

London's Night Stalkers

Chapter 3 - Dreams

“The police can lock you up, take fingerprints and DNA samples. They will then start to pull apart your fake identity. We avoid the police, the way movie vamps avoid wooden stakes and Van Helsing. Got that ?”

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Some people know when they're dreaming, especially if it's a recurring dream. For Clara it always felt real, always the same terrible dream of fire, death and becoming an orphan. Once or twice she'd woken up screaming, Simon silently holding her until morning. Most of the time she woke without making a sound, just the unusual sensation of her heart hammering in her chest.

Past trauma seemed to be the driver; Simon had his own recurring dreams. His were of bloody, brutal wars that weren't even important enough to get into the history books. Apart from a dream of trench warfare in the First World War. That troubled him a great deal, though he had never given her many details. It seemed that trauma left its mark somewhere in their unconscious minds and vampires tended to live traumatic and violent lives.

Clara only had one recurring dream and she'd just woken from it, her breathing still too fast, her heart thudding in her chest. Her fangs had dropped, as if her body was trying to protect her from some unseen enemy. Clara held Simon, pushing her face against his cheek.

“Was it bad ?” He asked.

“It's always bad !”

She'd been just a child, what would now be called a toddler. Able to walk and talk quite well, even understand what her family did to earn a living. Clara had to guess at her age, but thought she'd probably been somewhere between three and four years old. Her father and older brother worked the local mill, while her mother and older sister looked after their home and cultivated vegetable in their garden. Life was hard, especially during a bad winter and the previous winter had been bitterly cold.

“God punishes us for our sins.” Her mother had told her.

Clara had no real notion of God then and sin seemed to be something that only grownups understood. Her understanding of sin was soon to be greatly increased, but at the time of the dream, she was still an innocent human girl child.

The dream always started on that particular morning, a beautiful autumn day that was warm for the time of year. All her family helped when there was a large amount of flour to be moved and there had been two wagons full that day. Sacks of course, crude woven sacks that bled the fine flour through their sides. Her father must have known the dangers, yet that day had started off with such a carefree feeling.

“Don't get under our feet Clara.” Her mother had told her.

The last words her mother had said to her and now Clara found it hard to picture her mother's face. Most of her memories were of the smell that came from her mother's apron. Wet flour, mixed with lavender and the sweat of hard work.

They'd all been there, her entire family and the farmer had brought his own children. There was almost a holiday feel to the day, at least for the young children. Clara had another child her age to play with, even if he was a boy. He'd been there, a labourer then, easily carrying huge sacks out to the wagons. Called Daniel even then, though she doubted that it had ever been the name he'd

been christened. If he ever had been christened ? Something about Daniel made her doubt he'd ever been a member of any God fearing faith.

"What a mess you're in." Her father had said. "Covered from head to foot in flour."

The last words her father had ever said and he'd been laughing, which made the memory perfect. Clara found it impossible to see his face properly, the five hundred or so year in between had robbed her memory of those precious details. She saw his face in the dream, but the details were forgotten once she woke up.

There was no warning ! Perhaps a spark at just the wrong moment ? There had been a huge amount of flour in the air. Little breeze that day, to keep the dust moving, little humidity in the air to dampen it down. Clara had read up on flour fires once, surprised at how common they'd been in the old wooden mills. Not just flames and intense heat, but explosions too.

"Can I help ?"

"No, it's heavy work."

The last words her brother had said to her. A bright light had dazzled her then, making her fall over backwards. Next he was on top of her, holding her down. Daniel, though she didn't learn his name until after he was called a hero.

"Stay down girl and stop struggling."

Daniel covered her completely, his hands pushing her down, his cheek hard against hers. Clara felt heat and heard someone screaming, but one specific odour always punctuated her dream at that point. Daniel burning, his skin blistering, his hair igniting, giving off that terrible smell. It felt as though he'd covered her body with his for hours, yet it could only have been a minute at most.

"Don't look child, don't look." He told her. "You'll be fine now."

Her dreams didn't carry on for long after that, just the final shock that sometimes sent her screaming back into the waking world. Daniel turned his back to her and his skin was cooked. That was how she'd thought of it as a child, the crackling on the pigs they ate at Christmas. Even at four years old she knew Daniel was dying, no one could survive those kinds of burns. But he did..... Unfortunately her memories carried on after the dream ended; forcing her to relive events she desperately wanted to forget. Everyone at the mill that day died, apart from her and Daniel. Her father died immediately, but her mother died three days later. Her brother struggled on for nearly a week, screaming most of the time. There had been nothing left of the mill or the house where they'd lived. It was a superstitious age, there was no rebuilding or any other building constructed on the site of the great disaster.

A childless, middle aged aunt took her in and cared for her fairly well, though they both lived in poverty. Daniel was the hero of the village of course, though he was expected to die within days, maybe less. But he didn't.....

"Is she treating you alright ?" His head nodding at her aunt.

"Yes."

It had taken him three months to be well enough to visit her and he still looked more dead than alive. Wearing a cloak and hood, but she could still see terrible blistering on his head and neck. He twitched after every movement, as if stifling a scream, yet he'd walked a good two miles to see her.

"Thank you for saving me." She'd said.

He'd smiled and promised to visit her again, but things became awkward for him in the village. A man surviving such horrendous injuries became suspected of being in league with dark forces, maybe Lucifer himself. Clara trusted him though, even after he'd betrayed her. A year later and he'd sought her out, finding her tending her aunt's kitchen garden.

"I'm so pleased to see you looking so much better."

"A few scars on my back, but no pain now, none at all."

They'd carried on meeting and she trusted him, there was no reason not to. Even fifteen years later, she saw no reason not to go with him, when he asked her to meet some of his friends. Vampire's, one of whom had bled her almost dry and then turned her into one of them. Such a betrayal by someone she trusted ! Not that she thought that now, but then she'd expected far better of people. She still trusted Daniel, despite what he'd done. There were drawbacks to being a vampire, but immortality paid for a lot of fairly minor peeves. Who wouldn't give up human existence to avoid being worm food by the age of eighty ? A lot younger when she'd been a child. So yes, she still trusted Daniel, but she still had no real understanding of why he'd given her to the vampires, to become one of them.

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Simon had been seeing Patsy for around two months and they'd reached the stage where going out, often meant a lot of staying in. Patsy Smart, he'd learned her full name on about their third date and then it had been from seeing her debit card. Clara was right; he was useless at the simple things, like asking people questions about themselves.

"Oh, what is this ?" Asked Patsy. "Never order dessert in a curry place."

"I think mine is still frozen."

"Maybe it's supposed to be ?"

"Yeah, but I'm going to bend the spoon getting it out."

A curry house in Wood Green and they'd become regulars. The desserts were on a separate card from the main menu and looked far better than they tasted. It had become a game, trying out every dessert on the card. Simon dug his spoon into the coconut something or other and managed to dig out enough to taste.

"Actually, not bad. Far better than that mango thing we had last time." He said.

The waiters were getting to know them, two brandies were served to them without being asked for. Simon always paid in cash and tipped well as they left.

"Two months and we're officially regulars." Said Patsy, sipping the brandy.

They'd used her friend Gina's place a few times, as Patsy still lived with her parents. Finding somewhere to get hot and sweaty was difficult, he could hardly take her home. There was a seedy bed and breakfast place within walking distance, they'd already been there twice. A bit grubby and squalid, but that added something to an elicited relationship. Only Patsy had no idea it was elicited, no idea he was in a long term relationship.

"My place is a dump, but if you don't have to rush home, there is the Lancelot." He said.

"The Lancelot !" She laughed. "A very fancy name for a very seedy bed and breakfast."

"I think they prefer the term, boutique hotel."

Patsy was laughing, which was good. She'd never asked him why his place was always too messy for her to visit, or why they couldn't see each other at weekends.

"The Lancelot sounds fine." She said. "I'm leaving this coconut thing, it's foul."

Simon paid in cash and left a large tip for the waiters. It was a popular curry house, but they'd remember Simon if he needed a table on a busy night. For some reason she held his hand as they turned left and walked the quarter of a mile to the Lancelot.

"I know there's someone." Said Patsy. "I don't care, don't want to know her name or anything. It's fun and as long as it stays fun....."

"Thank you, I was dreading this conversation."

“Just promise me she won’t try and stab me with a metal comb or anything.”

No, if she ever comes after you it’ll be with her teeth and you’ll be drained of blood in a few minutes. He never said that of course and Clara wouldn’t mind anyway. She’d been through her own fair share of dalliances and flings.

“Not going to be a problem.” He said. “I give you my word.”

It began to spit with rain, so they half ran to the hotel, sheltering under its porch roof. He’d get her a cab home in the early hours of the morning. He’d once taken her home at four in the morning, without causing her any problems with her parents.

“They’re cool, as long as I turn up sitting upright and eating toast at breakfast. If I’m out all night they’ll start calling round the local hospitals.”

The door to the Lancelot was a bit sticky, he had to shove it hard to get inside.

“Do you think Cruella de Vil is on tonight ?” She asked.

“Shush, she’ll hear you.”

It was the hair, they’d both christened her Cruella on their first visit to the Lancelot. A middle aged woman with a permanent frown on her face. There was little small talk with Cruella. Cash changed hands and they were given a key to a room at the front of the hotel.

“Same room as the first time we came here.” She said.

Crap! They were becoming regulars at the Lancelot. He wanted Patsy in his life for a while and that meant arranging something better than a grubby hotel. There were at least three traces of blood on the room’s carpet, all human. Vampires had a thing about blood of course, he knew the stains had been there for some time. Patsy was taking off her top, half sitting on the bed.

“I’ll think of something better..... For next time.” He said.

“The Lancelot has a certain charm Simon. But yes, something better would be nice.”

He put the obligatory packet of condoms on the bedside table, before removing his trousers. Patsy was a belt and braces girl, most were these days. On the pill, yet always insisted on condoms for health reason. He could hardly tell her he was unable to catch or pass on human diseases.

“Oh, it’s pouring out.” She said.

He kissed her, running his hand quickly over her tummy and through the thin line of hair between her legs. They both quickly forgot the rain outside the grubby windows.

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Clara knew Simon had a new sexual interest, though they never talked about that kind of thing. He’d begun to groom himself with just that little bit of extra care, spend those few extra seconds checking himself in the mirror. It was all fine, she had her own designs on a guy at the local dry cleaners. All harmless and it gave her time to get to know Laura better. Laura was worrying her a little.

“You haven’t fed in two months.” Said Clara.

“Not quite two months.”

Laura was already looking pale and complaining about feeling tired. Clara had arranged for her to be a trainee at the hotel where she worked and Laura was coming home exhausted every night.

“You need to feed regularly Laura. Otherwise you’ll be tired all the time and soon the migraines will begin. At one time I had to go nearly six months without a kill and I felt dreadfully ill.”

“Why did you go that long ?”

“It was years ago and I was accused of something. The village elders locked me up for a while, but that was a long time ago and the details are unimportant. You have to eat, or you’ll get sick !”

Laura was looking so awkward, so guilty. Clara could have kicked herself, the answer was obvious.

“Life was simpler when I made my first kills.” She said. “No CCTV, no forensic evidence, no cops. Would you like me to help you ? We can go through it all a few times, if you’d like ?”

“Oh yes please Clara ! I’m just so scared of making a huge mess of everything.”

Clara felt guilty, a rare emotion for her. Of course Laura felt anxious, she was new born into the existence of a being a vampire. None of them knew anything after being turned.

“We’ll go out now.” Said Clara. “Go through the whole routine of kill, feed and disposal.”

“What now ? I’m not sure I’ve got everything.....”

“Laura ! Stand up and give me a twirl..... I mean it !”

Laura stood and twirled around in her perfectly fitting top and jeans. Her face smiling, enjoying a moment of play.

“See you have everything you need.” Said Clara. “You’re faster than any human and many times stronger. You’re tough and if you do get hurt, you heal fast. You carry your weapons with you all the time, your fangs. They’ll cut and rip out human bones, if you need to.”

Good, their new housemate looked a lot more confident and cheerful.

“You have everything ! Let’s go out and feed.”

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Clara didn’t drive that far. Along Green Lanes, turning off to go past Finsbury Park Tube Station, before parking a little way along Blackstock Road. There weren’t the usual daytime crowds, but a few people were still walking towards the station.

“I’ve hunted here a couple of times, but not recently.” Said Clara. “Lots of CCTV cameras, so keep your hood up all the time. I have a spare hooded jacket if you need one ?”

Laura felt nervous again at the mention of CCTV and keeping her face obscured under a hood. Clara and Simon had fed successfully for years though and had never once been interviewed by the police. She’d made a point of asking Simon as he put less of a rosy glow of their lifestyle than Clara.

“My top has a hood.” She answered.

She pulled the hood up, tucking her hair inside, obscuring her face. Clara did the same, while looking about, obviously enjoying the start of a hunt.

“Before we get out of the car, I’ll go through a few of the main rules for feeding and not getting caught.” Said Clara. “Don’t try to remember everything, it’ll all soon be routine for you. Firstly we’re really into equality when we feed. Male, female, young and old. No favourite racial group either, we feed on everyone of every colour and every religion. Personal preference and feeding habits creates a pattern and the police get very excited by patterns. Keep it random and the missing people will look random.”

“Fine, but not really sick people.” She replied. “Simon mentioned feeding on a man with leprosy. I don’t think I could do that.”

Clara was actually chuckling and shaking her head.

“Simon can be a bit over dramatic. I’m just your friendly mentor Laura. You’re pretty, female and have a certain vulnerability about you. You’ll get lots of guys wanting to take you home. Easy kills, I’ll even turn up in my car to take away the bodies. Just be aware of patterns and move around to different areas. I doubt if you’ll get the opportunity to feed on a leper in North London.”

Laura chuckled too, though she hadn’t realised her feelings of vulnerability were that transparent.

“Next the police, our real potential nemesis.” Said Clara. “We do everything we can to avoid the police taking the slightest interest in us. Any whiff of a copper near a potential kill and you walk away and go home hungry. The police can lock you up, take fingerprints and DNA samples. They will

then start to pull apart your fake identity. We avoid the police, the way movie vamps avoid wooden stakes and Van Helsing. Got that ?”

“Yes ! We do everything to avoid the police.” She replied.

“Great ! You’ll soon get used to spotting the police. For tonight I’ll give you two choices of target and both will require a little play acting.”

Clara actually held her hand, smiling to give her encouragement.

“Relax Laura; this really does quickly become what you live for. It’s not quite as enjoyable as sex, but it comes in a pretty good second.” Said Clara. “Did you ever worry about taking a knife to the steak in a restaurant ?”

“No, but.....”

“None of that Laura, no buts ! We work with humans, live alongside them. We even fuck them for fun. Mainly though they’re food and you’ll kill two dozen of them every year. Enjoy the hunt Laura, make a game out of it.”

“I’ll try. No, I will. Killing my boss was fun and that was almost as good as sex.”

“That’s my girl ! Right, tonight you can either go after a lone guy, by being a poor vulnerable young female. Or you can target a lone female by being a damsel in distress. Your choice ?”

She was changing. At one time, the mere thought of hurting a woman on her own..... Now though it didn’t worry her at all. Her main motivation was feeding after an easy kill, or as easy as any kill was ever going to be.

“You said guys were easiest.” She said. “Let’s get one of those.”

“Next time it will be a woman though. Remember there must be no pattern to your kills. Why is that so important ?”

“Because the police investigate patterns of missing persons and we avoid the police as though they were Van Helsing.”

“Great Laura, really great ! Ok, let’s get out of the car and begin.”

They didn’t get far, Clara went round the back of her Peugeot 208 and pulled up the door. She rummaged about, handing her an old holdall with a tennis logo of some kind on the side.

“Just some clothes I got paint on and keep handy in case I need to change a wheel by the side of the road. Nothing says vulnerable young female quite so well, as a grubby holdall.”

The station wasn’t far, the road curved slightly and Laura could see the familiar Tube sign. Clara led her into the doorway of a closed hairdressers.

“Time to play a part.” Said Clara. “Look helpless and awkward and avoid eye contact. You’ll attract a guy fairly quickly and then you’ll have to find out if he lives alone. You just ran away from home...Yada Yada....invent a simple sob story. He’ll want to take you back to his place, so it’s normal to ask him about his home. This is important Laura ! Only go home with him if he lives alone. No shared houses, no flatmates, even if they do have their own room.”

“Will you be somewhere close ?” She asked.

“Yes, but you may not see me. I’ll watch where you go, but this will be your kill. Enjoy it, take your time over drinking his blood. When you’re finished, call me and I’ll help you get rid of the body.”

Clara was actually walking away from her, back towards where they’d parked the car.

“That’s it, have fun.” She called. “And don’t get picked up by a cabbie touting for business. There are quite a few of those around here.”

Laura kept her head down and avoided looking up, just in case there was a camera watching her. She crossed the road and approached the covered station entrance. Quite a few people were waiting there, to be picked up or for others to arrive. Laura felt nervous and knew her awkward walk marked

her as a target to some. That was good though, wasn't it ? She kept telling herself she was faster and stronger than any guy who might try to pick her up, but she still felt nervous. Laura put her back up against a concrete pillar and waited.

"You'll love my mum's Baklava ! You can sleep on the sofa, she won't mind."

The first guy to approach her and he looked about eighteen or nineteen and still lived with his mum. She had no idea what Baklava might be, but the guy had a Mediterranean look about him. Quite cute looking, but she wasn't trying to find a date.

"Thanks, but I'm waiting for someone."

"Are you sure ? You look a bit lost to me."

"I'll be fine."

The next guy had been watching her for a while, keeping himself in the shadows near where the buses pulled in. Laura only noticed him because he had the same walk as Simon, the walk of a predator. Probably just on the prowl for casual sex, but there was something about him..... Still, as Clara had once told her.

"You'll never have to worry about being followed home by a molester again."

He walked across the road towards the station entrance, before veering off towards her. Early forties she guessed, white guy with scruffy black hair. Non-descript, no features you'd be able to pick out in a line up, or the morgue. Laura knew he wasn't a pleasant individual and she also knew she was going to kill him at some point in the next hour or so.

"Hi I'm Carl. I've seen you waiting here for a while."

She turned slightly away from him, playing hard to get.

"Look, there are a lot of creeps about, but I work with the local homeless shelter."

Lies but he was good, just the right amount of sincerity in his voice. Once she would have been fooled, but she recognised other predators now. Carl was in her jungle now, he just didn't know it.

"I'm waiting for someone." She muttered at him.

"Really ? I saw the other guy pester you. It's not safe out here, you might get hurt. Not every man is going to take no for an answer."

"Look !" She yelled. "My dad just tried to put his hand up my skirt. I don't need another creep trying it on."

Had yelling been too much ? He looked a bit nervous, looking around, seeing how much attention was they'd attracted. No, he was still on the hook.

"You need a bed for the night. I live quite near here and I've got a spare bed. In the morning you can come to the shelter with me and arrange something for a few nights."

"You live close to here ?" She asked.

"Yes, just five minutes walk."

"Do you live alone ? You'd better not be some kind of pervert."

"I'm not, I promise. I have a phone you can use to call your parents if you want, let them know you're safe."

She saw him smile as she picked up the holdall and followed him. A look in his eye when he thought he'd got her, but she'd got him.

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It was time to make sure Patsy was safely on her way home. There hadn't been the sound of buses passing the Lancelot for a few hours. There wasn't a clock in the room, just the obligatory bed, bedside table and lamp with a grubby cloth shade. There was just enough light coming through the window to see his watch. Two in the morning, time to dress and book a cab for Patsy.

“Sorry Patsy, time to get up and dressed.”

A warm night, they’d both slept naked on top of the duvet. So far, they’d never worked up the courage to sleep on the sheets the hotel provided. He gently nibbled at her ear lobe, causing her to turn towards him, still half asleep.

“What..... What time is it ?” She asked.

“Just after two. By the time we dress, book a cab.....”

She just nodded and grunted at him, as she rolled over and sat on the side of the bed. Simon was better at waking up than her, quickly finding his clothing and dressing. Patsy was still walking about like a zombie, as he called the local minicab office. Not Uber, they were a bit hit and miss in the early hours of the morning.

“Cab from the Lancelot Hotel to Southgate.”

“It’ll be about half an hour.”

“Fine.”

Patsy was going to need that half hour, she was still only dressed in her underwear. There was a kettle in the room, with two fairly clean cups and few sachets of instant coffee.

“Do you fancy a coffee ?” He asked. “There is time, the cab won’t be here for half an hour.”

“No, that stuffs probably been here since the seventies.”

She was smiling at him, always a good sign. In a way her self-imposed need to get home before breakfast, was a good thing. There was no way he could spend all night with her, Clara would go crazy.

“I can snooze through morning lectures.” She said. “How do you manage ?”

“A couple of hours sleep seems enough some days.”

“Lucky you. Go on, boil up the kettle and I’ll risk the coffee.”

Sleep was another oddity that no one understood properly. His knowledge was limited to the few vampires he’d met, but they could all happily sleep for ten hours a night, or just one or two. Simon would feel a bit tired at work, but he’d function as well as ever. He’d once deliberately gone for a whole month with no sleep, without dying or going insane. Daniel had a theory, though Daniel had a theory for most things.

“Vampires operate at a reptile brain level of consciousness Simon. Less ‘I think therefore I am’ and more, ‘I feed therefore I am’. Your brain doesn’t need to do all that night time organising that keeps humans sane.”

It sounded a good theory, even if it was mildly insulting. Simon poured boiling water onto the granules of instant coffee and stirred it with the plastic spoon the Lancelot provided.

“It looks alright.” He said. “Fancy being brave and risking the sachet of Coffee Mate ?”

“Yeah, let’s live a little dangerously.” She replied.

Dangerous, like dating a vampire without realising it. He handed her the cup of coffee and wondered how Clara had spent her evening.

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Clara had watched Laura from various shop doorways and other places she could hide in the shadows. She kept behind parked cars, watching as Laura entered the small block of flats. She’d then gone to fetch her car, parking quite close to where she hoped Laura was feeding. She sat in the car for an hour, waiting and watching the entrance to the block. A guy sat in a car on his own for an hour caused suspicion, maybe even a call to the police. Women were considered harmless though, safe. Even so, after an hour Clara left her car and walked a figure of eight around the two blocks closest to the flat where Laura was enjoying herself. Two hours was one thing, three hours and Clara was

beginning to get concerned. Her phone buzzed in her pocket, just when she'd made up her mind to break into the block of flats.

"Are you alright?" She asked.

"Yes, fine. I drank some wine and listened to some music, before..... You know."

"Great! Is there a lift?" She asked.

"No. Carl's flat is first floor front. I'll come down and let you in."

Clara left her car and had a good look at the block of flats. Might be private, didn't have that council housing look about it. Four floors with no lift was tough for the people on the top floor, they had to be fit. She waited for Laura to appear, before crossing the road and entering the door to the block.

"Is it a quiet place?" She asked.

"I think so. Haven't heard or seen any other tenants."

Dimly lit corridors with a slight aroma of the previous day's dinner. The sort of place where people came home and kept themselves to themselves.... Perfect. Laura led her into the flat and Carl was still sat in his recliner near the fireplace. Dead of course, every drop of blood drained from him.

"He had good taste in music." Said Laura. "We had some wine and then he tried to grope me. Then I put my fangs into his neck and touched him. He didn't like that."

"Was it good?"

"Oh yes."

"Unlikely the cops will even investigate his disappearance, though we need to be careful and assume they might. Do you remember the things you touched?"

"I've never been fingerprinted."

"Trust me Laura. Your prints will eventually be an 'unknown female' at quite a few places people were last seen, unless we take a few precautions. Where did you touch?"

"The wine bottle and a glass..... And I went to the loo."

"Ok, wipe everything you touched with loo paper and then flush the paper away."

Laura was grinning at her.

"Hey, that's a clever trick."

"Glad you like it. I have been doing this for quite a while. Don't forget to wipe the handle on the loo."

Clara looked Carl over with her expert eye, deciding on the best place to dispose of him. His arm looked odd, jointed where there wasn't supposed to be a joint.

"What did you do to his arm?" She asked.

"Touched him, taught the bastard a lesson." Laura shouted from the bathroom.

Clara knelt down and noticed Carl's right knee was twisted too. She felt the joint and it had been crushed, pieces of bones rubbing together as she felt it. His left thigh bone had also been crushed. Poor dead Carl was like a puppet with its strings cut. Laura has tortured him! Simon would be so proud of her when he heard about it.

"How did you crush his bones?" She asked.

Laura came into the room, looking pleased with herself. Clara's second kill had been like that, the anxiety disappearing. There was a sudden realisation that the first kill hadn't just been beginners luck.

"I bit him first and waited for him to go quiet." Said Laura. "Then I punished him for trying to touch me."

"How though? I'm strong, but I can't crush bones with my bare hands."

Laura was shrugging at her.

"I just did it, as I fed on him. I assumed we all had that much strength."

"No we don't. There's someone we know who can answer a lot of your questions, or at least give you some informed guesses. I think it's time you we took you to see him."

"What's his name?"

"Daniel. Come on, we need to get Carl into my car. On the backseat rather than in the back. Simon and I have a whole list of standard ways of getting bodies out of houses and I'll show you the 'Drunk Walk.' Use the sleeve of your top to touch anything. I noticed his North Face jacket with a hood, hanging up in the hall. Go and get it."

"Ok, when we will go to see this Daniel?"

Another avalanche of questions was going to start. The sooner they could take her to Daniel for a week or so, the better.

"I need to talk it over with Simon and get some time off, but soon. Did you see where Carl put his keys and wallet?"

"Yes."

Laura vanished into what had to be the bedroom and came back with a set of keys and a worn leather wallet. Clara put them into the pocket of Carl's jacket.

"He seems the sort to simply vanish one night, so we'll do our best to make it look as though he just went out and never came home. Curtains next, closed they attract more attention than being open all night. Then we'll turn off the lights as we go."

Laura opened all the curtains, asking questions as she moved through the flat.

"Is Daniel a vampire?"

"Daniel is like us in many ways, but he's not a vampire. There are a few people like him, humans who are immortal for some reason. Simon met another like Daniel in Italy once. Though we only know two, there are rumours of others. Here, grab Carl under the arm and pretend we're helping a drunken friend."

They left the flat, quietly closing the door as they left. Luckily Carl hadn't been a heavy man and together they could carry him with ease.

"I've never heard of anything like Daniel." Said Laura. "How did you find him?"

"Daniel found me! It's a long story, which I will tell you, probably next pizza night. Daniel doesn't like the term immortal, he prefers long lived. As to noticing his kind..... Daniel can be rather poetic at times and once told me. 'Those who walk the path of eternity, tend to notice one another.'"

"Oh, that is good."

"Wait until you've had a week of it. Come on let's get him in the back of the car. No one will bother us, we're just two girls helping a friend and girls are harmless, right?"

"Right! This is so much fun Clara."

"I told you it would be. Just remember to keep away from cops."

"The Van Helsing! I remember."

Not one curtain so much as twitched, as they sat Carl in the back of the car. Clara fixed the seat belt round him, pulling it tight to hold him in place. They'd driven a whole fifty yards, before the questions began again.

"Where are we taking him?"

"There are several places actually, disposed of doesn't necessarily mean never to be found. You'll find them by instinct, those out of way the holes in the ground and long abandoned cellars. Simon saw three of his turn up on a TV crime show once. Years later of course and treated as a mystery.

Soft tissue decomposes very fast, leaving the cops with an insoluble mystery. There is a deep lake in a quarry out in Kent, but tonight we're going to see George."

Laura looked excited by it all, almost quivering with delight.

"What does George do with them?"

"George was my find, a humble hospital worker with an ambition to be immortal. I know his shift patterns by heart and he's working tonight. George is in charge of the incinerator at a large North London hospital."

"It's that easy? He just burns them for us?"

"Easy! It took me a long time to cultivate George. His hospital takes in medical waste from all over, even private labs. They run the incinerator at night so the local don't see a constant plume of smoke over their district. George putting the occasional body of ours into the mix, isn't a problem for him."

"Are you going to turn him?"

"Crap no, of course not! I'll string him along for another decade or so and then George will be added to the long list of missing persons. Sad, he'll be hard to replace."

Laura looked so happy, like a kid being taken to the zoo for the first time. Clara felt happy too, Laura was going to be an asset, once she stopped asking so many questions.

"Anyone else I need to know about?" Asked Laura.

"Your ex-boss went into the quarry lake and his car was dealt with by Tom. Tom runs a car breakers yard out near Erith and he thinks Simon is some kind of cartel level drug dealer. He accepts me as a sort of gangster's moll. I suppose you'll have to play the role of moll number two."

"Does he know you're vampires?"

"No, he just likes cheap drugs. If you look for those who won't be missed in quiet lonely places, you'll find a lot of drug dealers. Simon keeps their stock after he's fed on them. He started selling the stuff to Tom for a nice low price and now the guy almost worships him. Any car we need to get rid of, Tom makes it go away."

"You're so well organised."

"We need to be, it's an important part of not getting caught. I'm sure I mentioned avoiding the police."

Laura had her index fingers placed over each other, forming a cross.

"Oh no, Van Helsing!" She hissed. "When can we go out again?"

"Wait until you're feeling a bit hungry. Next time the target will be female. Never have a feeding pattern."

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Simon had showered and gone to bed, by the time Clara joined him. She didn't owe him an explanation, but offered one anyway.

"I took Laura through her second kill tonight."

She had her back to him. Simon kissed her neck and gently fondled her shoulder. Clara had a thing about being fondled.

"Did it go well?"

"Yes, perfect. I took her to see George and told her about Tom."

"Great news. Now she's dipped her toe in the water....."

She turned towards him, her arms going round his back.

"I told her about Daniel too. We need to take her to see him, soon."

"What happened?"

“We did the vulnerable girl at the station routine. Some guy called Carl took her home and tried to get a little too friendly. She crushed his bones with her bare hands Simon. She did it while she drank his blood.”

“Wow, she is special. I’ll talk to Anthony tomorrow and get a week off as soon as I can.”

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