. It is a home security risk as it is."

"Yes, yes, the window. I have someone who I will call today."

"You look so unwell." Said Elizabeth. "Are you sure we can't do anything for you?"

For God's sake, couldn't the silly girl feel it too? The evil in that house, hanging over the Gladitch woman like a dark veil. He began to feel sweaty, his heart beating a little too fast. Nurse Gladitch actually laughed.

"If you think I look bad now child, I can assure you I looked far worse. I will be fine after a few more days of bed rest. I shall call about getting the window fixed, you have my word."

He had questions to ask, help to offer. Luckily years of experience and discipline, triumphed over the growing wave of terror.

"There is help available." He said. "The district nurse, meals for the housebound. I can give you a few numbers, or ask your local council to get in touch?"

Again that smile that looked so warm, so natural.

“The police here are so kind. I am an émigré from Eastern Europe and your country took me in and treated me with kindness. Always so kind.”

Steven wanted to scream when Gladitch actually patted Elizabeth’s hand.

“I am an experienced nurse though and I know what my body needs to heal itself. I will be fine, but thank you for your kindness.”

That was it, apart from asking the local constable to keep an eye open and check that the window was repaired in a few days. Steve felt intense relief, once they were out on the street again. It was if a heavy weight had been removed from his chest.

“You alright Sarge ? You look a bit peaky.”

“Yes fine, just glad she was alive.” He replied. “She does look very unwell.”

“Nice lady though.”

Steve wasn’t so sure, but having a bad feeling about someone wasn’t something to go into a report.

~ The End ~

© Ed Cowling – May 2018

~ ~

Of course it’s not the final end, book two is already being structured and pondered on. All those loose ends and the returning nemesis to be dealt with. Think of it more as an end of season than the final page. Book two will commence in the autumn.