

## London's Night Stalkers

### Chapter 7 – Vlad's House

**“You need a little paranoia to survive.” He said. “Always assume that some kind of highly malevolent deity is watching you. Do anything dodgy or even slightly illegal and that deity will make sure the police turn up.”**

»

Vlad had hit the council gritting bin so hard, that he'd broken the thick blue plastic, allowing the mixture of salt and grit to spill out. The force of the kick to his chest alone, would have meant most human's being dead, before colliding with the bin. Vlad wasn't human of course and Clara was pleased when he instantly jumped to his feet. An opponent worth fighting, it had been a long time since she'd faced one of those. Her favourite weapon was in her right hand, a curved dagger from Yemen, a Janbiya. It had blood on it, his blood. He'd ambushed her, or at least tried to and she'd given him a wound across his chest for his troubles. Not that Clara had come out of it unscathed, his machete had cut her across the shoulder blades, going deep enough to hit the bone. She felt the pain and ignored it, holding her Janbiya high, ready to strike.

Clara knew the others had arrived of course, yet kept all her attention on the vampire that Simon had christened Vlad. As Laura screeched, he looked to his left, probably surprised to be attacked by a group of three vampires.

“Now I have you.” She muttered.

She ran at him, getting her curved blade deep into his shoulder. He was still strong though, with the extra strength and desperation of any cornered creature. His left hand hit her on the jaw, sending her sprawling.

“Between his ribs Laura ! Stab him deep !” She heard Simon shout.

They didn't fight to any code of chivalry, no notion of a fair fight. They just wanted Vlad dead, as quickly as possible. Preferably they also didn't want to end up too injured during the killing. Territory was what it was all about, adding West London to their hunting grounds. Clara was on her feet again, trying to get her dagger into his neck, or maybe jam it into an eye. Laura looked covered in blood, hopefully most of it wasn't her own. She stabbed at Vlad so furiously, that he walked backward into a downward thrust from Simon. Clara smiled, as Simon's short sword sank deep into Vlad's chest. He was dead now, he just hadn't realised it.

“Finish him ! Finish him !” She yelled.

Easier said than done, Vlad wasn't going down without a fight. His machete caught Laura on her upper left arm, making her cry out. Clara ran at Vlad, but this time he was ready for her. His boot caught her in the solar plexus and it was her turn to be thrown backwards.

“I'm getting too old for this.” She muttered.

Clara rolled onto her knees, willing her breath to return. Her throat felt as though as it was blocked and couldn't open for her to breathe. It was just her body's reaction to the blow, she knew that. As she struggled to get air into her lungs, Vlad ran, her friends chasing after him.

“He mustn't escape !” Yelled Simon. “Clara will be ok, run Laura ! Run !”

His heart must have been pierced by Simon's blade, yet Vlad ran at speed. It made her proud to be a vampire, watching her friends chasing after him. Simon took another swing with his sword, before all three of them vanished over the side of the river wall. High tide, low tide, she had no idea if they'd

be fighting in mud or trying to swim to safety. Clara now had enough breath to run and she used it, sprinting towards the section of wall, where they'd gone over the side.

"Fuck ! Why won't he die ?!" She heard Simon shout.

It was dark on the riverbank, they were a good twenty feet below her. Even vampires find it hard to fight in viscous, cloying mud. They were disturbing the infamous Thames mud, releasing a stench of decay and filth. As her eyes became used to the gloom, she saw the mud near Vlad was heavily stained with blood. Laura's arm was adding its own crimson colour to the grey mud and Simon seemed to have picked up a leg wound on his thigh. It was a war of attrition that had to end soon, there was the clear sound of an approaching police siren. They hadn't looked up and seen her, people rarely look up, even vampires.

Strangely enough, most vampires do tend to have religious beliefs. If you can suffer an agonising death by feeding on holy ground, it implies there must be something watching. Clara said a quiet prayer, to whatever deity might be watching and jumped.

"Got you Vlad."

Her left foot caught him on the shoulders, she heard his collar bone snap. Poor Vlad, all those hundreds of years, prowling around the posh part of London and he was going to die in the stinking Thames mud. Clara held her Janbiya in both hands and aimed it at the centre of Vlad's skull. She wobbled slightly, as he moaned and began to fall. The tip of her dagger bit into bone just above his left ear and went in deep, very deep. Clara saw his skull split apart, as her blade came out of the bottom of his head and dug into his shoulder.

"Crap !" She yelled.

The force of her fall sent her tumbling, to land in the mud, her injured shoulder taking the full force of her fall. It hurt, it hurt a hell of a lot ! Clara was just grateful that most of the bacteria, which love to infect humans, didn't find a vampire's body very appetising.

"You can stop stabbing him now." She heard Simon tell Laura.

"Stop Laura..... He's never going to be any deader than he is right now. Stop !"

Clara could understand her enthusiasm, there was nothing quite like going after one of their own and none of them had died. They were a good fighting team, even if going over the river wall, had been a little impromptu. Clara had her face in the mud, a good clump of it in her mouth. She turned and spat it out, noticing that something in it wriggled. She grinned at Simon.

"We have to do this more often." She said.

He laughed, but they could all hear the approaching police siren.

"No time to get Vlad anywhere." Said Simon. "Get under the river wall and hope they don't spot us."

Even dragging dead Vlad out of the mud was hard work. The river wall had an overhang, they huddled under it, hoping the police might not notice them. Was there a trail of blood ? Probably, Vlad had been bleeding copiously. The siren came close and then began to move further away.

"I guess they're after someone else." Said Laura.

"We should get moving." Said Simon.

"Not before I find out who Vlad really is, or at least the name he'd been living under." Said Clara. She felt in his pockets and found not only a wallet, but also a letter he hadn't had time to open. A credit card statement, to a Mr Roy Barlow. There was a Santander debit card in the wallet and a Barclaycard, all in the name of Mr Roy Barlow.

"Roy ! That's fucking disappointing." Said Simon.

"It is a bit..... well, naff." Added Laura.

“You’ve both got a point,” she said, “but calling himself Vlad Dracula, might have made his neighbours a bit over curious.”

The credit card bill showed an address, only a few streets away. She waved the bill about, making sure they’d both seen the address.

“I can’t see any of us getting in to work tomorrow.” She said. “I fancy a clean-up and Vlad’s place is only five minutes away.”

“Roy’s place.” Corrected Laura.

“Let’s pretend we never saw the name, he’s still Vlad.” Said Simon. “We’ve just killed him, a spot of burglary seems relatively minor. Any keys in his pockets?”

Damn, she hadn’t dug into his muddy trouser pockets. In amongst the mud, she found a bunch of house keys and about two pounds worth of small change.

“Looks like we’re cleaning up at Vlad’s place.” She said.

~

~

Laura was driving; Clara’s back was causing her a few problems, needing time to heal. Simon couldn’t drive of course. Vlad might have had a driving license, but he was wrapped up in about six sheets of plastic. It had been hard getting him up from the river bank and by the time he was under a car rug in the back of Clara’s Peugeot 208, they were all tired. They’d parked on the other side of the road from Vlad’s house and watched it for a while.

“He’ll have lived alone,” said Simon, “most of our kind live alone.”

“I like the hedge,” said Clara, “enough to give privacy, but not enough to make the neighbours call in the local council.”

Laura tended to agree, but was leaving the decision to the other two. She still felt like the junior member of the trio and probably would for some time. Vlad had owned a nice house, or maybe rented it. No, it didn’t have that rented look, it was too well maintained. A front driveway that looked big enough for three or four cars, though most of it was surrounded by a hedge. The front door was obscured, which was good for their purposes, but the upper two floors looked tidy. White painted wooden window frames and red brickwork that appeared to have been recently cleaned.

“He kept the place nice.” She said.

“No sign of sharing his home with anyone, or any alarm box on the wall.” Said Simon. “It’s well past dawn; the early commuters will be about soon. I say we risk it and park on his driveway.”

Laura didn’t start the car and wouldn’t, not until Clara had agreed.

“My back feels like it might need a few stitches,” said Clara, “and I definitely need a bath.”

“We all do.” Added Laura.

“Ok, we’ll do it. Get us right up against the hedge Laura.” Said Clara.

The size was deceptive, looking at it from the road. There was an old Volvo estate parked on the right, probably Vlad’s. Another six cars could have fitted onto the driveway, but Laura parked the Peugeot up against the hedge on the left. She reversed a little, using a row of wheelie bins to obscure the rear number plate.

“Good job you can’t see the door from the street.” Said Simon. “We really do look fairly disgusting.”

“And we stink.” Added Laura.

They had to help Clara, her back muscles were stiffening up. Vlad had two deadlocks on his front door, yet he’d only slammed the door when he’d left. Simon opened the cheap Yale lock and they were into the hallway. There was no peeping sound of an alarm waiting to be turned off, they all relaxed a little.

“Hello !” Shouted Simon. “This is the police. Your front door was wide open !”

“Crap Simon, warn me next time.” She said.

“Easiest way to see if anyone’s home.” Said Simon. “Not a peep, looks like we have the house to ourselves. I’ll get Clara into a bath, while you look for a medical kit. All vampires have medical kits, getting wounds is an occupational hazard. And everyone remember to wear latex gloves, all the time.”

The house was immaculate, far cleaner than their house in Wood Green. Vlad might have been a monster, but he seemed to have a touch of OCD about dust, even the skirting boards glistened.

“Where does he keep his medical stuff ?” She mumbled.

She could hear Simon and Clara, mainly Clara’s voice telling him to stop bumping her into things. Laura tried two bedrooms on the first floor, before finding Vlad’s very own medical unit. A large bedroom, given over to being something resembling an army field hospital. At some time, perhaps decades before, Vlad must have been a doctor, maybe a veterinarian. He’d certainly had money at some point in the past, to be able to afford all the gleaming medical equipment. She ran downstairs, finding Simon and Clara naked and sharing a bath. She ignored their protests about privacy, she’d seen them both naked before.

“Did you find a first aid kit ?” Asked Clara.

“Better ! Vlad has his own private Accident and Emergency department.”

~ ~

They’d tossed a coin for who called them all in sick and Simon had lost. He’d just injected Clara’s back with a local anaesthetic, before stitching up the wound.

“Oh Simon, the joy of local anaesthesia, we have to box some of this stuff up.” Said Clara.

“We can load up his Volvo, once we find the keys.”

“Laura will find them; she’s been exploring every room, hurtling about like a tornado.”

He tried to put in a stitch and Clara winced. He injected more of the anaesthetic.

“I’ll leave it, give it time to kick in.” He said. “I’ll call the Hotel and tell them you both have Thai belly or something. Is the number on your phone ?”

“Yes, though I’ll need to call in later and then again before five, to let them know I’ll be in tomorrow. It’s just a way of beating people up for being sick.”

“Bastards ! No sympathy for an ageing vampire with a machete wound.”

She tried to thump his arm and winced, he was going to give the injection a good five minutes to work. Was there an overdose level ? She could hardly have a numb shoulder forever ! He injected quite a bit more of the stuff into her back, before calling the hotel’s voicemail system.

“This is Simon Atherton, I’m calling in for Clara Copley and Laura Selway. Neither of them will be in today. My fault, I bought takeaway food from the wrong place and we’re all ill. I’m sure they’ll be in tomorrow.”

He then repeated the call to his own boss, pleased that Anthony didn’t pick up his phone. Anthony had been known to start work at 4am and Simon wasn’t in the mood to talk to him. He gave Clara an experimental jab with the needle and she didn’t twitch.

“It’s healing up already, but I’ll put in a few stiches.” He said. “We can probably remove them in a day or so, but they’ll make you feel more comfortable.”

He was used to stitching her up, though rarely with the proper equipment. He’d once had to use bright yellow thread, which had looked strange and oddly cool.

“Ouch Simon ! Define more comfortable.”

“Ahh, sarcasm again. I’m beginning to recognise it.”

He’d put in about four tidy stitches, when Laura appeared in the doorway, clutching a holdall.

"Look !" She yelled. "This is five thousand and the bag is full."

Laura was waving a wad of twenty pound notes at them, there had to be several hundred thousand in the bag.

"I thought we were all poor." Said Laura. "Vampires I mean."

"Most are, money tends to get you noticed," he replied, "which is something we try to avoid."

"He might have stolen it." Said Clara. "Useful though, anything else worth taking ?"

"Lots, I've started filling a case in his bedroom."

"I still need to stitch you up a bit." Said Simon. "That temporary bandage isn't enough, if you're exploring."

"Ok, I'll be back."

She'd gone again, a wild look in her eyes. He liked to think it was more excitement about having a vampire's house to explore, rather than fear of his medical abilities.

"Three more and then you can do me." He said.

Clara had just started stitching up the machete wound in his thigh, when Laura appeared again, carrying an armful of women's clothing, which she dumped on the floor.

"In the attic, trunks full of it." She said. "Old but clean and there are quite a few well known labels. Looks years old, maybe he had a human lover at one time."

"Oh my..... These are flared jeans !" Said Clara. "Maybe he was a Bay City Rollers fan."

"Who ?"

"Never mind, Simon wants to stitch you up, or I can do it. I have to admit it, he does leave a nice tidy scar."

"Simon, of course ! I need to get some clean clothes for him. Won't be long."

Laura had gone again; leaving Clara to put the final stitches into Simon's wound. Laura was back; once more carrying quite a lot of clothing, men's this time. She looked unhappy about something.

"You two need to come with me, there's something strange downstairs." She said.

"No ! I can see blood on your top." Said Simon. "I'll stitch your arm and then we put on clothing that isn't muddy or bloody, or both. Then we can go exploring."

"But....."

"I don't care Laura, get in the chair and take off your top."

There were boxes full of bottles of surgical cleanser, so he used tons of it to clean her arm. She winced as he injected her with local anaesthetic.

"Worth it in the end." Said Clara. "I'm now nicely numb."

Simon just hoped the numbness didn't last too long. It had to wear off eventually, but he used quite a bit less of the anaesthetic on Laura.

"You've pulled at the wound." He said. "I'll need to use a few large stitches, to close the skin up."

"I must have pulled it, kicking the door open."

"What door ?" Asked Clara.

"I've been trying to tell you both, the door into the basement. It had a keypad lock, so I had to kick it down."

"What was in there ?" He asked.

"Bodies, or at least the smell of them. Faint, but clearly there. I think Vlad, has been burying people in the basement."

~ ~

His clothes fitted fairly well, Vlad must have been fairly near to his size. The woman who'd once inhabited the house must have been a few sizes larger than either Clara, or Laura. Floppy jeans could

be held up by belts, loose tops didn't really matter at all. The problem was old fashioned shoes that were a good three sizes too large.

"If my own trainers didn't stink of Thames mud, I'd ditch these things." Said Clara.

"Me too." Agreed Laura.

They'd both ended up in clogs, which he'd learned, had been a big thing in ladies footwear in the seventies. The clogs had straps that could be tightened, to reduce the floppy shoe problem. They clumped down the stairs a bit, making quite a noise, but they did have the place to themselves. Simon stopped on the threshold of the basement and sniffed the air, before flipping down the nearby light switch. The basement lighting wasn't bright, just two low wattage bulbs, hanging down from a low ceiling.

"I can smell it too." He said. "A definite aroma of rotting flesh."

"Might be an injured cat, which crept in here and died." Said Laura.

"No !" Said Clara. "Trust me, I know that's the smell of decaying human remains."

"You certainly did a job on the door." He said.

Simon stepped over the shattered basement door, with its number pad entry system and found himself on a dirt floor. Not a natural dirt floor, it looked like Vlad had brought in tons of topsoil and compost.

"I know this !" He said. "A memory of something Giovanni once told me. Some of the real old school vampires, used to bury their dead in cellars. The soil had to be raked over regularly, kept free of fungi."

"Why would they want to do that ?" Asked Laura.

"An army for when the apocalypse comes." Answered Clara. "I've heard the stories too, I'd always assumed it was just another myth."

Simon walked over the soil floor, finding not a single thing trying to grow, or any insects.

"He'll have a vampire altar somewhere." He said. "Giovanni told me about those too. It started in Romania, where all the best vampire folklore seems to come from. If the Christians could have their resurrection, then why not the vampires ? Vlad was planting his army, for when the..... War or whatever finally came."

"The second coming and the rapture." Said Clara. "He was building a group of followers to fight for him on judgement day."

"Crap ! How many ?" Asked Laura.

"The ceiling looks a bit low to me." Said Simon. "I think he's been burying them in layers over the decades. There are likely to be hundreds of them buried here, every meal he's had since moving into the house. No wonder he was so keen to protect his patch."

There was another doorway, unlocked this time. Simon turned on the lights, to reveal another section of the basement. That too had a soil floor, and a ceiling that looked far too low.

"More here," he said, "more recruits for Vlad's army of followers. The house is Victorian, he might have been here for a hundred and twenty years or more. Say he kills two dozen people a year...."

"Nearly three thousand bodies under our feet." Said Clara.

"With no way of avoiding the police finding them, eventually." He said. "Roy Barlow will one day be on the TV news, as the most prolific serial killer in UK history. Hopefully it will be a while before anyone investigates his disappearance."

"Here's the altar." Said Laura.

Another section of the basement, with a wooden ramp leading down to the original concrete floor. A shelf on a wall rather than an altar, but it had a large book in pride of place. Simon picked it up, flicking through the old yellowing pages.

“Handwritten in Romanian,” he said, “used to speak it well, but now I barely recognise a few words.”  
“Is it a vampire bible ?” Asked Laura.

“No, fairly certain there isn’t one of those.” He replied. “Just a handwritten journal he’s been keeping for centuries. It indicates that our Vlad, did originally come from Eastern Europe. There is a rumour that we all owe our existence to one man from that part of the world....”

“Or that too, might be complete crap !” Said Clara.

“Oh yes, I fully admit that most of what I’ve picked up over the years, is probably as dodgy as a seven pound note.” He said.

The altar had the usual paraphernalia so beloved of Hollywood films about the occult. Black candles, two skulls, several bottles full of something red and viscous looking. All crap, though he handed Vlad’s journal to Laura.

“Might all be nonsense, but you never know.” He said. “Copy a few pages and send them to Daniel. This stuff will make him cum in his pants.”

“Daniel !” Said Clara.

“Oh come on Clara, you know we’ll all kiss and make up eventually. He’s still the best source of information we have.”

“Fine !”

“I don’t mind sending them to him.” Said Laura. “As long as I don’t ever have to go to his house again.”

There was nothing else worth taking on the altar, it looked like their visit to the basement was over.

“We’ll clean up as best we can.” He said. “Vlad has tons of surgical cleaner, gallons of the stuff. Then we can box up what we intent to take and load up his Volvo.”

“I think we should torch the place.” Said Clara. “Best way to get rid of the evidence.”

Simon recognised the tone in her voice. He sat cross legged on the floor, ignoring the horror on Laura’s face.

“It’s only soil Laura, you’ll sit on far worse. It’s some of the cleanest and most cherished soil you’ll ever come across. Come on, sit down ! I can see a major difference of opinion coming along and you’re a fully paid up and equal third of our little democracy.”

Laura sat on the soil floor and so did Clara, but she did it with an obvious reluctance. Not because of any qualms about sitting on a burial ground, but because he’d suggested it. They’d fought over far sillier things in the past, even tried to kill each other two or three times. Vampires operated in the reptile part of their brains for most of the time, which brought dangers with it.

“I propose that we loot this place for everything worth taking and then leave.” He said. “Make it look like Vlad took off, probably worried about someone finding the three thousand bodies in his basement.”

“It makes more sense to burn the house to the ground.” Said Clara. “We bathed here, had wounds stitched. It’s almost certain that we’ll miss some forensic evidence in the clean-up. This isn’t an ordinary house Simon; it’s a massive crime scene. The police will be all over it, for months.”

“And setting a fire will cause them to come quicker. It might be a year before anyone comes looking for Roy Barlow and even then they might not dig up the basement.”

“But the smell ?!” Said Laura.

“Our sense of smell is better than a human’s.” He said. “Sniffer dogs would get excited about the odour in the basement, but not any police who might come looking for Vlad.”

The doorbell rang. It sounded a long way above them, but unmistakably ringing inside the late Roy Barlow’s house.

“Everyone is out.” Said Clara. “They’ll go away.”

Three more rings and whoever it was, gave up trying.

“Probably selling something.” He said.

“Or someone wanting to book his services.” Said Laura.

“What ?!” He exclaimed.

“I found business cards in the drawer next to his bed.” Said Laura. “He’s probably had lots of jobs, but for the last three years, he’s been a children’s entertainer. He performed magic tricks and made balloon animals.”

“You’re kidding ?!” He said.

“No, really.”

He looked at Clara and they both started laughing. Laughter cured the bad mood between them, it always did.

“Actually that means people might look for him.” He said. “He’ll be missing from a few kid’s birthday parties.”

It was no good, laughter is infectious and Laura was now seeing the funny side of Vlad’s chosen profession. Simon left it for a good five or six minutes, before asking for a deciding vote from Laura.

“Right, let’s get this decided.” He said. “Torch the place or just loot and leave. You get the deciding vote Laura, what’s it to be ?”

“Sorry Clara, I love you like a sister but.....”

“No need to go any further Laura. I’ll help you fill a few suitcases with anything worth taking.” Said Clara. “Did you find anything decent ?”

“Oh yes, more cash, several Rolex watches and a box of expensive looking jewellery.”

“Wow, I think we need to get you something better than a tatty old van.” He said.

“Oh yes, she’s earned it.” Added Clara. “I think that just having her about, might stop us from killing each other. What car do you fancy Laura ?”

“Actually I’d still like a van, a nice one.”

“What kind ?” He asked.

“The sort they use on American cop shows. Do you remember the start of the movie, Resident Evil II, that line of vans, all racing into Raccoon City ?”

“Yeah.”

“I’d love a van like that.”

~

~

Zoe Winstanley was determined to book Roy Barlow for her son’s seventh birthday party. Imogen had booked him a year or so before and had said wonderful things about him. Imogen was famously hard to please, currently on her third husband and starting to complain about him. If she liked Roy, he had to be fantastic. She’d rung the doorbell quite early; perhaps he wasn’t an early riser. Two cars had been on the driveway, but no one had opened the door to her. It was a fairly minor frustration, but it annoyed her. Zoe didn’t like being frustrated in her plans.

A little shopping had improved her humour. Some fennel bread from the boutique bakery and a few of the ginger bread men that her kids loved. She was most of the way home, before deciding to try Roy Barlow’s doorbell again. She could have called him of course, but really wanted to see him. Most

children's entertainers were fine of course, but she wondered if a few were a bit..... too fond of kids. She needed to see Roy in person, get inside his head a little.

"I'll know if he's alright." She muttered. "Just give me a few minutes with him."

The cars had gone. He'd obviously been at home and ignored her. Zoe pictured him watching her out of a window and ignoring her. She'd forgive a lot of faults in people, but not rudeness. She almost walked away.

"Can I help you?"

A woman about her age, wearing a uniform of some kind and a photo ID badge around her neck.

"I was hoping to talk to Roy Barlow." Said Zoe. "I'm thinking of booking him for a birthday party."

"My husband is good at those, though I see his car has gone. Can I take your number?"

"I was hoping to see him for a moment. Over protective mum and all that, I'm sure you understand."

She finally managed to see the name of the local hospital on the ID card. Doctor just off night shift, nurse? Zoe didn't like not knowing things about people, it was just another thing to frustrate her.

"I do understand. I'll shout up the stairs and see if he's home. If not, I'll ask him to call you."

"Are you a doctor?" Asked Zoe.

"Nothing so grand."

How rude! No name offered and now she'd ignored a clear signal to give her occupation. Zoe began to wonder about employing Roy at all. She could forgive an awful lot, but maybe not him having a rude wife. They'd reached the front door and Zoe realised that Roy's wife had the most unusual green eyes, almost luminous.

"Roy! Are you home? A lady wants to talk about a booking."

Not a sound, obviously Roy had been home and had left in one of the cars.

"Sorry he's obviously gone out. If you can give me a number where he can reach you?"

"That's alright, I'll try to call him later today."

Zoe left, determined to forget all about Roy Barlow. The stench of surgical spirit as the door had been opened! No, there was something odd going on there, something best avoided.

~ ~

Clara had volunteered for the job of disposing of Vlad. Not the hospital, George wasn't going to be on duty for a few days. It appeared she had somewhere of her own, a special place to leave the lifeless shells of those she fed on. Laura had seemed surprised when Clara refused to say where, but he'd understood.

"You'll find a few places of your own." He'd told her. "We're often quite secretive about our personal places to dispose of our kills. There will always be places we all use, like George. Eventually though, you'll find your own sites too, ones you want to keep safe, keep secret."

A small amount of the medical supplies had been left in the bathroom. Just enough to be useful in an emergency, but not enough to cause alarm. Yes, they did have the occasional visitors and one or two delivery guys had asked to use the loo. The bulk of the stuff was still in its original boxes and Simon carried most of it up to the attic. Strangely, neither of them had changed out of the clothing they'd liberated from Vlad's house.

"You get it out of the Volvo and into the hall." He'd told Laura. "And I'll carry it up to the attic."

Agreed?"

"Agreed."

It all fitted into a surprisingly small space and looked just like any other attic junk, once he'd thrown a couple of paint stained dust sheets over it all.

"Think of it Laura! Enough local anaesthetic to last for decades."

“Doesn’t that stuff have use by dates ?”

“Pahhh, use by dates are for wimps !”

She was probably right, but he suspected its efficacy just began to degrade, rather than it becoming dangerous. Surely any level of anaesthesia was better being stitched up without any at all ? It had to be hidden though and the attic was the best place to keep it, alongside his small store of antique, yet lethal weapons.

“What next ?” Asked Laura. “Do we take the Volvo to the crushers ?”

Simon gave her, what he hoped was his most mischievous grin.

“Well, we should of course, but the police won’t be looking for it. How about you parking it a couple of streets away for now, leaving us time to properly go through the suit cases full of loot ?”

“I like the sound of that. Don’t start until I get back.”

“I won’t.”

She was back incredibly fast, shoving the keys for the old Volvo, into a drawer in the hall.

“How fast did you run Laura ? I hope you didn’t spook anyone.”

“No Simon, I’m not stupid. I ran fast, but not really fast.... You know ?!”

“Yeah, ok. We’ll carry the cases up to the spare bedroom.”

She was looking decidedly fed up.

“More lugging stuff about.” She said. “Can’t we do it in the lounge, with tea and toast ?”

“Supposing ‘they’ arrive Laura ?”

“Who ?”

“The ‘they’ who always turn up at the worst possible moment. It took me centuries to learn this stuff the hard way grasshopper, and you can hear it all for free.”

“Ok Guru Master, or whatever. Enlighten this unworthy one ?”

“You need a little paranoia to survive.” He said. “Always assume that some kind of highly malevolent deity is watching you. Do anything dodgy or even slightly illegal and that deity will make sure the police turn up.”

“Oh no Simon, not the Van Helsings ?!”

“You may scoff, but assuming the worst might just save your life. Supposing we had a sofa covered in stolen goodies and the meter man wanted to come in ?”

“It’s in a cupboard next to the front door, but I do see your point. Always assume the worst !”

“Ahh grasshopper, you are ready to leave the temple.”

The money was spread over the bed and there was a lot of it. Simon counted it into useable bundles, while Laura sorted out the jewellery.

“Five large Rolex watches.” She said. “Obviously stolen from his victims. Also two smaller ladies Rolex watches. Vlad didn’t strike me as cross dresser, there must have been a woman in his life once.”

“Yeah, going by her clothes, probably in the sixties or seventies and something happened to her.” He replied “All Rolex watches have a unique serial number, we should dump them.”

“But Simon, they’re gorgeous !”

“Ok, wrap them up and hide them somewhere, but not in the house.”

“Where then ?”

“Find a private place Laura. I once used a crypt in an old cemetery, no one goes near those. The gold jewellery can be sold for cash to be melted down.”

He could see she wanted to keep it all. He’d get Clara to talk to her, she had to learn the danger of keeping the things they stole. He put the last bundle of notes on the bed and smiled.

“Wow, just a few pounds short of four hundred thousand. I think you’re getting a brand new van.”

“Really ?!”

“Oh yes. I’ve no idea what make they use in those American cop shows, but I will personally find out and get you the deluxe version with all the trimmings.”

There was one of Clara’s useful eccentricities in a cupboard, a box full of supermarket bags, which she’d collected since the fifties.

“They’re handy Simon and cost five pence a time now.”

He used them to wrap the bundles of notes and put them back in the holdall they’d arrived in. Laura was wrapping up the jewellery, with some obvious reluctance.

“If anyone recognises something you’re wearing.....”

“I know Simon, the Van Helsings get interested and we never do anything that might make them excited. Do you know a jeweller who’ll buy it all ?”

“Yes, several who’ll pay cash with no questions asked. I’ll take you along and introduce you.”

Everything looked tidy before they left the bedroom, the cases stacked up beside a small wardrobe. It all looked ordinary, ready for whoever the evil deity might send round at any moment. Simon smiled to himself.

“What ?!” Asked Laura.

“Just pondering on what being a vampire has given me, besides immortality and a crappy job.”

“What did you come up with ?”

“Delusional psychosis ! I could get awards for it, paranoia too.”

They ended up in the kitchen, Laura looking out of the window, while he made coffee.

“Clara will be a while yet.” He said. “Do you want to call that cop, get it done ?”

“Maybe we should take the Volvo to Tom in Erith ?”

“Don’t avoid it Laura, call him.”

“I had his card, but.....”

“It’s in the back pocket of those awful flared jeans. I saw you put it there when we changed.”

“You saw me change ?”

“Yes, right after you walked in on Clara and myself in the shower ! Stop finding things to argue about and call him. He won’t forget about it !”

He kept close to her, close enough to see her dial a Central London number.

“Could I speak to detective Marcou please, Mike Marcou.”

“Yes, my name is Laura Selway and his is expecting my call.”

Simon thought that hoped was more accurate than expected. He’d been right to push her though. Eventually the police would find her present address and, if they were pissed off enough, might arrive with a search warrant. Laura had obviously been put through to Mike.

“Yes of course, or I could come to see you ?”

“Ok, let me give you my new address.”

He heard her give out their address, complete with postcode. It was the first time that any police officer had been given their address, or had any need to know it. He hoped it didn’t mean them having to move, he loved the house.

“When did you.....”

“Oh, ok, yes no problem. See you then.”

She disconnected her phone and simply stared at it for a few seconds.

“He’s coming today.” She said. “Around three this afternoon.”

“See Laura ! Now you’ll begin to believe in the cussedness of the universe.”

“Do we need to..... prepare or anything ?”

“No, we’re ready. The coffee stains in the sink, the odd musty smell near the radiator in the hallways, is all normal. We look normal ! Just keep your answers short and honest, where possible. Oh yes, and never volunteer information.”

“Like telling them I killed my boss and enjoyed seeing his head bounce off the car park floor ? Like that sort of information ?”

There was a slight extra green glint in her eyes.

“Ok, you had me for a second then,” he said, “but only for a second and I am tired.”

~ ~

Mabina Gladitch, it said on her ID, an NHS laminated badge. Just Mabina to anyone who knew her well, which was a small number. She’d had many jobs and careers over the centuries, yet always came back to medicine. Her passport, certificates and references were all false of course, but her medical skills were genuine. Mabina had probably saved more lives than she’d taken. Not that she cared about any kind of balancing the books, or cleansing of her Karma. She enjoyed killing, being a senior nurse, just paid the bills.

“Oh Roy, I knew your hubris would get you killed.” She muttered.

He was dead of course, her partner for more than seven hundred years. He’d never have allowed their home to be robbed, her jewellery taken, unless they’d killed him first. He was such a brave warrior, it was why she’d chosen him to turn into one her kind. A woman travelling on her own was an impossibility then, she’d needed a male companion. Still, you couldn’t share a bed for that long and not form a bond.

“A tear for you Roy, my first in..... maybe forever.”

A tiny amount of moisture in the corner of her left eye, she reached up and transferred it to the tip of her index finger. The fluid was milky, with a few yellow dots.

“I’m surprised it’s not rusty.”

Vampires in her home, she smelt them still. They’d stitched up their wounds, there were still tiny traces of blood between the floorboards. It had to be the vampire couple in North London, she knew of no others in the area. The disrespect ! To enter her home, steal her things, as though she was nothing. She’d once been a queen, ruling over a good half of the lands between the Danube and the Carpathians. She’d commanded armies of men, too numerous to count.

“Perhaps they thought you lived alone Roy ?”

They hadn’t found her secret places, or the hidden room in the attic. They had taken her sacred journal though, that enough had earned them centuries of pain. Roy’s death was going to cause potential instabilities in her life, which had to be dealt with.

“Then I will avenge you.” She muttered.

~ ~