

The Hornsey Vampires

(Season two of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 1 - Home

“Top predator, pinnacle of the food chain. Yet you’ve probably queued with one of them to get a coffee, without realising. They’re real, they’re dangerous, but they’re also very good at appearing to be..... Ordinary.”

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Simon Atherton had already drifted off into his thoughts about five times previously, maybe six. He’d carried on through Finsbury Park on the Piccadilly Line, having to get off and walk home from Turnpike Lane. Not a huge problem as their house in Hornsey wasn’t that much of a trudge up the hill from Turnpike Lane. Missing his stop was embarrassing though, even if no one else ever knew about it.

‘The next stop will be Finsbury Park.’

There was even a red LED screen to back up the voice, yet part of him still felt as though he was getting off the tube train too early. They’d lived in Wood Green for years, him and Clara, before becoming three with the arrival of Laura. The brain hardwires routine into the mind, the way a carthorse can find its way home if the driver falls asleep. It was worse with vampires for some reason.

“You use the old reptile brain more than humans, the basal ganglia.” Daniel had told him. “It’s one of the reasons you can react at the speed you do.”

Moving and reacting fast was nice, but he hated being a slave to routines. Yes, moving to Hornsey had been a good idea for many reasons.

“It’ll give us a fresh start, a clean slate.” Clara had said.

Simon walked up to the overground trains to travel the last part of his journey home. It was just a five minute trip on one of the rattily old trains, which were usually crowded. He liked it though for some reason, that few minutes travelling on what felt like a proper train.

“Another late night ?”

“Yeah, my boss has got me on the late shift again.”

“Still trying to sell phones to the huddled masses ?”

“Yep, rude huddled masses if you call them during Eastenders.”

They chuckled for a while until his train came in. He could use any train on that line, but the red head needed a Welwyn train. He’d been chatting to her on and off for three months, ever since his journey home had changed. He still didn’t know her name, but he knew she worked for an advertising company in Charlotte Street.

“I might see you tomorrow.” Said the red head.

“Monday you mean, it’s Friday.”

“Oh, yes.... Of course.”

He was awful at that kind of thing, small talk and asking people for things like names and a few personal details.

“Give a little of yourself Simon, then ask them something.” Clara had once told him.

Not that Clara had probably meant gorgeous thirty something red heads when she'd said that. With Clara and Patsy in his life, Simon didn't have the time or inclination to start up another relationship, or even a fling.

'Hornsey. This train is for all stations to Stevenage.'

The driver announcing the station rather than yet another irritating, far too perky automatic voice. Simon got off the train and finally managed to get into 'Friday Night and Chill' mode. It was a tradition another routine, the three of them getting a Thai meal and watching Netflix with a few beers, or a bottle or two of wine. Yes, it was yet another routine, but all three of them were vampires with that whole basal ganglia thing going on.

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Mabina Gladitch had to rest by leaning against the side of a mausoleum. She needed to be there, Brendan was strong and reasonably intelligent, but she couldn't trust him to collect the Psochic Bible. It was said there was no vampire bible, which was true. A secret group of occultists had studied her kind though and put their findings into their greatest work, the Psochic Bible.

"Damn it Brendan, I need your help." She hissed. "Make sure I'm alright before walking off."

"I'm sorry... You were so much stronger this morning."

Brendan Roche helped hold her up, taking most of her weight as they crossed the neglected West London cemetery. Brendan was the builder who'd come to repair a broken upstairs window. Not her first choice as a helper, but she was unwell and having to work with what life sent her way. She'd used quite a lot of her remaining strength to hold him down and drink a little of his blood. It was the simplest way to convince him that vampires were real. Convincing him to be her henchman in return for a promise of immortality had been easy, everyone wants to live forever.

"Over there Brendan.....The gravestone leaning over.... That's it, sit me on the grass. Oh, carefully you fool !"

"Sorry my queen."

"I'm alright.... This is the grave.... Go and get the tools."

He tried hard and learned quickly, she was even thinking of keeping her promise and turning him into a vampire one day. Helping her while carrying a flashlight had been hard enough, without carrying a bag full of tools. She watched him wander off to his battered old Fiat van, to grab the tool bag and a shovel.

"So polite even when I yell at him." She muttered. "I just might turn you Brendan, though it's likely you won't survive the attempt."

Mabina had returned from the dead the revivification preparations had worked, much to even her surprise. All the dead buried under the earth floor in her cellar, thousands of them. Her family had taught her the sacred ritual, but Mabina had assumed that was all it was, just a ritual. She'd died from two bullets in the head, her brains sprayed across the cellar. Her body had liquefied and seeped into the earth floor for over a year.

"Oh, the return was such agony, such sweet agony." She muttered.

She now knew there was a link between pleasure and pain. Her body had been healed by whatever dark forces looked after vampires and their kind. Her consciousness had returned while there were still millions of exposed nerves, all causing her unimaginable agony. Mabina had turned it inwards, letting herself immerse in the pain, treating it as a wonderful pleasure. Had that saved her sanity, or driven her mad ? There were times when that worried her.

"What went wrong though ? Why am I weak as a kitten ? Why do my joints cause me such pain ?"

"Sorry, were you asking me ?"

"No of course not." She snapped. "Dig Brendan, the answer may be buried with Samuel Westcott."

"Could you hold the flashlight my queen?"

"Oh, very well."

She had been a queen once; her realm had covered much of Romania and Northern Bulgaria. That had been many centuries ago, yet she still had hopes of reclaiming her lands and title.

"The ground is hard, but I brought a pick."

"Good Brendan, I can always rely on you."

Samuel Westcott had been buried in eighteen ninety one and it was unlikely the ground had been disturbed since then. Over a hundred and twenty winters had hardened the ground, aided by tree roots, various types of grasses and the inevitable London clay. Brendan was strong though, swinging the pick with apparent ease. Mabina wondered if those strong back muscles made him a good lover, though she'd wait until she was well to find out.

"No point in it if I can't enjoy it." She muttered.

"Sorry? I missed that."

"Just dig Brendan, just dig."

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Clara was in their bedroom, looking out into the street they all still didn't know that well. Quite by chance she saw Simon walking from the direction of Hornsey Station. Their new house had another floor, further to shout down the stairwell. Clara knew Laura would hear her, if she shouted loud enough. Vampires had good hearing, better than just about any living thing.

"I can see Simon coming Laura. Call the Thai place and tell them to hurry."

"Ok, they know my voice now. I think we're one of their best customers."

Clara closed the curtains and went back to her wardrobe, or rather one of her wardrobes. Simon could fit every stich of clothing he owned into one wardrobe, three drawers and a shelf in the airing cupboard. She had three wardrobes and was already using up space in the spare bedroom. Her clothes for a Friday night had to look as though she'd thrown any old thing on, but still look stunning. Difficult as the unofficial house uniform tended to be trainers, black jeans and a T shirt.

"It's all about accessorising." She muttered. "Like Temperance in Bones, the identity is all in the accessories."

"I love that show too." Yelled Laura.

Damn vampire hearing, it could be a real nuisance in a house three vampires called home. Daniel called them a coterie of vampires, but she thought that was a misuse of the word. She reached for her Aztec drawer, a mix of expensive jewellery and cheap junk. It all had a vaguely Aztec look about it though, her current preferred thing when it came to accessorising.

"Beer or wine on the table?" Called Laura.

"Yes, both."

"You lush."

A heavy necklace that overdid it a bit, an armful of bangles and the final touch... A scarf to tie her hair back. It was an old Liberties scarf, the sort of thing everyone loved in the 80s, but they were coming back into fashion... or so she convinced herself.

"Clara, are you ever going to be ready? I need to change."

Pest, but at least their surrogate daughter was growing up and causing fewer problems, though she still insisted on driving a black Chevrolet Suburban V8, which had been seriously pimped.

"On my way young lady, on my way down."

It was nice having a house with more space, though they nearly hadn't moved from Wood Green. The old house was like a security blanket, somewhere familiar where they all felt safe. There had been arguments into the night, with Simon wanting to move, her wanting to stay and poor Laura caught in the middle. In the end, Laura had been given the deciding vote.

"The police know this address, the Van Helsings." Laura had said. "All my fault and I'm sorry, but you've both told me so often that the attention of the police must always be avoided. Well, they had this house under surveillance for weeks..... By your rules, we have to move."

Not the sort of moonlight flit and identity burning Simon and her had done before. They moved like respectable ordinary people, giving out new address information and even getting on the electoral register in Hornsey.

"You only have to move three streets away in London and you vanish." Simon had said. "Even though we're telling banks and utilities our new address, it's still a new start. Like getting a new email address, it's amazing how much crap and spam just goes away."

It was a slightly weird analogy, but they all did feel that a lot of past baggage had been left behind in Wood Green.

"Clara."

"Yes."

"Can you grab my phone on the way down. I think it's on my bed."

"Ok."

Clara loved the way Laura had done her room up. It was a wonderful eclectic chaos, with posters of Stevie Nicks, next to Dua Lipa and Kylie. It looked the sort of room any sixteen year old girl would love and Laura really was still only twenty five. A genuine twenty five, with a birth certificate to prove it. The reason the house had been bought in her name was largely due to her being the only one of them with valid ID documents. They weren't big on birth certificates when Clara had been born about five hundred and twenty years ago.

"We'll put the house in your name and Clara and I will officially be tenants. If anyone wants to move, we can sell the place and work something out." Simon had said.

"I'll never want to leave, ever."

Clara believed her, they had become a family, even if it was sometimes a very dysfunctional family. Clara arrived downstairs just as Simon opened the door.

"Hello dear, have a good day at the office?"

"No, it was crap."

"Never mind, Thai food is on the way."

"Beer or wine Simon?" Laura asked from their new larger kitchen.

"Yes, both and by the gallon."

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Mabina must have drifted off for a while, another symptom of her incomplete resurrection. If she was tired a kind of brain fog could rob her of hours and she'd been tired all day.

"I've reached the coffin and it's intact. Amazing after all those years."

Brendan had created a heap of soil which seemed to be enough to fill ten graves. He was currently down there, in the hole with the coffin.

"The Westcotts were a wealthy family, only the best for Samuel." She said. "The best hardwood coffin, pumped full of preservatives. It'll still look as good as it does now in another hundred years."

"I'll need to break the lid to get it open."

"Then break it..... Just don't damage anything inside the coffin."

“Did you know this Samuel Westcott ?” He asked.

“Only by reputation Brendan and a few notes in a journal found on a dead vampire.”

“Did you kill them ?”

“You’re forgetting your place..... Get the coffin open.”

“Yes my queen.”

The problem was that the journal had been vague and such notes left by vampires were often inaccurate. Her recently departed husband Roy had killed the vampire during the blitz. There had been something about that particular journal though, almost an aura of authenticity.

“It’s coming, almost open my queen..... Oh that stink.”

“You never struck me as the squeamish kind.”

Poor Brendan was rubbing his nose and looking disgusted by what was in the coffin. She knew there was a misconception that an embalmed corpse never rotted or stank. No matter how good the embalming every body stank after being in the ground for over a hundred years. Add on a nice solid coffin to hold the corruption snugly inside... She heaved herself when the full aroma of death hit her nostrils.

“Oh Christ ! What am I looking for my queen ?”

“Anything you wouldn’t expect to find in a coffin. Don’t be squeamish, push the body about and look down the sides..... Oh Brendan, stop pulling faces. The stench of death will come off in the shower.”

Mabina didn’t really know what container the Psochic Bible might have been placed in, or even if it was there at all. Their endeavours that night were based on rumours and the journal of a vampire who’d died during the Second World War. That and her own knowledge that occultists often tried to take their most treasured objects with them. Like ancient Egyptian pharaohs, they liked their treasures to be buried with them.

“I need to get a facemask, I’ve a few in the van.”

“Man up Brendan..... Immortality isn’t for wimps.”

She peered over the edge of the hole and he wasn’t even looking into the coffin. Brendan was looking at the side of the grave, while using his hands to feel around the corpse. Mabina saw his hand hit something metallic and move on.

“There, there Brendan..... You were right on top of it you idiot... There, between his feet.”

“I’m covered in bits of.....Oh.”

“It will wash off..... Now hand it up to me.”

Brendan was throwing up, but luckily not until after he’d handed her a heavy metal box. It was about the right size to hold such a book and someone had made a good job of soldering up any gaps.

“Lead Brendan, they had the good sense to use lead.... The contents should still be in perfect condition.”

No good, he was still retching, while wiping his fingers on his trousers. So much fuss over a bit of dead tissue and a little bodily fluid. Still, she left him in peace until he was calmer and sat on the edge of the open grave.

“Shall we open it now ?” He asked.

“No, we might damage the contents. We’ll need proper tools and somewhere with decent lighting. You can open it very carefully, when we get back to my house.”

He was on his feet and walking towards her.

“I’ll help you back to the van.”

“Not yet Brendan, there is the hole... It needs the soil putting back. Then you can take me home.”

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Friday night was Laura's idea of heaven. Far too much to eat and drink, followed by a few hours of old TV from a streaming service. Netflix used to be their favourite, but Amazon were now showing the full series of Buffy and Angel. It was odd, but they all loved watching films and TV shows centred around vampires, even Simon.

"I love this stuff..... Hokum but wonderful hokum." Said Simon.

"Why did Dru put up with Spike for so long?" Asked Clara.

To Laura Sunnydale looked a bit too middle class and a bit too white to be credible. All the girls were pretty and slim and all the guys were hunks. That did just about sum up popular TV in the late 90s though.

"I saw one of the neighbours this morning." She said.

"Which one, were they friendly?" Asked Clara.

"The lady two doors further down the hill. She smiled but never said a word."

"Perfect, we obviously chose the right area." Said Simon. "If we'd gone to Winchmore Hill they'd have been on the doorstep with welcome cake and wanting to know all our business."

"Cynical Simon, but probably right." Said Laura.

"I know I'm right. Most of what people call being a good neighbour is just being downright nosey."

Laura exchanged a look with Clara, they both knew Simon would have loved to live like Daniel. A small holding in the Parish of Udny with just one neighbour within five miles, was probably Simon's idea of heaven. Laura was often amazed that someone who called strangers on the phone all day, could be such a would-be recluse.

"Oh, look at that....That snake thing is obviously a guy in a monster suit." Said Clara.

"Come on Buffy, stab it with something." Added Simon.

"I talk about this show so much at the hotel, that Sofia on the front desk watches it now." Said Laura.

"Yes, Angel is good too, but can be too serious sometimes." Said Clara.

They both still worked at the same hotel. Still underpaid, overworked and underappreciated. So far though, the hotel hadn't made any serious noises about seeing a national insurance number for Clara, or asked her to sign anything for the tax man. Jobs with a lax attitude to official paperwork and employment regulations were worth more than gold to a vampire.

"Anyone want more wine? Shall I open another bottle?" Asked Clara.

"It's Friday night, there is always a need for more wine." Said Simon.

"Yes, ditto what he said." Added Laura.

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Daniel wasn't anywhere near his small holding near Pitmedden in the Parish of Udny. It was the early hours of Saturday morning and he was in Aberdeen, actively hunting for his next meal. It was only his third kill as a vampire and he was still learning the ropes. He'd listened to Clara's tips and rules, which had kept her safe for over five hundred years.

"You need to be an equal opportunities killer Daniel." She'd told him. "Black, white and every shade in between. Every religion, every gender. Simon has gone home with a few gay guys to stir up the data pool of the missing. Build a pattern and the police will begin to take an interest. Move around too, never just hunt in the same few streets. Mabina's husband was almost caught by hunting the same type of women in the same district."

"Almost a pity you three killed him."

"Take it seriously Daniel, the police are better than they were when Mabina's husband came to London. There's CCTV everywhere, mass data collection and facial recognition software. If your picture gets onto a police list of 'wrong'uns, you might as well leave the country."

"I do appreciate your help Clara, but I taught you a lot of this."

"Yes you did, so why have both your kills been drunken men coming out of the same kebab shop?"

Simon had muttered at him about it too and of course they were right. There had been the excuse that he'd only had two kills and the third would probably be a woman in Dundee. There he was though back in the same street in Aberdeen, his newly purchased van parked in a nearby street. He'd checked the area for CCTV during the day and found none, not even in the kebab place. Daniel had even worn a hoody, which he kept pulled across his face.

"Everyone has a smartphone these days Daniel," Clara had said, "and they know how to use the video recorder function."

He was listening to Clara and learning, so why couldn't he be more diverse in his hunts? The simple truth was that he couldn't imagine killing a woman. It went against his whole sense of morality.... Actually if he was honest with himself it was more a code of behaviour he'd followed for many centuries. Not the same as a moral choice, but just as crippling for a new vampire with a need to feed.

"Next time I will go to Dundee and find a different kebab shop." He muttered. "I'll wait for a brown skinned guy to come out, or a butch looking woman, maybe."

Daniel had been known as Isaac Laquedem for more centuries than he liked to remember. The wandering Jew some called him, he was even mentioned in one of the lesser known books of the Old Testament.

"Why the name Daniel?" Laura had once asked him.

"I don't honestly remember, but one name is as good as another."

He often felt it was strange that he, the legendary immortal wandering Jew, had ended up as a power seller on Ebay, selling cheap electronics under the trading name of Udney Electronics. It brought in enough cash to keep his small holding running though and give him a comfortable life.

"That one will do, the world will never miss him." He muttered.

The man was drunk, but so was just about everyone coming out of the shop with a kebab in their hands. His choice looked to be about forty, with a bald spot and a scruffy beard. He was trying to text someone, while eating a kebab and cross the road. Luckily the driver of a passing car wasn't drunk and stopped in time. There followed a brief exchange of insults, before the drunk was wobbling in roughly the direction of Daniel's new van.

"I hate cars Clara, loathe them. But I can see how it makes the whole feeding and disposal business a lot easier."

The drunk was trying to text again and dropped his phone. There must be a special God to look after drunks. The phone had hit a paving slab from about three or four feet, yet obviously still worked.

"I'm just cleansing the gene pool a little." Daniel muttered.

He knew his attempt at justifying a kill was nonsense; he'd had a few discussions with Simon about it in the past.

"There is no balancing the books Simon, no set of karmic scales. You need to feed on blood, human blood. Your kills are no worse than a hunter killing a deer to feed his family. It isn't right or wrong, just a necessity for staying alive."

Despite all that, Daniel found it easier to think of the approaching drunk as a member of the underclass, a wastrel, someone whose death would improve the world. He knew it was self-deception, but it made him feel much better.

Daniel had long felt his life had no purpose and had asked Clara to turn him into a vampire. His motivation was far more complex than that, but he was now a vampire with a hunger for blood.

“Wow those trainers are falling apart.” Said Daniel. “I’ve got new ones in my van, genuine Nike. Some are only a tenner.”

The same words had worked well with his first kill from the kebab shop; drunks seem to love a bargain. Daniel had changed the script to cheap knockoff watches for his second kill, but that had needed more of a conversation with his victim than he was comfortable with. Sadly the drunk with the phone and kebab was a fighting drunk, the sort who wants to fight anyone for just about any reason.

“Fucking queer.”

The drunk dropped his kebab and took a swing with his right fist. Daniel had always been big and quite intimidating. Simon had once told him he looked like something left behind, a missing link between modern man and his primate ancestors. Daniel hadn’t been insulted; he’d often thought the same thing. Even before becoming a vampire he could have dealt with the drunk, now it was embarrassingly easy.

“Please don’t be a respectable man with a wife and six chubby kids.” Daniel muttered.

Daniel struck with minimum force and precisely aimed blows. The first to the solar plexus to make the drunk drop his phone and gasp for air. A second blow to the chin left him with an unconscious drunk to shove into his fan. There was an important step before feeding though; smart phones had a nasty habit of broadcasting the user’s location to a huge number of organisations. He stamped on the phone until was the broken remnants of an iPhone. The debris went down the nearest drain.

“Now I can feed.”

The first two kills had been messy and the inside of the van had looked like a scene from a slasher movie. He’d been too eager to feed and hadn’t held his victim down properly.

“Get your fangs in their neck and they quieten down.” Clara had told him. “Until then you have to use your strength. No holding back Daniel, use all your strength if you have to.”

Luckily the drunk was unconscious and likely to remain that way for a while. Tempting to look in the man’s wallet for an ID, perhaps a few pictures of his family. That way led to too much regret though and mental torture. Laura always thanked her victims after they were dead, which he understood, even if it was a bit weird.

“Thank you, whoever you are.” He muttered.

Daniel felt vulnerable as he leant in to bite, which was probably why the previous feeds had been so messy. He closed his eyes and remained calm, as he felt for a pulse with his lips. There, that was where he needed to sink his fangs. Once they’d penetrated the skin the victim became docile, drugged with a mild neurotoxin unique to vampires.

“Oh, that is so good....Almost as good as sex.”

The first taste of blood was almost like a drug, he felt as though he was intoxicated. Actually he was a little tipsy, one of the perils of feeding on drunks. Laura had told him nothing could compare to the rush of feeding on his first kill, though he’d keep hoping it would.

“It’s like an addiction, a search for something to match that first wonderful high. Though sadly you’ll never find it.” Simon had told him.

Daniel drank, almost a full gallon of hot delicious blood. Far more than any human stomach could hold, but he was no longer a human and his body had changed. After feeding he curled up into a foetal position and waited for the feeling of drugged euphoria to subside.

“Oh, how I love being a fucking vampire.”

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It had taken a long time in the shower and some of the Roy's aftershave which was still in the bathroom cabinet, before Brendan no longer smelt of death and decay. Mabina found him some of Roy's casual clothes, which fitted him surprisingly well. It was nearly four in the morning before they were in her home trauma centre, looking at the sealed lead box. Being in the medical profession for centuries was useful in so many ways, if you were a vampire. She'd placed four expensive electric cutting tools out on the table.

"These can cut through bone in seconds, so be careful." She said. "Wear a mask, lead can be a deadly poison."

"You should wear a mask too."

"My physiology is different to yours. Very little can harm me."

"But you're unwell.... Please wear a mask Mabina."

He rarely used her first name, only if he was trying to get her attention. Mabina nodded at him and put on a surgical mask.

"Don't damage the contents Brendan, or I'll..... Just be careful."

Brendan ran one of her expensive electric saws across the solder on one side and it worked, far better than she'd hoped. The saw was probably ruined, but that could be replaced. Some of the solder had dropped away, leaving a thin surgical cut in the lead.

"That was easy."

"Don't get cocky Brendan. Now do the other side."

The box reminded her of a Zippo lighter, the top was obviously supposed to lift off. Brendan ran the saw right round the box about three times. He then gently pulled at the top.....

"It won't budge..... Probably just needs a thump with a hammer."

"The contents are fragile Brendan and priceless."

"And they've survived over a hundred years of being buried in the ground."

"Good point Brendan, a very good point."

Mabina had a surgical hammer in a drawer. Expensive of course, but her bone saw was already useless for its intended purpose. Brendan took it off her, but obviously wasn't happy.

"It's a bit light my queen."

"Try it..... Try it very carefully."

She cringed at the sound of metal hitting metal, as he used the hammer. Brendan pulled at the top of the box and it came away, to reveal the top of a cloth bag.

"Give it to me..... Now, give it to me."

Mabina felt the cloth and it was dry, a sniff told her there was no mildew. Being sealed up in lead seemed to have worked, keeping the ravages of time at bay. She pulled the bag out and opened it, revealing a book about the same size as the King James Bible in her study.

"It looks almost new." Said Brendan.

She opened the book and carefully flicked through a few pages. Each page was perfect, written by hand, there were even a few illuminated letters. It was what she was looking for the almost legendary Psochic Bible.

"The Psochic Bible Brendan, created by a long dead occultist as a record of centuries of study by his order."

"Is it what you were looking for?"

"Yes, look at it Brendan, isn't it truly beautiful?"

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