

## Clara Copley

(Season five of London's Night Stalkers)

### Chapter 1 - Firstborn

*Q'ua'umatz the great serpent was dead. The ancient God who'd created the world had grown tired of his creation and had intended to destroy it. He was gone now, destroyed by Laura. Actually, as Laura kept correcting people and saying, Q'ua'umatz had ceased to exist.*

*Destroying a God though, that was certain to have consequences. A minion of the Gods had mentioned huge and terrible consequences, but the minions had been known to exaggerate. Meanwhile.....Clara was concerned about more personal matters.....*

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#### **~ Sat in the lounge of the house in Hornsey ~**

"I have a need to be useful." Said Niña. "Laura mentioned finding food for you. I could help with that and in the process, get to know you better. I want us to be friends."

Food, only the young vampire girl from Italy would describe their kills as food. Clara needed a lot of blood for the child in her womb, a lot more blood that she usually obtained by a kill every couple of months. Laura was hunting and sedating humans for her, at the rate of one a week. All sorts and varieties of humans, Clara's growing child needed their blood. For a vampire, everything was about the blood.

"You are useful, Niña." Said Clara. "If you want to hunt, go out with Laura. London in the twenty first century is very different to Florence at the time of the Medici. Let Laura show you how to hunt safely, before you go out alone."

"Cameras, yes.....Laura has shown me what she calls CCTV." Said Niña. "I now wear a hoody of some kind, every time I go out. She also warned me about the police, the Van Helsing's as she calls them. I must never kill a Van Helsing, as their gang is huge and very powerful."

"The biggest gang in London." Said Clara. "Learning isn't all about fighting though; has Laura shown you how to order food online ? There is a plastic card next to the phone."

"Oh yes, I know how to order takeaway food." Said Niña. "I especially love Thai Food.....We had nothing like that in Florence. Laura has shown me how to see Netflix on the flat screen. Such wonders you have in your time."

Niña didn't seem to have a last name and Giovanni had named her Niña. She was the baby of the house, their Niña. A young human girl in a house with two vampires. It was a miracle she'd survived. Had the street urchin Simon and Giovanni had taken in, ever had a given name ? Probably not, but she'd need some paperwork to survive in modern day London. Niña Copley maybe, a baby sister who'd come to live with her big sister. Clara would ask Noah about a passport and birth certificate; he seemed to know everyone crooked in North London.

"Do you miss home, Niña ?" Asked Clara.

"Sometimes..... Though I prefer jeans and a T shirt to the clothes I used to wear."

"You may be here forever." Said Clara. "It's important that you find a way to be happy in this age."

"I have to be useful." Said Niña. "You have Simon to thank for that. He was always telling me to find a way to be useful. There must be something I can do for you ?"

It was nice having the young vampire around. Laura was living in the house, but much of her life revolved around her relationship with Tim. Mabina had agreed to be the midwife at the birth of her child, but she was working again, full time for her local hospital. Not that Clara thought of Mabina as an ordinary vampire, but that was a long story. Clara liked having a female vampire around as a friend, but Niña was right.....She did need a proper role in the house....A purpose.

“When were you most happy in Florence ?” Asked Clara. “What where you doing then ?”

“Simon turned me into a vampire to save my life, I was dying from the flux; it was a particularly bad epidemic that year. I was so ill with it, almost certain to die. He bit me and had me drink his blood. It worked and I became a creature of the shadows. Can I be honest with you ?”

“Of course, Niña, I’ll tell no one what you tell me.” Said Clara.

Clara could see it in her now, the vulnerable street urchin who the two vampires had taken into their home. Clara had never understood their motivation, but now she could. Simon had once told her that Niña had been his one truly good deed. Just one good thing to go on the scales against all the bad things he’d done.

“I was most happy when Simon and Giovanni let me run their house.” Said Niña. “I bought their food; made their meals....I even washed their clothes. I was good guard too, keeping the doors shut against undesirables. I hit one with an axe once. That was all before the flux arrived and I became.....As I am. If you want me to be happy, let me run this house for you.”

“I almost want to kiss you.....Are you sure ?” Asked Clara.

“Yes, I am.”

“Alright.” Said Clara. “.....You can order things online and there are several car drivers to run you around. Quite quickly, we’ll need to get you a driving license and arrange a few driving lessons. You’ll soon be hurtling off to Morrisons on your own.”

“Great....What is a Morrisons ?” Asked Niña.

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### ~ Shopping for maternity items with Patsy ~

Patsy Smart had begun calling the spare bedroom in the Hornsey house, the nursery. She’d recently noticed that everyone was doing it, including Laura. Clara might not have forgiven Patsy for sleeping with Simon, but it hadn’t been mentioned for a while. Patsy knew Clara wanted her as a friend, when she’d told her something no one else knew, not anyone in the group, apart from her.

“I’m carrying a boy child, Patsy.” Clara had said. “That is not to be told to anyone. I don’t need a scan to know the sex of my child and that it is having a hard time in my womb. My vampire body, my physiology as Daniel calls it, is fighting what it views as an invader. Yet, the child grows within me and fights back. It shouldn’t survive, but it does. Perhaps it is a miracle granted by some dark deity ? In truth, it is probably something to do with the Jade figurine that seems to have allowed me to conceive. Whatever is going on.....I’m finding it very tiring. I’d appreciate it if you’d purchase what’s needed for the maternity room, the nursery as you call it. Will you do that for me ?”

“Yes, of course I will.....Do you have a list ?”

“I do and not just my list.” Clara had told her. “Mabina has a few items needed for the actual birth. If that wasn’t enough, Daniel has requested a few machines that go ping, as he calls them. It’s not the traditional list of baby thing; we’re building a small maternity ward.....Still want to do it ?”

Patsy had worked at Hayle’s Motor Factors for years, going from being the only girl on the sales counter, to chief buyer. She’d taught herself all about car spares and compared to that, a few baby bits would be a doddle. Not that she knew what half the machinery did, but Daniel had included a lot of information on the list.

"I'll treat it as challenge." Patsy had replied. "Some of these things sound expensive. Just a hint that I'll need a large amount of cash, or a Beryllium level card of some kind."

Was there a Beryllium level ? Patsy had heard it mentioned on a Sci-Fi show and thought it sounded cool. Clara would know what she meant.

"I'll get you duplicate cards for three of my bank accounts, Patsy. There's more than enough money in them to buy everything on the list, twice over."

Patsy had taken time off from work, for personal leave as she'd told her boss. Of course he'd asked her why, which seemed to go against the whole idea of personal days. She'd stood her ground and eventually he'd agreed to her taking a few weeks off, to do whatever personal things she needed to do. If they ever started sarcasm leave, her boss would never be in the office. In his defence, he was giving her time off at full pay.

"GDR Medical Equipment.....Well, I found the place." Patsy muttered.

A small industrial estate to the north of Hatfield and the building looked a bit neglected. Offices upstairs, with the warehouse below. Patsy had visited quite a few such places, when she'd been buying for Hayle's. None of those had been selling medical machines that went ping. Patsy pressed the call button on the entry phone.

"Patsy Smart.....You are expecting me."

Set yourself up as a doctor and lots of official bodies would be queuing up to look at you credentials, or at least Patsy hoped they would. Want to set up your own mini-hospital and that was fine; no verification of anything seemed to be required. Patsy had even seen an MRI machine in one company's catalogue. Just the thing for a reclusive billionaire with hypochondria. The door buzzed and opened, allowing Patsy to go up the stairs to the office.

"Patsy.....It's all boxed up and ready to go. Once we've taken care of the payment."

There were quite a few boxes; Patsy had hired a small van for the day. She'd been promised there'd be a few strong lads to get it all in the van. At the other end, there'd be at least one very strong vampire to get the boxes into the nursery. Strangely, no one was letting Clara carry anything, yet she could probably pick up a heavyweight boxer and throw them across the street.

"Oh, I have to get one of those for above the crib." Said Patsy.

It was a mobile, a large number of quite delicately painted fairies; all held on several thin slats of wood. Everything was so well balanced that blowing on the structure, caused the whole thing to move about.

"Considering the amount you've bought, I'll throw in the mobile." Said the sales guy.

"Is it your child ?" Asked an office girl.

"No, my boss is expecting." Said Patsy. "She wants to be prepared."

Prepared to give birth to what was supposed to be an impossibility, but the office full of curious people, didn't need to know that. Daniel had called Clara a very elderly primigravida, which Patsy had looked up. It meant quite old for a first child. That was an understatement; Clara wasn't far off being five hundred and thirty years old. Not that Daniel had been to London yet. Everything had been done by phone calls, emails and sending blood and urine samples, in tracked jiffy bags.

"How long has she got to go ?" Asked another office girl.

"She's just showing, so probably about five months to go." Said Patsy.

Oh, that number had nearly caused a permanent rift between Clara and Mabina. Mabina had insisted the pregnancy would be fast, supercharged was the word that had been used.

"Four months and you'll be a mother." Mabina had told Clara.

Daniel had analysed blood and urine samples, to come up with a vastly different number.

“Everything is progressing exactly like a normal human pregnancy.” Daniel had said. “Assuming you’re right about when the child was conceived, you should have the usual nine month pregnancy.” Neither side would budge and although Mabina was still going to be the midwife, it was obvious that Clara had greater trust in Daniel. He’d been invited to London for the big day and he’d accepted the invitation.

“Hasn’t she had an ultrasound ?” Asked an office girl. “She should you know, it’s important. They can give her a pretty good idea of when the baby will be born.”

“She has to get a scan.” Said another girl. “They can see if everything is alright.”

Like Clara’s womb trying to dissolve the foetus, while some left over mojo from a jade figurine, constantly healed it. No, there was never going to be an appointment for Clara Copley to get an NHS scan of her child. Just as the group of worried office girls were becoming a bit shrill, the sales guy must have seen the bill for what Patsy was buying.

“Now.....Now.....I’m sure anyone spending so much on a home maternity setup, must be really concerned about her child.” He said.

As order was restored, Patsy caught a glimpse of how much she’d be expected to pay. Clara could afford it, but it was a hell of a lot of money. The sales guy must have seen the expression on her face.

“We don’t normally stock toys like the mobile.” Said the sales guy. “We had a sales rep in.....Could sell fridges to Eskimos. I had a few bits off him.....I’ll happily throw in two more free toys for when the little one is born.”

“That’s really nice, thank you.” Said Patsy.

Patsy used Clara’s card, to pay what looked like a King’s ransom for the medical equipment. She then looked over the toys and chose a small stuffed polar bear and a crib blanket covered in the faces of cartoon characters. Clara’s child would be born a full blood vampire. Did vampires like stuffed toys and cartoon creatures ? Patsy hoped so.

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### ~ Laura’s lock up near Green Lanes ~

Laura opened up the lockup and had the same feeling of love she always had. Her original customised van had been shiny black, with several coats of gloss to make it shine. She’d had flames painted around the rear, alloy wheels.....The works, or at least as much as she could afford at the time. Simon had called it a cop magnet, an invitation for a routine stop by the police....A pull as it was known. Strangely, Laura had never had been stopped by the cops, not once. She’d been pulled in her new van, but only twice.

“Are you sure you want to come, Tim ?” She asked. “I might grab anyone from a sweet old lady to a junkie sleeping it off under a railway bridge. I know you can get upset.”

“I know Clara needs the blood.” Said Tim. “Clara is family, so I’ll help you do what needs to be done. Ignore me if I get moody.....I’m definitely on team Clara.”

They’d had the full talk about all blood being good blood, several times. There were a few rare exceptions that proved the rule; which Laura thought was a nonsensical phrase. On the whole, vampires were immune to human diseases and maladies. No cancer scare either and she could swallow most poisons with impunity. It meant that all blood was good blood; vampires could feed on anyone, with any disease.....With no ill effects. Simon claimed to have once drained the blood of a leper.

“Fine.....We hunted in N7 last night, so tonight will be N8.” Said Laura.

“That’s where we live.” Said Tim.

“We can’t avoid Hornsey, that would be spotted as a pattern.” Said Laura. “We’ll just keep to the Crouch End part of the postcode.”

Keep it random, Simon had told her. No pattern to the kills, or the area being hunted. No pattern to the socioeconomic types you hunted and especially.....No avoiding her own gender. If they had blood, they were a valid target.

“Work to a pattern and the Van Helsings will notice.” Simon had taught her. “Keep everything as random as you can.”

The lockup Laura used was in a nice quiet street off Green Lanes, just a few minutes’ walk from the house. She drove her van out and relocked the doors. Her new van had the same black finish, sprayed over with layers of lacquer. It glinted under street lights. Again she’d gone for expensive alloy wheels. The big change from her old van, was flames that went the entire length of her van. It should have been pulled every night, but it wasn’t. Even Laura had no idea why. If she’d been a bored traffic cop, she’d have pulled it over. There had been work done to the van’s engine, it roared into life as she started it up, like a wild tiger ready for the hunt.

“Grab the street maps and pick a street in Crouch End.” Said Laura. “We’ll work out from there on foot.....The usual spiral outwards.”

“More avoiding patterns.....Isn’t it all a bit over the top ?” Asked Tim.

“Ask Mabina about how she was nearly caught.” Said Laura. “She thought there was no harm in hunting close to her house in Chelsea. The Van Helsings aren’t stupid, Tim. They spotted the pattern and used plain clothes patrols at night. She was almost caught while feeding. So no.....I’m not being over the top.”

“Sorry.” Said Tim. “Christchurch Road looks good.....Our favourite type of street. A quiet street, a long street in the suburbs. A street that doesn’t lead to anywhere, or come from anywhere. Just lots and lots of ordinary houses. It’s less than a mile from the house.”

“That’ll do.....Now; do I need to go through the rules of the hunt again ?” Asked Laura.

“Oh no, I’m sorry for the over the top comment.” Said Tim. “Please don’t make me go through all the rules again.....Please.”

Tim was mortal, a normal human. Not that vampires were really immortal. The lifestyle, the need for blood, the hatred usually felt for other vampire coteries. It all meant that one day a sword to the heart, or a bullet in the brain....Would finish her off. It might be the next day, or a hundred years from now, but Laura accepted that vampire immortality just meant a much longer life than the average human. Dating an ordinary human could be problematic, but she was used to Tim. Laura even had feelings she still didn’t understand, but might mean she loved Tim Chance.

“You’ve survived a lot since we’ve been together.” Said Laura. “That must mean you’re doing something right. Just remember the main rules and of course.....We never hunt the holy. No priests, vicars and Imams.....Nuns too. All holy men and women are out of bounds.”

“You’ve mentioned that before, but I assumed it was just a tradition.” Said Tim.

Laura had decided to turn onto Green Lanes, which had been a mistake. The traffic heading for Crouch End at ten in the evening, was nose to tail.

“You’ll find few vampires who believe in much, but they all know to never feed on the clergy. I must have told you about Simon and poor Ludmilla ?” Asked Laura.

“No, you’ve told me quite a few anecdotes about Simon.” Said Tim. “I’ve a good memory and you’ve never mentioned this Ludmilla before. Who was she ?”

“You’re sure.....It was one of the first things Simon told me about.”

"I'm sure.....The traffic is dreadful, so we have time." Said Tim. "So, tell me the entire gory tale ? I'm assuming it will be something gory ?"

"Careful what you wish for, Tim." Said Laura. "I was a new born vampire, but I had never been squeamish as a human. Ludmilla's ghastly fate, gave me a few sleepless nights."

"I'll risk it." Said Tim.

"Simon travelled with three other vampires then, wild people from Prague. They all believed that all the rules about anything holy were nonsense." Said Laura. "It was a bad winter that year, even vampires beginning to suffer from the cold. Simon's group had taken shelter in a small village church. There was no problem until Ludmilla was hungry the next morning and decided to feed on the priest. I can tell you Simons words; feeding on holy ground is something to avoid."

"Stop teasing me." Said Tim. "What happened to Ludmilla ?"

"Me tease ? I never tease. She fed on the priest and Simon saw her die as the priest died. From what he said, it wasn't pretty ! Her death was nasty and slow. From what I heard, I wouldn't wish her death on my worst enemy. Trust me ! You don't want to hear the details."

"I do want to know the details." She said. "Tell me Laura, tell me everything ?!"

"Oh, poor Ludmilla ! I'm not trying to scare you, that kind of death is almost unknown. Putrefaction of bodily tissues, while the victim is still alive for most of it ! Simon said she was screaming, while she still had lungs to scream with."

"Shit.....Your lesson worked." Said Tim. "We stay away from anywhere holy, all the time. No chance of you accidentally feeding on a priest and.....Putrefaction while alive. Fuck that must have hurt her."

"I have been to a couple of weddings while a vampire; it's sort of expected and inescapable. I just totally avoid any member of the clergy, while I'm in the church. Actually, one was in a synagogue, I had to wear something on my head." Said Laura.

"You were right.....I will have trouble sleeping tonight." Said Tim.

"Here we are, the top end of Christchurch Road." Said Laura. "I'll park where I can and we'll hunt on foot. Do you remember rule four ?"

"Was it about not getting caught ?" Asked Tim.

"Very funny.....Rule four; I get to say who we sedate and take to Clara." Said Laura. "We'll walk towards Crouch Hill and look for likely targets."

Laura locked her van and gave it a gentle stroke, as though it was a pet cat. She loved her van with its wonderful paint job. Like all vampires, Laura wasn't really into anxiety as a pass time. Sometimes she worried about Tim getting hurt, but aside from him, her biggest worry was her van. She dreaded coming back to where she'd parked and finding an empty stretch of road.

"I think it's getting a little misty." Said Tim. "Perfect hunting weather."

"Pull your hoody up further.....I can see too much of your face."

Laura adjusted it for him. It gave her an excuse to get up close and give him a quick kiss on the lips.

"Be careful." Said Laura.

"You too." Said Tim.

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### ~ The Hornsey House ~

Mabina Gladitch wasn't angry about Clara believing Daniel, instead of her. Mabina had forgiven her and Simon for killing her husband, so a little lack of trust wasn't that huge a problem. Daniel was an authority on vampire physiology, or rather the best person they knew on the subject. It was just that Mabina had been through years of NHS training as a nurse. True, they only had human patients for

her to work on, but it should have counted for more trust than Clara had shown her. Daniel was probably right about the nine month gestation period, but.....Mabina felt unappreciated, but at least she was still going to be the midwife at the birth. Daniel would be there, but only to monitor the various pieces of medical apparatus. Clara had promised her. The gig was hers, as Clara had put it.....

“Sorry if you had to wait.” Said Clara. “I knew someone would be here to let you in.”

“You’re still working, Clara ? I assumed you’d be resting at home until the birth.”

“When Cyril heard I was back in London, he invited me to his office for a chat.” Said Clara. “It seems he hired a new head of security for the night clubs, but they didn’t last very long. He offered me a good rate of pay, so I’m back working for Cyril H Carter.”

There had been bleeding, though that had to be under control. It still seemed bizarre to Mabina that Clara was going out to work. It wasn’t exactly an ordinary nine to five job either. Cyril had needed an enforcer and vampires made good enforcers. Mabina still wasn’t sure if Cyril knew what Clara really was.

“But the problems.....Are you sure it’s safe to go out to work ?” Asked Mabina.

“Safe.....What sane person wants a life that’s boring and safe ?” Asked Clara. “Noah is my driver and he’s built like the proverbial brick outhouse. I always take another guy with us. If anyone needs thumping, I point them at who to thump. As for the problems.....I still bleed, but I’ve got very good with period pants and feminine hygiene products. I never realised how many feminine hygiene products there were, until I started searching on the net. I still bleed, but I’ve got very good at handling it, and.....I don’t get in a panic.”

“Can I be honest, one old friend to another ?” Asked Mabina.

“Fine, but we’ll talk in the kitchen.” Said Clara. “I desperately need coffee and at least one bacon sandwich, maybe two.”

Niña was in the kitchen, nibbling at a cinnamon swirl and reading an enormous hardback book. Clara seemed to like the girl, but to Mabina, she seemed a very strange young vampire.

“Ignore Niña; she’s studying history.....Modern history.” Said Clara.

“Starting from Napoleon.....The Victorians look interesting.” Said Niña. “There are fresh pastries in the fridge.”

“Hmmmmm.....No, I set my heart on a bacon sandwich.” Said Clara.

“I was hoping.....For a private moment.” Said Mabina.

“No problem.....I can read in my room.” Said Niña.

Once Mabina knew there were pastries in the fridge, they became irresistible. She looked into one brown paper bag and discovered a cinnamon swirl, that smelled delicious. She took it to the kitchen table and began to eat it, savouring every mouthful.

“Sorry.....I love these things.” Said Mabina.

“No problem.....Do you want a bacon sandwich ?”

“Of course I do.” Said Mabina, while laughing.

Vampires didn’t put on weight. Tubby vampires weren’t the real thing, they were fakes. Simon had a revolting habit of calling vampires huge bed bugs; Cimex lectularius to use their proper name.

Vampires could live on the blood they drank, never needing to drink coffee, or eat cinnamon swirls. But as Simon had once said while tucking into a Thai takeaway, where’s the fun in that ?

“Right.....Bacon under the grill.” Said Clara. “No Niña in sight.....What did you want to talk about ?”

“Well, our kind aren’t known for maternal feelings. I have to ask.....Why did you keep the child ?”

There is had been said, even though Laura had told her not to ask the question. There was no anger though, just a smile from Clara, as she moved the bacon about with a fork.

“Don’t think I wasn’t tempted to tear out what was growing in me.” Said Clara. “A deity had made that Jade figurine, to give an elderly priestess what she most desired; a child. A deity so old, that no one living knows its name. Not an adopted child, or one created by a deity; but a child conceived and born in the usual way. By some strange quirk of fate, I was given the Jade piece and had it on me at just the right moment to get pregnant by Simon. I suddenly began to believe in fate, just a little.”

“That was it ? You had a sudden belief in fate ?”

“Yes, as simple as that.....And I intend to give birth to this miracle child in my womb.”

“Hate me if you have to, but I have to say it.....Bullshit.” Said Mabina.

Clara and her circle of friends, might not think Mabina was a full blood, a real vampire. Mabina had the ability to read people though, the same as Clara could. Clara was lying and it was like a huge sign hanging over her head, with liar printed on it.

“I’m not sure I owe you a full explanation.” Said Clara.

“Perhaps, but we’ve been friends for a while now.” Said Mabina. “Plus if I know, it might help me to protect the little one. There will be those wanting to hurt the baby, or abduct the vampire child for the own occult purposes. Knowing why this baby is important to you, might be important.”

Clara put a bacon sandwich on a plate and put it in front of her, with a bottle of brown sauce next to it.

“Simon is the real bacon sandwich aficionado, but mine are alright.” Said Clara.

“Well.....Are you going to talk to me ?” Asked Mabina.

“It’s Simon’s child, or at least half of this thing growing in me, will be Simon’s. I never believed I could be a mother, so I never thought about it.” Said Clara. “Now Simon has gone into the past and I may never see him again, ever. I’m not suddenly maternal, but I’d die to make sure his child is born and survives. I love Simon, so I love the baby.....Simple as that.”

Clara put huge amounts of brown sauce on her sandwich and began to eat it. The two of them ate, while giving each other a nod. Mabina now knew the truth and it might make her a better protector for Clara’s yet to be born son. Yes, she could tell Clara carried a son in her womb.

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### ~ Hunting in Crouch End ~

Tim Chance was sincere about not caring about the age and gender of potential kills. But he did have preferences, which Laura would give him a hard time about, if she found out.

“Not hunting women is actually sexist.....When you think about it.” She’d told him.

By her own admission, Laura had stated that big people held more blood than little people. As women tended to be smaller and lighter than men.....It wasn’t an argument he’d win with Laura, but it comforted Tim to know there was a logic to his hunting preferences. He was going to avoid women and anyone who looked disabled, or below the age of thirty. Arbitrary nonsense of course, but it would help him be a serial killer; and still sleep nights. Ideally he’d only ever hunt large aggressive guys, who looked like child molesters. He called Laura on his cell phone.

“I have a consignment.....Looks ideal for us.” Said Tim.

Anyone who thought cell phones were encrypted, thus impossible to listen in to; was delusional. Tim had already had the all calls should be considered insecure, talk with Laura. Tim liked to think he was good at giving enough details, without providing evidence for a future murder trial.

“How large a consignment ?” Asked Laura.

“Huge.....I’ll text the location.” Said Tim. “Bring the van.”



Tim had a stun gun in his pocket, the same kind the police used. A Taser as Laura's contact had called them. He'd had quite a selection of non-lethal weaponry, including several devices to deliver knock down electric shocks. Laura had one too and from experience, they could bring down a sumo wrestler, a large sumo wrestler. It was a chilly night in Crouch End and the mist was getting thicker. Definitely not a night for the local population to go out for a walk. Tim saw Laura's van, as her paint job glistened under the yellow street lights.

"Excuse me.....I'm lost." Said Tim, to the man. "I seem to have got myself lost."

Damn, he smiled and had friendly eyes.....Why did he have to have friendly eyes ?

"Where are you trying to get to ?" Asked the man.

He didn't look, or sound like a child molester. The voice was friendly and he looked quite ordinary. Probably a law abiding citizen on his way home. There'd be a wife waiting there and a couple of rug rats, waiting to be tucked in. Tim stopped that train of thought.....It probably wasn't good for his mental health.

"My friend lives in Dickenson Road." Said Tim.

"Oh, not far at all.....Left at....."

Laura pulled up in the van, hiding their prey from the rest of the street. Tim was experienced in using the Taser, very experienced. As the van stopped, Tim fired and the man with friendly eyes, was flat out on the ground. Tim rushed forward and put cable ties around his wrists. He looked larger when flat on the ground. Tim was worried he might be losing his moral compass, when he began to estimate the number of pints of blood in their latest catch.

"Well done, Tim." Said Laura. "Got him to stand right in front of where I could stop."

"We're both getting good at this." Said Tim.

It had been luck really, but Tim didn't mind accepting undeserved praise. Laura easily lifted the man and put him in the back of the van. Tim followed Laura inside and used more cable ties, this time on his ankles.

"Tough one, he's already beginning to move." Said Laura.

Mabina was obtaining the anaesthetic, from her medical supply contacts. Laura had become an expert at judging weight and giving their catch just the right amount. The large friendly guy would be in their basement within the hour. What if they were seen ? It had never happened, but if it did.....Laura would report her much loved van as stolen and get it crushed at a breakers yard she knew in Erith.

"Wow, this guy will have a lot of blood." Said Laura.

"Ten to eleven pints I think." Said Tim. "Clara can't drain every drop, but he'll keep her going for a week to ten days."

"Cover him up, in case we get a pull on the way home." Said Laura.

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### ~ **The House with a takeaway & Netflix** ~

Clara enjoyed working for Cyril, though she was trying to stay out of any rough stuff. Noah was quite capable of dealing with anyone who needed to be dealt with. Working got her out of the house and most of the night clubs were pleasant place to work. Clara was treated like royalty by the staff and most of them had a restaurant with really good chefs. Clara had discovered she quite liked being pampered and well fed every lunchtime. The money was nice to have too. Clara was never going to starve, but it was nice to see something going into her bank account, rather than always going out. The machines Daniel had wanted, hadn't been cheap. Most nights she came home tired, usually

carrying a takeaway of some kind. She'd sit in front of the flat screen TV in the lounge, her food spread out over the coffee table.....

"Alright.....Let's see what's streaming ?" She muttered.

Usually Netflix, though she had added a few others. She might be spending a lot of time at home, after the birth of.....She still hadn't definitely decided on a name for the baby growing inside her. Noah insisted that picking a name so early, would be bad luck, tempting providence. Clara had noticed that Noah was one of those people who knows everything that, supposedly, attracted bad luck.

"All nonsense.....I think my son will be called Justin Ned Atherton."

"A nice name.....How did you pick it ?" Asked Niña.

"Damn.....You're the only person who can creep up without me hearing." Said Clara. "I suppose everyone knows I'm having a boy ? Difficult to keep it secret, in a house that is often full of vampires."

"Yes.....I think most know, or have guessed." Said Niña. "So.....Love the name. Are they old family names ?"

Clara never liked explaining herself and the pregnancy was making her bad tempered. For a second, she was tempted to pin Niña to the floor and threaten her until she agreed not to ask anything else about her unborn child. Luckily.....The feeling quickly passed.

"I know it sounds weird, but I looked up the original Twilight movie on the net. I flipped through the cast list and the names Justin and Ned looked good. Simon gave himself the name Atherton, when he signed up for the war, the First World War. Not really a family name, but it'll do. I like the way it sounds.....Justin Ned Atherton. Yes, that'll be his name."

Niña sat with her and began picking at her Thai food, without asking. Not that Clara cared; it was just one of Niña's things. Some of her behaviour was far weirder. Mabina put it down to a thirteenth century girl, being dropped into the twenty first century; the age of social media, fast food, streaming TV and weird politics.

"Will you get him christened ?" Asked Niña.

"No, of course not, Niña." Said Clara. "One splash of water from the font and poor Justin might burst into flames. Much of what you see on TV is nonsense, but we have to be very careful on sanctified ground and never.....Feed on the clergy."

"I like these bean sprout things.....Can I get a plate ?" Asked Niña.

"Of course you can.....Do you fancy watching Arcane again ?"

"Yes, I like the ending." Said Niña.

An episode of Arcane led to a horror movie, which took them into the early hours of the morning. When Clara woke herself up with her own snoring, it was time to leave the dirty plates where they were and go to bed.

"Niña.....Wake up, time to go to sleep." Said Clara.

Had she really just said that ? It was a bit like nurses waking patients up to give them sleeping pills. Niña muttered a bit, but was quickly fully awake.

"Just one thing before we settle down for the night." Said Niña.

"Settle down.....It's two in the morning and I'm due in Limehouse by nine." Said Clara.

"I meant to ask earlier.....What is this thing about Mabina not being a proper vampire ?"

Clara sat down again and took a gulp of very flat and very warm cola.

"Alright, the quick and dirty version, with no questions allowed...Agreed ?" Asked Clara

"No questions ever ?" Asked Niña.

“No questions about it....Ever.....Agreed ?”

“Alright.....Agreed.”

Clara organised her own thoughts. She’d heard the story many times, from many different people, including Mabina. Like all of history, much of it was open to interpretation. In other words, not every version was totally accurate. Still.....The quick and dirty version had less errors than the long, rambling scenic version.

“Mabina was a queen once.” Said Clara. “Her realm was partly in what is modern day Romania, but included a good chunk of Bulgaria. Her family drank blood and always kept marriages within their own bloodlines.....First cousins rather than out and out incest, but inbreeding always has consequences.”

“Did it turn Mabina crazy ?”

“Shush.....You can be so annoying.” Said Clara. “They called themselves pure blood vampires, but of course they weren’t. There was a lot of human in them and a few parts of something else. Daniel used to be one of the something else, until Simon turned him. There are probably a lot of people out there who are a bit human, but largely something else. Daniel was called the wandering Jew and his life seemed to have no end.”

“Wow, I’d love to know more about that.” Said Niña.

“Ask him, but only when you have a day to spare.” Said Clara. “Get Daniel on one of his pet subjects and he’ll talk for days, maybe weeks. Anyway.....Mabina’s family did breed in the usual human way. They also called themselves pure blood vampires. They weren’t, they were vampires who still had a lot of human in the mix and a little of something else. My child will be the first genuine, pure blood vampire, born since.....Well, forever. Now, do you understand ?”

“Yes, I do.....Thank you, Clara.”

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