

London's Night Stalkers

Chapter 6 – The Van Helsings

“Clara crushed two whole cloves of garlic into a mixing bowl. Another myth of course, she loved garlic.”

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For Patsy Smart, it started off as just another ordinary day. Up late of course, not getting out of bed until her mother had shouted up the stairs at least six times.

“Get a place of your own and you’ll never get up.” Gina had said, often.

She’d been out with Simon the night before, celebrating his early and unexpected return from Aberdeen. Finding somewhere to be together had been talked about, somewhere to have sex that was less squalid than the Lancelot. The talk had been about her finding a flat of her own, but they both knew that really, it was about somewhere to screw each other senseless.

“There are flats on the college noticeboard.” She’d told him. “But they’re all about fifteen hundred a month to rent, or more.”

Flat shares really, four or five students, crammed into a one bed flat with crappy plumbing and central heating that only worked when it felt like it. Gina lived in a flat share, even had the luxury of her own room. Most didn’t though and living with four or five other students, would mean less privacy than living at home.

“I could help you out with the rent.” Simon had suggested.

“No Simon ! I don’t mind you paying for hotel rooms, but I’m not going to be your mistress.”

Besides, what happened when she either got fed up with him, or he with her ? Patsy might easily end up with a flat she couldn’t afford. She looked at her reflection in her bedroom mirror and smiled. A friend doing a psychology degree had once told her, that as long as you could smile at yourself in the mirror, things weren’t that bad.

“Looks like we’ll have to make do with the Lancelot.” She muttered.

No breakfast, which was becoming a bit of a routine. She kissed her mum on the cheek and picked up an apple from the bowl in the kitchen. She rarely saw her father, apart from the occasional Sunday morning, when he cooked everyone a fried breakfast.

“Gives your mum a lie in.” He claimed.

Patsy was sure he enjoyed being Jamie Oliver for an hour, he certainly made enough mess in the kitchen. The food was always overcooked, but dad’s full English had become a bit of a family tradition. She hadn’t seen her father for three days though, he left the house at six thirty and she was usually out with her friends, when he got home from work. All their usual routine, though Patsy would later beat herself up about it.

“You look shattered.” Said Gina. “Another night at the Lancelot ?”

“I got about two hours sleep.” She replied. “Nice to have him back though.”

Gina was her best friend and knew most things about Simon, but not that he was probably living with someone. Being the other woman wasn’t cool and she knew Gina would keep telling her it was stupid. It was eleven and they had different lectures to go to.

“I’ve got a free period, might go for an early lunch.” Said Gina.

“Lucky you, I’ve got an hour with Delbert.”

“Don’t forget to turn your phone off.”

The lecturer wasn't really called Delbert, his name was Derek L Bertram, but as happens in colleges, everyone called him Delbert. A nice friendly lecturer away from the classroom, but an angry man with a thing about mobile phones, when giving lectures. Some of the staff were fine with phones being on, as long as they were quiet. Delbert was different though, it was almost a psychosis with him. One girl's phone had ended up being thrown against a wall and there had been a huge fuss. After that, everyone made sure their phone was off. Fine, as long as there was no genuine family emergency to be dealt with.

"Sorry to interrupt Mr Bertram. The office needs to see Patricia Smart."

"That's me."

A female teacher she'd seen but didn't really know, led her along empty corridors.

"Is it something serious?" Patsy asked.

"I was just sent to fetch you. I'm sure the office will explain everything."

She'd only been in the main office about three times, it always looked so large and airy. The woman who ran it was called Miss Jacobs. Not one of the teaching staff or the principle, a civilian who spent all her time looking after the college admin. Miss Jacobs was all smiles.

"Sit down Patricia."

"Patsy, it's Patsy."

It was on her file, she knew it was, yet every new lecturer or member of staff she met, insisted on calling her Patricia. She sat on the plain wooden chair, the other side of the desk.

"Your mother called after trying your phone several times. Your father was taken ill at work and has been taken to Barnet General Hospital."

The shock would set in much later, for now it was just a puzzle, a problem to be dealt with.

"Is it serious?" She asked. "What happened?"

"Your mother sounded quite upset. It was difficult to get details from her. Please turn your phone on, she might have left you a message."

"Yes, of course, thank you."

No text messages, her mum wasn't into texting. Probably for the best, some of her friends were driven crazy by texting mums. Patsy called up her voicemail inbox and listened to what sounded like her mother screaming. Her world began to gradually disintegrate.

"Are you alright?"

"Yes, I need to get to the hospital."

"Yes of course. Do you have a friend who can go with you?"

No, no friends, she knew it was serious, she could still hear her mum screaming for her to answer her phone. Her normally quiet and unflappable mum. Her dad was dead or dying, she knew it. It was too personal and intimate to share with anyone, or maybe just one person.

"Do I need a pass or something?"

"No Patsy. Do you want me to see if a teacher can drive you there?"

"No, thank you."

She left the office and checked the money in her old brown leather wallet. Two five pound notes, it wasn't enough to get minicabs and a takeaway for when she was back home with her mum. There were several nearby cash points. She withdrew a hundred pounds, half of all she had, but it was an emergency. She was crossing the road to the minicab office, when her phone rang.

"Miss Patsy Smart?"

"Yes."

"This is Barnet Police Station. Your father was taken into the local hospital this morning."

"Yes, I know, I'm about to get a cab to go there."

There was a bit of a silence as the woman on the phone talked to someone in the background. All Patsy could hear was another woman muttering.

"You'll need to come here Miss Smart. To the police station in Barnet High Street."

"Why ? I don't understand."

More muttering, several voices mumbling, all too faint to understand.

"Your mother was obviously very upset , there was an incident at the hospital. We're looking after your mother until you can pick her up. Do you have a car ?"

"No, I was going to come by minicab."

"That's fine, as long as you take your mother straight home."

Her mother hysterical, incidents at hospitals. Patsy's world was falling apart, but she wasn't stupid.

"My dad is dead, isn't he ?"

"I think you should be prepared for the worst."

She wasn't going to walk into the cab office crying, that would come later. As would calling Simon. He was in London, the Old Street area she remembered. It would take him hours to get to her and even then, he didn't own a car. She'd pick her mum up from the police station and make sure she had a meal. Then and only then would she call Simon and allow herself to cry.

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Laura wasn't having a good morning. A couple had come in to talk about having their wedding at the hotel and had wanted to spend quite some time, looking at the hotel's small private garden.

"Oh Jim, it's beautiful !"

"A bit small."

Jim wasn't keen, but his soon to be bride was hearing none of it. The garden might have been small, but it was always kept full of blooms. The problem was that Laura had been a victim of hay fever as a human and hated sunlight as a vampire. It was a double whammy of itching eyes, painful sinuses and sneezing. By the time she was back in the main hotel building, she felt like hell. Even Clara showed no sympathy, teasing her relentlessly.

"Oh, poor thing. Two days of sun a year and you get the couple who want to measure up the garden."

It was going to be one of those days ! The only consolation was that the couple had booked the most expensive wedding package and she'd receive commission on it. Not much, hotels were notoriously poor payers, but it would buy a few new clothes. Her nose had finally stopped tingling from her allergies, when her mobile phone rang, a company she'd worked for during school breaks, years before.

"Laura, is that you ? It's Betty from Bronstein's."

A picture of a large lady in brightly coloured clothing entered he memory. Nice though, they had been friends during the time she'd worked there.

"Hi Betty, how are you ?"

"Fine, I'm always fine. Just calling to give you a message, kind of."

"Oh, who from ?"

"The police called and as you know, I get all the personnel related queries to deal with."

The Van Helsing ! Laura felt herself begin to tremble a little. It was nonsense, she hadn't been seen feeding and they'd cleaned up any trace of her at both killings. Besides, her DNA and prints weren't on file anywhere, not yet anyway. She steadied her voice to sound unconcerned.

"The police Betty, that is weird. What did they want ?"

“You, or more accurately your current whereabouts. We don’t officially have your mobile number, so I didn’t give it to them. He gave me his name and number, if you want to call him ?”

“Thank you Betty. Did he say why he wanted to talk to me ?”

“No dear. I just assumed that young man of yours had involved you in something again.”

Erving with an E, a really nice and honest guy she’d dated. He looked and spoke like a gangsta rapper, but his dad was a merchant banker and they lived in Epsom. Betty obviously hadn’t heard that it was cool to sound urban. As to the trouble he’d involved her in ? It had been a small amount of marijuana, which had been hers, not his. Erving hadn’t lasted, but their few months together had been fun.

“Can I have his name and number Betty ? I’ll call him and sort it out.”

“Of course dear, you be careful. You did mix with some bad types.”

She almost chuckled, wondering what Betty would make of her hunting and feeding in the urban sprawl of outer London. The call ended and Laura looked at her almost illegible scribble, she’d just written on the back of a wedding brochure. He had initials after his name that Clara and Simon were sure to understand. A Mike Marcou was the Van Helsing stalking her and it was a Central London number. Once she’d have been terrified, now she saw it as a challenge.

“It has to be about the disappearance of Stuart.” She muttered.

Yes her first kill, her now very ex-boss. Clara had warned her that the police might want to see her about it. She had vanished about the same time, the police might well think they’d run off together. She felt slightly disappointed, it was so mundane. Laura went to look for Clara, to ask her advice.

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The cab driver was a nice middle aged guy with an East European accent, who agreed to wait for her, while she fetched her mum. He hadn’t asked her to leave any money with him and had even volunteered to come with her. He’d also pulled up on a double yellow line.

“I’ll be alright on my own.” Said Patsy. “Are you allowed to stop here ?”

“Let them try and move me ! Go and get your mother, I’ll still be here when you get back.”

Patsy wanted to hug him and probably would when he’d taken them both home. The police Station looked new, but it also looked intimidating, which was probably deliberate. Lots of solid looking red brick and the ominous blue sign, ‘Barnet Police Station.’ Blue railings too and a weird ramp, like going to a football match. Once inside it looked far less foreboding. Patsy went up to the enquiry desk and waited for the man in police uniform to look up at her.

“My name is Patsy Smart. I think you have my mum here.”

“Oh yes, wait here for a moment.”

He vanished out the back somewhere and a minute later a door opened, a woman police officer beckoning her through it. Poor women coppers, Patsy knew they always got the job of telling women their husband was dead, or a child run over by a car. The room beyond had no windows and was lit by just two long fluorescent tubes. A male officer and a woman were sat watching her mum. What the hell had the ‘incident’ been like ? It didn’t matter of course, surely everyone was allowed a moment of insanity when their partner died, their soul mate.

“Oh mum, are you alright ?”

Her mum was sat in a chair, clutching her bag and a brown envelope. She’d always been the family’s emotional rock, yet she was looking round like a hunted animal. Patsy hugged her, feeling the tension leaving both of them.

“Come on mum, let’s go home.”

“If I can leave ?”

The woman police officer nodded at them.

“Take her straight home and go round to see your GP, today ! Your mum needs something to help her calm down.”

“I will.”

She took her mum’s bag, but let her clutch the large brown envelope. Her dad was dead and his wallet, watch and maybe even his glasses were in that envelope. No one had told her, she just knew it. It would be nice to know how her dad had died, he wasn’t that old. That would come later though, once her mum wanted to talk. The cab was still there, no traffic warden trying to move the driver on.

“Thank you for waiting.”

He helped her get her mum into the back on the cab, Patsy sitting next to her. Her mum just looked at the shop windows, as they drove along Barnet High Street.

“It was his heart.” Said her mum. “At his age ! The doctor said it’s rare, but sometimes a healthy heart just stops. They should know why though !”

“Let’s get home mum, then you can tell me everything.”

After a cup of tea of course and then she’d have to brave reception at the local GP surgery. It was a health centre really, where you had to book appointments two weeks in advance. She’d just go in there and shout a bit if she had to.

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Simon was sending out emails when Patsy called, lots of spam to persuade his contacts to buy a new phone. They often worked though, despite a few threatening phone calls from angry punters.

“Unless you’re upsetting a few people, you aren’t trying hard enough.”

Or so Anthony was always telling him. He saw Patsy’s name come up on his phone and automatically smiled. Things had been going well with her, very well.

“Hi, how’s college ?” He asked.

“Are you busy, can you come over here ?”

“Where, to your house ?”

“Yes, I put mum to bed and the doctor gave me something to make her sleep. We can talk, she’s not likely to wake up until morning.”

His mind was turning somersaults. Doctors, sleeping pills, what the hell was going on ?

“Back up a bit Patsy. What’s happened ?”

“My dad collapsed at work, a heart attack. He was dead by the time the ambulance arrived at Barnet Hospital.”

“Oh shit ! I’m so sorry Patsy. I’m going to leave work now, do you need anything ?”

“No, actually..... Yes, a big bottle of Bailey’s.”

“I’ll get one on the way.”

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Clara made dinner, it helped her to think. Cutting up vegetables, timing the potatoes, it was all therapy for her. Nothing focused her mind, quite like cooking a meal for three, even if Simon hadn’t shown up yet. His could go in a low oven, under a plate, she was used to his ideas on punctuality.

“I shouldn’t worry too much, they were bound to want to see you.” She said.

“So you definitely think I should call this detective Marcou ?”

“Yes, or they won’t stop looking. Eventually there will be a bored looking cop on our doorstep.”

“How ? No one knows I moved here.”

“Apart from work, who will eventually send a few bits of paper into the tax man. And I suppose you gave your credit card company your new address ?”

“Oh shit ! Yes Clara and my bank.”

Poor Laura, she looked distraught, though she hadn't done anything wrong. It was just life, it did nasty things to you, while your back was turned.

“Relax Laura, it's quite natural for them to want to see you. A local solicitor in Potters Bar goes missing at the same time as his personal assistant. His wife has probably been pestering the police, thinking he's shacked up with you. Call them and defuse the situation.”

“How do I explain living here ?”

“Tell the truth Laura, always be truthful when you can, it's often easier and more effective than thinking up a lie. We work together and get on well, so I asked you to move in. We had a spare room, it's the truth. Use the truth to obscure the big lie, which is ?”

“That we're vampires !” Said Laura.

“I was going to say that we killed Stuart and crushed his car, but being vampires is pretty big too.” Clara crushed two whole cloves of garlic into a mixing bowl. Another myth of course, she loved garlic.

“I feel better now.” Said Laura. “I was worried I might have to kill this Mike Marcou.”

“No Laura, we've been through this. No hunting the Van Helsings, ever !”

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Simon arrived home late, the front of his shirt still damp with Patsy's tears. He felt drained, as though he had genuine feelings and empathy. Perhaps he did, sometimes, if the situation was bad enough. He'd never known anyone cry like that, solidly and for hours. Then sex, which had really confused him for a while. Patsy had behaved as though she'd been kept in a cell for years, starved of sex and intimacy of any kind.

“Are you sure you want this ?” He'd asked her.

She'd pulled his boxer shorts down and used her lips and tongue to answer his question. Sex on the sofa, hot sex that left them both sweaty and panting. Then they did it all over again. It was as though Patsy wanted to grab onto life, lose herself in the ecstasy of hard and prolonged screwing. Eventually she relaxed, resting her head on his chest.

“Better now ?” He'd asked her.

“Oh yes, thank you.”

Part of him understood her, though it just brought home to him how different he was from humans. A tiny amount of the sympathy he'd shown her was genuine, most was copied from films and TV shows he'd watched. Fucking away the pain he could understand though, that had been good, hell that had been truly awesome. Three steps into the kitchen and he smelled his dinner, still drying out in a warm oven. Simon used two dish cloths to move the plate onto the table.

“That'll be dried up to nothing. There's some cold meat in the fridge.”

Clara, wearing just her panties, come to see what he was doing. Normally her appearance would have roused him, it still did slightly. Patsy had drained him though, literally dried him out until he was cumming nothing but air.

“Sorry, should have called. What was it ?”

“Veal Parmigiana, usually your favourite meal.”

There were even the bits of boiled potato he liked. Clara had called him a philistine for ruining a classic dish, but hell; he was the one who'd been born in Pisa. Or actually it might have been

Florence, they weren't big on birth certificates in the thirteenth century. Simon picked at the meal and there was just enough moisture left, for it to be edible.

"Actually Clara, it's pretty damn good. I miei complimenti allo chef."

His Italian had been ruined by centuries away from his country of birth. At best he could just about order a decent meal in an Italian restaurant, or buy a bottle of passable wine.

"If you say so," said Clara, "it was better three or four hours ago. I'd better put on a gown, Laura will be down as soon as I start up the coffee machine."

"Well my dear Clara, we are creatures of the night, even if I do feel knackered."

Laura did join them, before he'd finished eating the partially mummified meal. Food and coffee changed his view on life, counteracted the hours of helping Patsy to grieve. He needed to defy death and cling on hard to life in his own way. Simon needed to hunt.

"Daniel is right, about claiming London as our territory, all of London." He said.

They were half listening to him, as they ate ham rolls and drank coffee. That was fine, he was confident that they'd join him on a hunt that night. The trick with Clara, was to let her talk herself into it, after he'd set a few seeds in her mind. As for Laura ? He doubted that she'd need much encouragement to hunt another vampire.

"I think Vlad in Fulham might object to that." Said Clara.

"Who's he ?" Asked Laura.

A glint in her eyes, an extra hint of green. No, she wouldn't need much persuasion at all.

"A vampire who hunts in West London." Said Clara. "We have no idea of his real name, so Simon started referring to him as Vlad."

"He's been there a long time, probably since before the first great war." Said Simon. "He might be our only vampire neighbour, we had to call him something."

"Old school," added Clara, "always lone females and he sticks to one small area. Mostly SW6, though there was a cluster once in SW17. Recently he seems to like office girls around Chelsea Harbour."

"How do you guys know all this ?" Asked Laura.

"We watch him," said Clara, "or rather we watch the press for missing females. No white board on the wall, or press cuttings of course, but we keep an eye on his activities."

"The cluster in SW17 was in the sixties." Said Simon. "It caused a serious police investigation. With modern forensics and CCTV, they might have caught him. He'd have run of course, maybe leaving a few dead cops behind. That might cause problems for us, so we took a bit more interest in him."

"Wow, have you seen him ? What's he like ?" Asked Laura.

"I've seen him a few times," said Clara, "though he moves quickly. Dark hair, looks about thirty, though obviously he might have looked thirty for centuries. Simon has seen him close up, too close for comfort once."

Laura turned towards him, she was hooked now and together they just might persuade Clara that it was the right time to hunt for Vlad and kill him.

"I wasn't Vlad watching that night." He said. "I came out of Fulham Broadway Tube, on my way to the Chelsea ground. I'm not into football, but it was a corporate do for where I was working, more champagne and smoked salmon than football. He came out of nowhere, actually hissing at me and waving a machete."

"What did you do ?"

"Erm, nothing really. He shouted at me, something along the lines of killing me if he saw me again and then he ran off, towards Lots Road. He was seen and I thought it best to ignore him. I think the

other people near the Chelsea ground, decided he was just another football hooligan. As Clara said, he looks like a million other guys with short dark hair.”

“We should kill him !” Said Laura. “Now, tonight !”

Bless you Laura; the idea wouldn’t seem like his and his alone.

“I think it needs a little planning.” Said Clara. “We can’t just head off to Fulham.”

“Why not ?” Asked Laura. “You once told me we have everything we need.”

“She has a point.” He said. “We planned seeing Daniel for weeks and that didn’t work out too well. Maybe we should just go there, get it done ?!”

He knew Clara wanted to do it. It wasn’t just the extra green twinkle in her eyes, he felt it. The same way that he could instantly spot another vampire, even at a distance. Dear and usually useless Giovanni had explained it, one of the few useful things he’d told him.

“It’s a feeling my lad, you’ll know it when you feel it. I can’t describe it, any more than I can describe how something smells. You’ll know though, you’ll know.”

Clara was hooked, he felt it.

“I suppose we could do it tonight.” She said. “It would be nice to know Laura can hunt in West London, without the worry of Vlad pouncing on her.”

“So we’re going then ?” Asked Laura.

“Looks like it, I’ll get my weapons.” He said.

“Conditions !” Yelled Clara. “I have two conditions before we head off towards Fulham. I may tease you about your antique ironmongery, but Laura will need to be properly armed. Second, you stay with Laura, no matter what. She’s never fought our kind before.”

Easy stuff to agree to, he’d been expecting Clara to demand more than that. She wanted it though, the ultimate thrill of hunting one of their own kind. A creature just as strong as them, probably just as quick and experienced in battle.

“Fine, makes sense.” He said. “He just knows there are two of us and is likely to think Laura is you. That just might give you an opportunity to surprise him.”

His weapon bag was up in the attic, under a loose piece of insulation material. Hidden well enough to avoid being found by an opportunist burglar, or someone being nosy. The attic was often the warmest and driest part of the house, perfect for what Clara called his antique ironmongery. He shook the worst of the dust off the old cloth bag and carried it downstairs, depositing it on the kitchen table.

“You’ll love this Laura.” He said. “A chance to fight flat out, to kill rather than just to control.”

The weapons in his bag were rare, many of them were priceless. He’d never thought about selling any of them though, even during his years as a beggar. He touched them gently, as though each piece of hardened steel was a holy relic.

“Let’s get Laura kitted up.” He said. “This first, I think.”

The long blade glinted in the kitchen lights, it’s hardened edge hinting of previous kills long ago, or perhaps more recent.

“First Simon, we’ll dress in jeans, T shirts and jackets.” Said Clara. “Then you can fit your weapons on Laura. Not too many, she has to be able to walk !”

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They drove past Fulham Broadway Tube Station and then the Chelsea Football ground, before turning right and going through several small residential streets.

“I’ll park in Lots Road.” Said Clara. “It seems to be the centre of his territory; it’s likely he lives somewhere quite close.”

“All the recent missing office girls, worked within a five minute walk from Lots Road.” Added Simon. “Not enough of a pattern and over too long a period for the police to take an interest, but we noticed.”

Laura had always thought of Fulham as being nothing but street after street of housing, but Clara had parked next to a park. There were shops on the other side of the road, all closed, shutters pulled down for the night. Laura got out of the car and smelt a rain storm approaching. She had no idea how she knew it was going to rain, another new vampire sense probably. In a way the rain was good luck, it gave them an excuse to tighten their hoods over their faces.

“Do we kill him right away, or bring him back to the car ?” She asked.

“This isn’t a pervert or a lone female.” Said Clara. “He’s a vampire with the same skills as you and he’s had centuries to practise them. You try to kill him at the first opportunity.”

“Use the Medici Blade I gave you.” Said Simon. “Probably best if you kept your hand close to it.”

She did, loosening her jacket, so that her hand could rest next to the hilt of the ten inch blade. Simon hadn’t told her how many people the blue hardened steel had killed, but she imagined it was hundreds. It made her feel braver, like having another harder, sharper fang to use. It was strapped across her back in a kind of holster and hung under her left armpit. He’d given her four other blades, which were distributed around her clothing.

“Cut him Laura and don’t stop.” Said Clara. “Cutting open his veins might not kill him, but it’ll slow him down. Tendons are a good target, especially those behind his knees. Use your blade as quickly and as often as you can.”

“If you get a chance, jam it into his eye and through his brain.” Added Simon. “That’ll kill him !”

Laura’s hand was shaking as she felt the blade next to her ribs. Not the tremors brought on by fear, but by excitement.

“We’ll walk down towards the river.” Said Simon.

Clara walked into the shadow between two parked cars and was gone. It wasn’t much of a plan, to entice Vlad to attack them and use Clara as backup, but it was probably the only plan they needed. They were hunters, like a group of lions expanding their turf. No grand and over complex plan, just find Vlad and kill him. They’d only walked a few yards, when the rain began.

“Useful,” said Simon, “it’ll keep the three am joggers and dog walkers indoors.”

“Do you get many of those ?”

“Oh yes, heaps of them. Women as well as men, running through the streets in their lycra shorts. It can sometimes be a real nuisance. Add the insomniacs dragging some poor tired mongrel along the road and the night can sometimes be far too busy.”

“What if we are seen ?”

“That depends on how long the fight lasts. We move fast, usually by the time someone had looked out of their window to see what the noise is all about, we’re gone. If we are seen, it’s just a gang of people in hoodies having a fight, another gang fight. Even if someone points a camera out of their bedroom window, they’ll just get a picture of what looks like street thugs. Which, to be honest, we are.”

She could see him grinning at her in the streetlight, as they reached the end of Lots Road and walked across the roundabout and on towards Chelsea Harbour. Something came out of the shadows and screeched at them, before running off in the direction of the river.

“That must be Vlad.” She said. “Can we screech like that ?”

“If you like, but I’ve never felt the need.... Too... theatrical.” Said Simon. “Vlad doesn’t know we’ve come to kill him, he just wants to scare us off his patch.”

They carried on walking towards the Chelsea Harbour hotel, going right past its doors and on, until they reached the marina. Vlad had picked the spot to let them know, in no uncertain terms, that they weren't wanted. No actual violence yet, just shaking a machete at them from a safe distance. More shrieking of course, loud enough to wake up half of Chelsea.

"Crap ! He's got a machete." She said.

"Did you think we'd be the only ones with weapons ? One vampire I fought during World War II, had a Mauser Machine Pistol. Come on, we don't want to lose him now."

Through the marina and quickly past an old man taking a tiny dog out for a walk. She smiled at the man and he smiled back. He might remember a girl in a hoody with pretty green eyes, but the odds were on him forgetting all about it. Past the rain soaked benches where office workers had their lunches and on until they reached some trees, quite close to the Thames. Things hadn't gone exactly to plan, Vlad had found Clara and they were the backup.

"Hold your blade up and ready." Said Simon. "No mercy, use it to cut any bit of him you can. Keep cutting and stabbing until I tell you he's dead."

Simon held her hand, as they watched Clara kick the man, who had to be the famous Vlad. She kicked him in the chest, so hard that it was like watching a TV Sci-Fi series, like something out of Heroes or Buffy. This was real though ! He went backwards, hurtling through the air for at least fifteen feet, before hitting the side of a blue council gritting bin. He had to be out cold, didn't he ? Laura was astonished to see him instantly get up, machete held up and ready to strike.

"Use your vampire senses." Said Simon. "Push the background away, see only the things that move, concentrate on Vlad. Use your reptile brain, it'll know what to do."

Laura raised the Medici Blade high above her head and ran at Vlad, screeching as she ran. Simon might think screeching was undignified, but she liked it, a lot.

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Patsy watched her mum for a while, before trying to get some sleep herself. She even shifted their cat, Timothy, off the chair next to her mum's bed, so that she could sit down. He seemed annoyed at being woken, making an unhappy hissing sound. It quickly turned into a purr as Patsy put him on her lap and began to rub his head. Had she fed him ? Yes, she remembered giving him a tin of tuna, to stop him pestering her mum. Animals didn't understand death, or maybe they did and handled it better than people.

"You have to help me look after her Timmy."

After making a huge fuss, the health centre had grudgingly given her about twenty nitrazepam tablets in a plastic bottle.

"They'll calm her and help her to sleep." She'd been told.

Her mum hadn't been one for taking pills, even pain killers for things like toothache. The nitrazepam had hit her hard, she'd only just about managed to get into bed, before falling asleep. She was still in a deep sleep and unlikely to wake before morning. Actually it was morning, the bedside clock was showing three thirty three. She wondered where Simon was. Probably lying next to her, the woman who'd driven him to Aberdeen.

"Things change Timmy, things change."

She'd read an article in an old magazine once, while waiting to have a dental check-up. It appeared that all married women thought about how they'd react if that knock on the door came, the police to say their husband wasn't coming home. It wasn't being morbid, it was simply applying a kind of emotional inoculation against the inevitable. Most women outlived their husbands.

Her too, her life was going to be different and it needed to be thought about. Her dad was bound to have insurance to cover the mortgage, but what then ? Her mum was unlikely to be able to pay all the bills on her salary alone.

“Is college worth the student loan Timmy ?”

He was fast asleep on her lap. She was likely to end up in a hell hole of a job and on minimum wage, no matter how good an education she left college with. Plus there would be a loan to pay off until she was into her fifties. It made sense to leave college and get that crap job right away.

“Beat the crowd to those McJobs Timmy.”

She badly wanted to discuss it with someone, preferably Simon. He seemed proud of his long list of low paid jobs, wearing them like medals. It couldn't be that bad. Patsy was asleep before the clock reached four am, Timothy fast asleep on her lap.

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