

# Hera Love & Revenge by Jenny Fox

## Chapter 17

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## Chapter 17

Before I even understand what is happening to me, I'm in the salon with Benedict, suddenly learning the basics of French and Italian, and having my accent pointed out at every single word I use. Only Bart has cleared the area, while Cata made me some peppermint tea right before my throat went dry from talking so much. Richard doesn't say a word and Swithin is still busy furiously typing on his phone, tablet and laptop, interchanging them regularly, and I wonder why they stay to listen as I butcher European languages, but then I realize they might actually both be enjoying this.

Benedict turned from a sweet gentleman to an absolute nightmare of a teacher. He's happy to tear apart my poor American education, with that polite but whipping tone of his, and reminds me every chance he gets that most of the Heartgraves speak three different languages, while my California-flavored – sorry, flavoured- English is just not going to cut it. Now, I have to speak as if I was having tea time with the queen, say grey instead of gray, skip a lot of "R"s, and add some "U"s. It's not just that, but the way I speak as well. Benedict makes me speak slowly, calmly. He even gauges how deep or low my voice is, and how my lips move.

"You are supposed to speak softly, gently. Control your speech, your voice."

"Why?" I sigh after the sixth time of repeating the same stupid sentence. "I already feel like I lived in the sixteenth century, what difference does it make how I speak?"

"First, if you had indeed lived in the sixteenth century, you would certainly not get to talk back to your elders like this, very young Lady," he retorts. "Secondly, you ought to know that your appearance is the first thing people see, whilst your voice is the first thing people hear. You are not a child anymore, you're a Heartgrave. You should learn how to impose your command in every room you walk in."

"Can't I just charm people?"

"That shortcut is not going to work every time," he rolls his eyes. "It may work on the weak-minded, but may I remind you, you are still a child to us, Baby Vamp. In fact, most vampires consider that charm is only for the weakest to use. Humans should be subjugated without the use of our power. Once you have years of experience, you will become someone who can naturally influence your surroundings."

I think I can already see what he's talking about. They are all like that. Each and every one of them, upon first meeting them, I felt inferior to them, almost envious. Richard didn't have to use his power on me to intimidate me, but neither did the others. Even Bart made a strong impression on me, and we stuck out at all the bars we went dancing to, mostly because of him. They all have charisma. Grace arrived late, but she walked into that place like she owned it. They are all very different, but there is something incredible and imposing about the auras surrounding them. I felt like I was standing in a room full of celebrities of their own right, just on different levels. It was like being the newbie actress all over again... Except that last time it happened, I was sixteen and fairly confident, arrogant even. Not anymore. Benedict can school me all he wants, I'm well aware he could probably have me licking the floor if he wanted to...

"...I understand," I mutter.

He nods, but still sighs faintly.

"That is good to hear, but we still have a long way to go to carve you into a decent vampire, and an acceptable Heartgraves. You need to drop that foolish accent for good. Think about each word you pick, your tone, the way you move, the way you act."

"I feel like I'm preparing for a role."

"If that makes it easier for you, then think of it that way. But this is going to be the role for your next five centuries of life, so I suggest you get extremely good at it. You will have to fool not only that man you were close to, but the whole world, Hera. We cannot have the world think you are June Starr anymore after you died. I admit, we have never had such a complex case. Just eighty years ago, it was extremely easy to move across the country and wait for the world to forget about us. Things are different nowadays, and we cannot just have them erase your whole previous life from people's minds or the internet. So, we need to get rid of everything left of June Starr. Do you understand?"

I nod. I'm not crazy about this patronizing tone he's using with me, but I know he's right. I can't help but glance back at Richard, although I'm only seeing the back of his seat now. Was he thinking about that too when he transformed me? Of how difficult, how risky it would be to have a former celebrity become one of them? I'm still baffled no one has brought this up yet, but like before, it seems like any decision of his goes.

We keep going, and I'm trying to keep up, but this is unlike any lesson I've received before. We don't just work on my pronunciation: for every word, Benedict gives me a full explanation of where it came from, the variations, why the pronunciation changed, and so on. I feel like I'm getting a full European history course and speech exercise packed in a language lesson. He even corrects my posture, how I carry my cup of tea, and often reminds me to straighten up, broaden my shoulders or lift my chin. Two hours later, I feel an inch taller, but my tongue is swollen and my head aching. He sighs, and gets up.

"That will do for tonight. Any more than this you will not be able to remember. Please do remember to watch your pronunciation at all times. I will be listening."

"I understand," I nod, in my most British accent possible.

He nods back, and walks away, probably fed up with me. I sigh, and use those few seconds he's away to stretch a bit. Cata chuckles, and pours me some more hot water.

"Benedict is a bit harsh but he's a good teacher. He used to have a school in the south of Italy."

"I can tell," I groan.

I take my cup of tea, but the truth is, I try to keep doing everything he told me. It's just as we discussed earlier. Hera isn't a new role I need to learn, it's a new skin I need to fit into, and the sooner the better. The truth is, since Swithin has got him to agree to come to London, I've been feeling nervous... Benedict doesn't need to remind me how quickly I need to adapt; I already know. How can I fool that bastard into not recognizing me? It's scary.

Richard slowly walks into the kitchen, taking me out of my thoughts. I didn't realize Cata had prepared some tea for him. It's a cup of Earl Grey, and he sits down next to me to drink it in silence. Richard is always so tall, impressive and elegant, he doesn't really fit into Cata's bohemian style kitchen.

"We only have a few days," he says after a couple of sips. "So we will have to get you ready for the outside world sooner than most. You'll keep learning how to hunt with Bartholomew, or whoever is available, and Benedict and Swithin will stay to teach you about your new identity. Rebecca and Anna will also help you forge your new identity, but because of your current goal, it is important that you learn how to be a vampire and yet blend in with humans."

I nod, a bit nervous. It's one of the first times Richard's spoken this much to me, and he's sitting very close, the hair on my nape is standing on edge. He's not even looking at me, yet I feel like I'm pinned to my chair...

"...I will do anything it takes," I mutter.

I've had time to calm down a bit while Benedict harassed me about my speech, but my determination is all the same. Moreover, I'm aware of how lucky I am, perhaps more than anybody. I've never had this many people ready to help me, without asking anything in return. If I'm fully honest, it's too new, too sudden and almost scary to me...

"Alright," he says. "Then, go and feed the cats."

...What? I'm not sure I heard that right. I glance at Cata, who heard the same thing, but looks a bit worried, her dark eyebrows furrowed.

"...Richard, are you sure?" She asks with her gentle voice, glancing my direction.

But the Overlord simply nods, and puts his cup to his lips. Catherina doesn't bother to argue any further. While I'm still utterly confused, she turns around, opens a cupboard and in front of my eyes, prepares a full plate of tuna and kibble. ...There are cats here? I wouldn't mind feeding any cat, but from Cata's expression, it will not be that simple. She hands me the plate, looking a little bit paler than before.

"In the garden," she simply says.

I glance at Richard, but he's focused on his second cup of tea. Alright, then... I grab the plate and get up, walking towards the garden. I have to walk by the living room, and Swithin barely raises his eyes at me, still visibly very focused. Is he still working on my case? Or something else, perhaps? From what Bart said, he ought to be one busy man...

I put my hand on the door to the outside, and open it. Now that I think about it, they are probably saving a ton on gas, since no one living here needs heating... I can't tell though, since the temperature outside seems exactly the same as inside to me. I am just aware of a gentle breeze, but nothing unusual for London. A bit nervous, I walk into the garden, holding the plate full of food. Enough food for half a dozen cats, actually. ...Don't tell me they are raising a tiger or something like that? That would be silly...

To my relief, I finally spot a cat, a grey tabby, laying in the grass, right before the garden furniture.

That's when it suddenly hits me. A pressure that chokes me, almost kicks me back inside. I shiver, but use all my strength to stay where I am. I breathe slowly, and glance up, looking straight ahead. I swear in a way Benedict certainly wouldn't approve. I almost didn't see her again. Beatrix, sitting in the middle of the sofa, and staring right at me.

It's even worse when I look her right in the eye, so I avert my eyes immediately. From the bit I saw, she's right ahead, sitting with her feet crossed on the couch. She's at least ten steps away, but the pressure is horrible. It's like I'm trying to swim against a hurricane, she's using her Domination and trying to push me away. My God, she didn't even say anything! I have to remind myself to breathe, not for the need of air, but to remind myself I can control my own body somewhat. To calm down. I realize she's doing this on purpose, and it's just horrible. She was tolerating me before, but now, I'm just an insect about to be smashed by a leather shoe. She wants me out of the garden, out of here. So that's it. This is what feeding the cats is really about, resisting Beatrix' Domination power. It's another exercise, and a much more violent one. ...Is she using all of her power? It does feel like I'm being crushed by a fucking monument. The guy from earlier tonight had me in his power, too. It's like Bart said, they could get me to crawl on the floor. ...Except that I won't.

I do my best to calm down, and try to resist. It's like I'm in a nightmare, with this urging feeling to escape out of here, out of that terrifying woman's power. My whole body has gone numb, yet shivering in fear, as if I could feel ice running through my veins. Don't run away, don't stop trying. This time it's Beatrix, but what if it isn't a Heartgraves next time? ...I need to learn how to not be

subjugated and killed. If I can resist her, I can probably survive a meeting with most vampires out there... or so I really, really hope. Because my whole body is screaming right now, and I'm fighting my survival instincts. I can't remember ever feeling fear as such a physical reaction before, while my mind is still somewhat rational. I want to look at her again, force myself to actually look at Beatrix, and that's when I realize I have tears rolling down my cheeks. My lips are trembling. I struggle to look up, my whole head shaking, shivering in protest, as if there's a gigantic hand forcing me to keep my head down in front of her. I see her feet, and the cat purring on her lap. In fact, I see at least three different cats around her, all of them probably wondering why the heck I am not bringing their damn food. One of them even walks up to me and purrs, rubbing its back against my leg. The plate in my hand is even leaking some of its content because of my ridiculous shaking. I try to calm down, force my head to calm down, fight my whole body, but it's like I'm having the worst fever of my life. Or perhaps a seizure, although I've never had one myself.

I realize I haven't taken a single step, I haven't moved even an inch closer since Beatrix used her Domination to stop me. I'm still frozen in the same spot, and it's been God knows how long. Perhaps even less than a minute, but it feels like a fucking century. Calm down, calm down. She's not going to harm you, she's probably not even going to move. Hell, I feel like I'm about to face the ultimate boss of some game, and she's only the number three of the family... No, I've got this. I need to beat her, to move. Even just a finger, a real movement, not some stupid shaking... I glance down at my feet. Move! Move! I scream in my head, but even my lips are tightly sealed.

I need to focus somewhere. I stare at my right foot, and imagine it moving. I can do this. I can move. Even just an inch closer...

Suddenly, it stops.

I fall down on my knees from the effort, and the plate luckily lands just right, prompting all the cats to run to it for their dinner. While they happily eat and fight around the plate, I'm still shaking, and out of breath. I still have shivers running down my spine, but it's nothing compared to what I experienced just before. I feel like I just got off some rollercoaster... I glance up, although I'm still afraid.

Beatrix is gently petting a small, dark cat on her lap. She glances at me, but this time, she spares me. Just like Richard, that woman hides her emotions perfectly; I don't have the smallest clue what's going on behind those dark irises, and it might be for the better. While I'm still on my knees, recovering, she slowly gets up after a good minute. I watch her move forward, and while I think she's going to walk past me like before, she doesn't. To my surprise, she gently puts the small kitten in my hand. I didn't even realize I still had it open... Then, she calmly walks back inside, and the last of the pressure is gone. I catch a breath, and sit back on my butt, completely exhausted, when I hear a chuckle.

I glance up, and sure enough, Cecily is staring down at me from one of the windows. Is that her bedroom?

"Not bad, newbie," she says.

"...I barely moved," I groan.

"The fact that you managed to look at her twice is impressive enough. ...I think she likes you."

I want to roll my eyes, but Benedict also warned against that habit. Cecily chuckles again.

"Alright, come on up, Little Sis. I've got something for you."

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Cecily seriously overestimates me if she thinks I can simply get back up just like that. It takes me an extra few minutes to recover the sensations in my legs, and a couple more to actually be able to get up. At least, I've made a few furry friends, as the cats that are done eating are all surrounding me asking for pets. The black one in my hand is purring, and rubbing himself against my palm to ask for more. I love cats, and I can't help but to give in. Plus, the gentle softness of their fur definitely helps me calm down some more. They seem used to hum- I mean, vampires. Does Beatrix always feed them? ...Can I keep this one? I wonder what's the house policy on pets... I should ask Cata later. For now, I have to give up the fluff therapy and get back inside. I'm sweating, my butt and hands are wet from the grass, and my face is an awful mess... Luckily, Swithin still doesn't care. He's still deep into his laptop, and I wonder if the red shades are meant to protect his eyes from the blue light or something. ...Do vampires have vision issues? I'd bet not.

I make a stop by the kitchen to wash my hands, and Richard is gone, while Cata is busy on... the tablet? She visibly borrowed Swithin's, and is making an order of some sort. Groceries, perhaps? Where does all that food go, anyway?

I don't ask, and simply walk back into the corridor and up the stairs, to where I estimate Cecily's room to be. I can't help but look around, nervous to cross paths with Beatrix again, but she's gone... She's silent as a shadow. I do hear Bart playing video games somewhere upstairs, though, and John and Juliet are talking to each other, but they are whispering very softly, and I don't dare to eavesdrop. The rest of the house is silent. I guess most of the others are still downtown, and will come back before dawn. I climb another row of stairs, Cecily's room is on the third... no, second floor by English standards. Damn, even that I have to be careful. It's the kind of stupid mistake that could betray me.

I softly knock.

"Come in, Baby Vamp!"

I walk in. Her room is quite big compared to the others I've seen, I wonder how come... She's got every bit of it used, though. One wall is completely covered by an open wardrobe, with dozens of designer clothes from brands I recognize. Her furniture is also the most modern I've seen, all white, without a speck of dust on it. She also has a big, modern desk with three different cameras on it, a laptop, and a whole bunch of that stuff influencers use nowadays to get better lighting or shoot their vlogs. I don't know much about it, but I can easily guess that stuff is worth hundreds. More surprising though is, that facing her big, pink canopy bed, is the biggest window, which I expect to be incredibly bright during the day... Although there are big curtains and blinds waiting to cover them anytime.

"Nice room," I mutter, a bit impressed.

"Thanks! It's nothing compared to my actual place, but I had it redecorated three years ago. ... I just hate the old antique furniture, and I needed something that actually looked like it's from this century for my videos."

Cecily is seated at the desk, visibly busy editing a video.

"So you shoot some things here too for your social Media?"

"Of course! In fact, I shoot most of my stuff here, in this room. My viewers love my setup, and they have no way to know where I am anyway."

"What is your content about?" I ask, walking up to her wardrobe, intrigued.

"Pretty much anything. I like to react to so-called movies and talk about the inaccuracies. I mean, I do know better than anyone in the movie industry about what the eighteenth century was really like... But my viewers also enjoy my make-up testing videos, centuries-proven skin tips, hairstyles that were popular at any era, and so on."

"Isn't it risky to use... your knowledge?"

"I actually love the risk," she winks at me. "I keep up a thin line where my viewers wonder if I'm just a historian or some ghost of the past. You can act like anything you want with the Internet nowadays... Oh, I made you come up to give you this."

She stands up, and goes to the door on her left. I realize it's not a bathroom, but a big cupboard, filled with dozens of boxes. I wonder what the heck she keeps in there... perhaps the makeup for her videos, or more clothes? She grabs one of the boxes and looks through it, pulling out a phone and a cable. She hands it to me.

"There you go, present from me. It's an old model I don't use anymore, but I figured you could use it, since you don't have a phone."

The "old model" is barely two or three years old, a Samsung in an impeccable state! I'm sure this model is still worth at least a hundred dollars- no, pounds. It has an awful pink case I promise myself to change as soon as possible, but otherwise, I'm pretty excited to have my own phone, free for me to use... I

haven't been able to use one without someone's approval in months! I turn it on, and it turns out to be half charged. A picture of Cecily in a Valentino dress is the background.

"I already transferred all my data, so feel free to delete everything and reboot it all you want! The PIN is 1523."

"...Your birth year?" I take a guess.

"Death Year," she winks.

Of course, I should have known... So she's older than both Bart and Cata.

"...Cecily, do you have a notebook I could use, by any chance?"

She raises an eyebrow, but doesn't comment on my weird request, and goes back to her wardrobe, and after a few seconds, pulls out one of those pretty tiny notebooks with a flowery cover, and hands it to me.

"I don't think I have a pen though, so you might have to ask Cata," she says. "Feel free to use it all you want, I have tons of these."

"Thanks."

"Now, what apps do you normally use?"

In light of my obvious lack of knowledge regarding the latest trend on apps, Cecily takes it upon herself to help me empty the phone, adjust the settings to my liking, and then proceeds to try and convince me to download three dozen different apps, most of them I've absolutely never heard of before. I'm pretty sure I'll end up deleting half of those, except perhaps for the news and music ones. I do have fun arguing with her though, she's incredibly willful and about as stubborn as I am, but she's not all that bad. I actually find we're a bit more alike than I thought, except that she's enjoying her social media fame far too much.

After going through a couple more apps, I decide, out of curiosity, to go and check what used to be my social media account. I have to use Cecily's account as I don't have one just yet, but I quickly find it... And all the content's been deleted. There's literally nothing left in there, but 2.3 Million followers still waiting for nothing.

"...Well that's depressing," she comments over my shoulder.

"I didn't delete anything," I mutter, a bit dejected.

"That bastard probably did it. Another clue that you were not doing well for your followers, suddenly withdrawing from all social media. If they had deleted the account, the fans would have protested, but since only the content's gone, they can't really know you're not the one who got rid of it all."



It does make sense... After a bit of hesitation, I decide to set up a new account, under my new name, and follow a few accounts. If I'm going to be Hera Heartgraves, I might as well start working on it now... I follow a few accounts of makeup or clothing brands I liked before my death, only too happy to catch up on everything I've missed so far.

"You have good taste," mutters Cecily, glancing over my shoulder.

"Should I follow you too?"

"Please don't."

I chuckle, but I don't really care either way, I'll follow her on YouTube instead or something. For the next hour, I have fun laying in Cecily's canopy bed and scrolling past the last five years I have missed of new trends, celebrity stuff and stupid challenges going on in the internet world. I carefully avoid anything that could even remotely be related to June Starr and, luckily, I was not that popular either that I would randomly appear in the feed of someone with seemingly no previous interest... Suddenly, another thought comes to mind. Liz.

A bit nervous, I look up her Instagram handle. ...I found it. Her account is set to private, so I can't see the content, but I see her profile picture. I immediately choke up, on the verge of tears. She's smiling brightly in it, and hugging a little girl from behind. Shit...

"What's wrong?"

Cecily grabs my phone out of my hands, and frowns.

"...A friend?"

I nod, hiding my face behind my arm, unable to speak. She sighs.

"...Well, she has a cute kid."

I didn't even know she'd had a child. She was an only child, so I'm sure that baby girl looking like her is her daughter. I'm such an idiot... I calm down a bit, but I'm still staring at that picture, and the "follow" button is rendering me crazy. ...Should I? I probably shouldn't. I should keep the people I knew as June Starr out of it, but... I can't help but wonder. Is she living well? Did she do fine in her new job in Paris? ...Does she still hate me? Damn it. First Rick, now Liz. That's a lot to handle for one day. I sit up.

"Thanks for the phone," I say. "I'll go back now."

"Cool. See you tomorrow, Baby Vamp."

Sounds like they really all adopted that nickname unanimously... I leave Cecily's room with my notebook, new phone and charger in hand, and after a stop by the living room to borrow a pen, I go to my bedroom. I remove my makeup, take a

quick shower, and change into pajamas. It's almost five in the morning, so I'm guessing I won't be going out anymore today. I take a look around my bedroom. I actually like it. It's not very big, but I like it better that way, I hate big empty spaces. I don't even feel the need to change the oak furniture, I kind of like the vibe. I sit up on my bed, and catch my reflection in the mirror. ...Hello, Hera. I still have to get used to that red hair, but I do like it a lot.

I grab the notepad, and start taking notes. All the names of the Heartgraves I've met so far, and if I know them, their dates of birth or death. A couple of notes about their personalities, too. Just so I keep somewhat track... I have a feeling it won't be necessary in a couple more weeks, but at least knowing who's older than who seems needed. I have a feeling the dynamics in the family also work according to their history, and there's a hell of a lot of it. I'm also well-aware there are probably more Heartgraves out there... I wonder how long it will take for me to meet them all.

My phone suddenly rings, making me jump. Cecily just added me into some family group chat, and I can't help but be amused. Vampires have a family group chat... I can't see the past messages, but I look up the members of the group. There are seventeen... I quickly add the names I recognize. There are a few I don't know yet. Susan, Vivian, Elijah, Quentin, Atticus... More of my new siblings, I guess. Some of those I have met don't seem to be in the group either, like Beatrix, Claude or Agnes, so I guess there might also be more Heartgraves I don't know about. I guess these are the more social ones... I wait a bit, but there's nothing going on. I hesitate to send a text... Would it be weird? After a hesitation, I just send a hand waving emoji. My social skills aren't blowing off the roof... To my surprise, I get a couple of answers. Bart replies with a baby emoji -very funny-, and Lancelot a wink. Cecily answers with a black heart, and a bit surprising, the unknown Viktor sends a hand waving too. Well, that's the first step I guess... I wait a bit longer, but I guess most of them are out partying or not on their phones at the moment. I put it aside, and lie down on my bed. I've had quite a long night... and it's just the beginning. I have a feeling I won't get many quiet nights like this. For now, I have to prepare for my revenge... I have to get Hera ready for this.

...But who do I want Hera to be? It's strange to think I'm starting with a completely new, clean slate. I literally get to be whoever I want, do whatever pleases me. The only thing I want right now though, is revenge.

I still feel the anger rise exponentially at the smallest bit of thought drifting towards Charles. I replay his call with Swithin over and over in my head. The fucking bastard. How could he use me like this, and just be even greedier for money... Now, where do I even start? I grab the notepad again, and start listing things down. I want to expose that he pushed me to my death for money. I want to expose all his wrongs with his company. I want to show how horrible of a person he is. I want to make him lose everything he has, all his relationships. I want him to regret everything he's done. I want to render him paranoid like he did to me... I start to think of a plan, lying down in my bed. I need to know why and how he did all this, and for that I need to get the insight that June didn't have. Like I told the others, I need to do it all from the inside, but in such a way that he won't have suspicions about me, about Hera Heartgraves. I suppose I have pretty much unlimited resources and money, but that certainly won't be enough...

Suddenly, a loud banging wakes me up, coming from downstairs. I hear someone walking in, and it doesn't sound like the steps of any Heartgraves I've already met. Even more intriguing, several doors are opened throughout the house, everybody's coming down. I follow the movement, and meet Cecily and Bart as we walk downstairs, both with long faces. What's going on...?

We finally arrive in the living room, where the tallest guy I've ever seen is standing. He's not just tall; he's freaking huge, with thick, square shoulders in a leather jacket, short messy hair, a big beard, and tiny eyes. He's facing Richard with a dark expression.

"...Greyson," Bart whispers for me.

First time I'm hearing about that guy, then?

"Greyson, what's going on?" Asks Cecily, stepping inside the room.

He looks up at her, his eyes going to me for just a second.

"...Quentin and Atticus are missing," he groans.

From the expression on their faces, it can't be good. I glance around, a bit confused.

"Is that an issue?" I mutter. "I thought you guys had your own lives going on..."

"Quentin does go off the grid from time to time," growls Greyson. "...But not Atticus. He never leaves the place he lives in, and he never stays without contacting at least one of us for longer than a couple of days, and we haven't heard from him in weeks. I went to his place. He's nowhere to be found."

"If he hasn't contacted us, it's not good." Bart nods. "...Something happened to him."

"It's worse than that. If something happened to Atticus, something might have happened to all those who didn't show up today," mutters Swithin.

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"...I thought we weren't expecting everyone?" I mutter, a bit worried now.

"We weren't, but when Richard summons us, most at least give a reply, even to decline. We haven't heard from Quentin."

"What about Viktor?" Asks Cata. "And Elijah?"

"Viktor just texted back in the group chat," Cecily says. "He's fine, just sulking as usual."

"Vivian said she was coming, she might just be late. Susan hasn't texted in a while though..."

"So Quentin, Susan and Elijah are also missing?" Mutters Benedict. "...What the heck is going on?"

All eyes go to the patriarch... Is that the real reason he summoned them all here, and forbade them from leaving London? His dark expression tells me that's right, but there might also be more than that. Greyson looks a bit out of breath, and he smells like gasoline. A biker?

"...I understand," Richard mutters after a while. "Thank you, Greyson."

Greyson nods, then glances my way. To my surprise, he walks up to me, and before I can utter a word, he pats my head, his huge hand easily covering my scalp, and then walks past us, towards the kitchen. I let out a faint sigh, while Cecily leans against the door frame, grabbing her phone. I bet she's texting the missing vampires. Behind us, I spot Felicia, standing on the stairs with a sad expression. Bart glances at her too, and they silently exchange looks. I don't know what to say... He then puts an arm around my waist, and without a word, I'm pushed back upstairs, Cecily following us. We all leave Richard alone in the living room.

"What the hell could have happened?" Bart groans after we've reached the second floor. "Atticus was no newborn and he always kept to himself. Who could have tried to attack him...?"

"You think someone attacked him?" I ask, shocked.

"That's the only explanation," whispers Felicia. "We don't die from disease, and it's unlikely a human could kill us. Atticus was the most quiet, calm vampire you could imagine. He spent four centuries living in the same area, guarding the cemetery his family was buried in. He would come to London or see one of us once in a while, but he wouldn't have gone somewhere without at least telling one of us."

"If it had been an accident, Greyson would have found him," adds Cecily. "Vampires don't simply disappear like that."

I can't help but shiver. Who could have been strong and mad enough to attack a three-centuries-old vampire? Do the Heartgraves have enemies I have yet to hear about? From what I've seen and heard, they all have their own lives, so who the heck would choose to attack one of them, and why? They seem worried it's

someone who's after all of them, seeing how they were disturbed about the ones missing earlier...

"Is this the first time?" I ask. "...That one of the Heartgraves is... attacked?"

"No," she shakes her head. "There were more of us before, but like we said, we lost a lot of our siblings during the wars. The thing is, wars were also a good way for enemy vampires to kill some of us without getting Richard's attention. They are all trying to get to him, to our Overlord, through us. Richard's a very, very powerful and old vampire, so they target us in order to hurt him."

"That's why we keep the newbies close to home," adds Bart.

So Richard really did call them all back to check who was still alive and well, but also for my sake... I have a bad feeling about this. I'm already feeling angry for Atticus' sake, and even worried for the others I haven't met yet.

"Go to bed, Hera," Bart suddenly pushes me towards my door. "Leave this to the grown-ups to handle, alright? Just rest, you'll have to wake up early again tomorrow."

I don't really get to protest, and I feel like I don't really have the right to. This is a family matter, and I'm just the newest addition who hasn't really gotten to fully fit in yet. So, like an obedient girl, I get to my bedroom, close the door behind me, and go back to lying on the bed. I listen to everyone going back to their own, and the house gets quiet again. I can faintly hear Cata and Greyson speaking if I focus enough, but I won't eavesdrop. From the little bit I saw of him, Greyson seemed like a nice guy, so I guess I'll have time to properly meet him later...

I roll around under the sheets, more for comfort than for warmth. It seems like this life as a Heartgraves won't be without danger either. For now, I should just trust Richard and the others... Seems like I'll be safe as long as I obey their rules. Plus, I don't really want to think further than my revenge. I may have calmed down, but I can't not think about it.

I fall asleep with a lot on my mind. Perhaps that's why when I wake up the next evening, I feel even more determined, and full of ideas. According to an app Cecily set up on my phone, the sun just went down, and it's still early in the evening. I quickly get up, but then, my enthusiasm is cut short again. Crap, I really need to get some clothes... Instead, I just go downstairs in my pajamas. As expected, Cata is already up and baking, but she's not the only one ready.

"Hi, Baby!" Rebecca greets me with a big smile. "Did you sleep well?"

Judging from her attitude, it doesn't look like she heard one of her siblings went missing, or worse. She changed clothes, and is now wearing black leather pants and a simple white blouse, but it looks like they are all brand new, and perfectly flattering her impressive figure. She clearly puts the accent on her accessories, like those huge earrings or the bracelets making a racket on her wrist, and those flashy blue heels.

"Yes, thanks," I nod.

"Come on," she says, clapping her hands together. "It's not often that I get to take one of my little sisters shopping, so today's the day! Go on and get ready!"

"I'm coming too!" Suddenly shouts Cecily from somewhere above us.

Half a dozen groans of grumpy, not-really-awake-yet vampires reply throughout the house. I have to go back upstairs to get changed, and this time, Cecily hands me a knit dress she bought and never wore for some reason, with high boots. Not my style, but it will do for tonight. When I go back downstairs, Swithin is up, and visibly waiting for me in another impeccable black suite.

"Passport," he says, handing it to me. "Credit card, National Identity Card, and my business card, for emergencies. Though I really hope you won't need to use it."

"Thank you," I mutter, impressed.

I open the passport, which looks absolutely genuine. I realize they somehow took a picture of me last night and cropped it into my profile picture... When the hell did they take it? They picked my death date as my birth date, only subtracting 25 years... I guess that makes me a Libra now? Everything looks absolutely genuine. I don't dare to ask what the limit is on the credit card, but I'm not really worried. It's one of those top tier, black platinum type of credit cards that already cost a small fortune a year.

"Since you have a phone now, I've also sent you the details we've set as your life as Hera, so make sure you learn it all by heart, and do not make any mistakes."

"Yes, Sir," I nod.

"Give her a break, Swithin," groans Cecily, grabbing me by the arm. "We have to shop for your passport protection and a proper wallet now! Come on, let's go before the shops close."

One thing I quickly realize: Winter is the shopaholic vampires' favorite season. We take Rebecca's car, and rush to the nearest shopping mall before it closes. I'm genuinely impressed at how efficient they are at picking which shops we still have time to shop in before they close, and finding my size once we're inside.

To be honest, I enjoy the whole experience a lot. First, the simple action of shopping for clothes for myself is just one thing I had been missing for a long while. Plus, I'm Hera now. Hera's body is different from June's, and I don't need to wear flashy, sexy clothes to get the photographers' attention. In fact, I find that I tend to naturally gravitate towards the basics, and pick simple designs but with higher-quality fabrics, in dark or simple tones. In just two hours, I buy four different denim jeans, two pairs of leather pants, some short skirts to show off my legs, a few bodysuits with long sleeves, three strap tops, a couple of turtlenecks, and two dresses. Following Rebecca's advice, I also buy a couple of accessories for jewelry, like a layered necklace, a few gold rings, and little hoop earrings. When it comes to shoes though, Cecily is a real tyrant. She forces me to

try eighteen different pairs, each more impossible than the last, and half of them I couldn't possibly have worn with my human legs without breaking an ankle. While I love being able to wear high heels, I'm just not ready yet for the snake skin or big red pumps. Luckily, I manage to settle for some boots, low and high, relatively normal heels, and even a pair of Nike Air Max, just so I look human from time to time... The last stop is the Dior makeup stand, and this time, I'm more than happy to try and get the latest colors I saw last night into my shopping bag. Rebecca and Cecily have literally dozens of decades of knowledge on makeup, and happily advise me on which colors to get. Right after I pay for it all, still impressed at how the credit card doesn't flinch at the impressive expenses of the day, we get back to the middle of the shopping mall, with all the shops around us closing or about to. I feel satisfied, and of course, not even tired from all that shopping. Rebecca interlocks arms with me, with a malicious smile.

"Well, all that shopping has made me a bit hungry, ladies. Shall we look for dinner?"

...She's not speaking about a restaurant. Cecily immediately looks all excited for it. Didn't they already feed yesterday? I don't know why, I don't really feel like going with them. In fact, those three long hours of shopping have rendered me kind of overwhelmed, and I feel the need to be... alone, for a bit. We keep walking back to the parking lot, and they already have their eyes set on some high-end nightclub they want to go hunt at.

"Rebecca, is it alright if I just go home instead?" I ask. "I just... need to be alone for a bit."

"Are you sure, Baby?" She frowns. "It's quite a walk back to the house."

"I'll be alright," I nod. "I just need to keep walking north-east, and plus I have a GPS on my phone. It's not like I'll be tired either, I'll be fine."

They exchange a look, and Rebecca shrugs.

"Alright, Baby Vamp, up to you. Just text us if you have any issues, alright? And if you eat, make sure it's not messy!"

She gives me a wink, and I nod, putting my shopping bags in the car. I just keep my newly-bought wallet in one of the pockets of my also brand new coat, a big fake fur one. I probably wouldn't be able to get away so easily if I was with anybody else, but Rebecca and Cecily are just so excited for their "meal", and a bit high on the shopping adrenaline. They bid me a quick goodbye, and the car drives away, towards another part of town and, no doubt, a fancy place with lots of fresh throats. I sigh. I'm left alone in the parking lot, with the last few customers making their way to the underground. I walk away. I did plan to walk home, but I have an extra destination in mind. I realized on the way here that we were close to that road.

I start walking, grateful for my tireless legs that don't mind the high heels on the asphalt. It doesn't take more than 20 minutes to get there.

Westway Road.

I only have very blurry memories of the accident. I probably wouldn't have been able to find out the road if it wasn't for the article I read over and over again, until I knew it by heart... The road on which my mom died. I don't know why she chose to drive so fast on a rainy night, but I have a hint of why she would have been drinking. I just wish she hadn't taken the car that day. I wish she would have thought of me, and just stayed home with her four year old... I take a deep breath. It's an above-ground highway, so it's not like I can get up there, anyway. I just wanted to see it, just once. If I asked Swithin or Richard, I could probably find where she's buried as well...

I sigh, but keep walking. There's no use staying around. I was curious to see it, but it's just a road like any other... And I almost feel sorry for my mother if she sees me now. Sorry I didn't get to live older than you did, Mom.

The neighborhood is quiet and empty at this hour, but I enjoy the loneliness. I can't be alone a single minute at the Heartgraves Mansion, so this is welcome. As someone who's lived alone for a long, long time without much contact with the outside world, I'm grateful for my new family, but I can't adjust so easily.

I keep walking, but something is tingling in the back of my throat. It's like a faint ache, something that renders my throat a bit dry, a bit thirsty... I feel my fangs tingle. My eyes get a bit blurry... and red. Shit, seriously? Now?

I try to calm down. The streets are empty anyway. I just need to find a human, quick, and hope I'll have enough self-control to stop... I keep walking, a bit faster, listening to my surroundings. I hear a small group nearby. No, too many. I hear a couple arguing, but they are behind closed doors. I keep going, taking small, dark streets, walking faster. The thirst gets worse, I need blood. I need blood, right now, fast, quick. Warm, delicious, filling blood. Come on, there can't be literally no one... Suddenly, I hear one. A drunkard, mumbling to himself. Very drunk, from the uneven sounds of his steps. I chase him down, a bit faster than I should. I feel like a panther hunting for her prey, restless and secretive. I'm so horribly thirsty, my vision is turning black and white... and red. I finally stop him. This should be easy. The guy reeks of cheap alcohol, and he can barely walk already. I don't bother with the small talk, I literally jump on him, biting like a savage.

It's not good, but it's filling... I drink, and drink, and drink. Remember to stop, remember to stop, for fuck's sake... but I want more. Just one more drop... Suddenly, a chuckle stops me. Shit! I didn't check around. I glance up, and, from the alley I came from, I immediately find a silhouette. I hiss immediately by reflex, and drop my victim to the ground. I sure hope he's still alive... Yeah, I hear his heartbeat. That was another close one... I try to see the silhouette better. I can just tell it's a man, but he's completely hidden in the darkness, and even my eyes can't really distinguish him from his surroundings, except for the light blonde hair. He smiles, showing off his fangs. Is that an enemy? I remember Atticus, and hiss even more. Shit, can I fight someone?

But before I can decide on what to do, he suddenly disappears. Fuck, where did he go? Why? One second later, I get my answer: bright, blinding headlights, and a



loud police siren. I turn my head to find a police car coming down the street. Two cops jump out, their eyes on me and my blood-soaked chin and hands.

“Hands up!”

Oh, Swithin is going to kill me...

## Hera Love & Revenge by Jenny Fox

### Chapter 20

[/ Hera, Love & Revenge by Jenny Fox](#)

### Chapter 20

“Your name, Madam. I won’t ask twice.”

I’m almost flattered to get a “madam” ... Although I probably shouldn’t rejoice at all right now. I’m at the police station, sitting in front of a desk, with a stubborn cop trying to interrogate me. They gave me some tissues to wipe out the blood off my hands and chin a bit, but they are still looking at me like I’m an alien. Can’t blame them...

“Do you understand my question? ...Do you speak English?”

I roll my eyes. ...Is it alright to give my name?

“Can I call my lawyer?” I ask.

“First, I want your name,” he retorts. “Listen, Lady, you’re not in trouble yet, but you were found with a lot of blood on your hands and an unknown man who’s now in the ER. If it was self-defense, you can tell me. I am not a bad cop, I just want to do my job. Now, your name?”

“...Hera Heartgraves.”

He sighs, but types it on his decade-old computer.

“Hera... Heartgraves. Age?”

“That’s rude to ask a Lady that.”

“Then your birthdate, if that makes you feel any better. Your occupation too, please.”

I stop answering. I won’t know how much trouble I’m in until Swithin or somebody else shows up, so I might as well try and not make it worse. I look around. It’s pretty busy for a police station, they are already getting all the drunkards and

people crying about their stuff getting stolen. If it wasn't so crowded, perhaps I could have gotten away with Charming him, but that just won't work in such a noisy environment.

"Fine," He groans; "I'll just have to make a good old search. With that attitude, I wouldn't be surprised if you have... a... rec-..."

What's going on? He's staring at his screen with a confused expression. He hits one of the keys repeatedly, as if there's something wrong with it. He glances at me, then looks around, and calls over one of his colleagues. What now?

"Have you ever seen this?" He asks, confused.

"You better call the chief," his colleague shakes his head, glancing at me.

The cop in charge of me sighs and leaves towards what I guess to be his superior's office. Less than two minutes later, he comes running back with an older man, both of them out of breath and giving me strange stares. What. The. Heck?

"...Can you repeat your name, Madam?" Asks his superior, sounding stressed.

"Hera Heartgraves."

He goes livid.

"M-my colleague said you mentioned a lawyer, Madam?"

"Can I make that call now? ...I have his card in my wallet, which you guys confiscated."

The man almost jumps on my wallet, opens it, and sure enough, when he sees Swithin's business card, he goes even whiter. Maybe I'm not in such a bad position, after all... I watch him glance at me again, then go back to the card. He takes a deep breath, and grabs the phone.

"...S-Sir Heartgraves? This is Officer Davies, from the London Poli-... Yes, Sir. We have one of your uh... relatives here at the station. ...A young woman, Sir. ...Yes, Sir, with red hair. ...Yes. Yes Sir, I understand. I-I apologize for the inconvenience, Sir... Yes, Sir, I will. Thanks for your understanding, Sir. Good Evening, Sir."

He waits until Swithin hangs up, and lets out a long sigh. Then, his eyes go back to me, and he quickly grabs all my belongings they had taken, handing them back to me.

"S-Sir Heartgraves is coming to get you, Miss Heartgraves. He said to wait for him right outside and that you... You'd better wait for him there."

So much for not being in trouble... Still, I grab my belongings, and get up.

"...Can I wash off a bit at least?" I ask. "He won't be here until a few minutes."

They take me to what I guess to be their bathroom, not the visitor one. I quickly wash the blood off my hands and chin, but I can't help but notice how officer Davies has his eyes on me the whole time, as if he was scared I'd suddenly turn into a monster or something. He seemed pretty scared of Swithin... He's not charmed, either. Does that mean the London police knows about our kind? Or, at the very least, our family? I don't ask, and just walk back to the entrance of the station, where they are happy to leave me to wait by myself.

Soon enough, a beautiful, silver car arrives and parks right in front of the station. Swithin steps out, glaring at me from behind his red shades. I sigh, and walk up to him, arms crossed around my big coat.

"...Seriously, Baby Vamp?" He scolds me. "The police station on your second night?"

"Thanks for coming to get me, Daddy," I grumble, walking up to the passenger seat.

"...Brat."

We sit down in the car, and he takes out a cigarette.

"You smoke?"

"Not in the house, Catherina hates it."

"...It seemed easy to get me out of there. What do they know?"

"Just enough," he retorts. "If the name Heartgraves comes up, I get a call. ...Now, are you going to tell me what happened?"

"I split ways with Rebecca and Cecily to go home, and I got thirsty on the way. I made... a mess out of it."

"I already checked. The guy is alive and fine. Seems like you stopped very early, in fact. How?"

I frown. What happened, indeed?

"Somebody showed up," I mutter.

"The cops?"

"No, before that. There was another vampire, he showed up. I think... I think he might have been following me."

Swithin's expression darkens. His eyes are on the police station, but I can tell he's thinking long and hard.

"Did he make contact?"

"No. He vanished right before the cops showed up."

Swithin doesn't say anything. Only the tip of his cigarette glows in the darkness of the car. After a while, he sighs, and, without a word, smashes his cigarette butt in a tiny box, puts it in his inner pocket, and starts the engine. I glance up.

"Stop!"

He immediately hits the brakes.

"...Hera?"

I keep staring at the entrance of the police station. A male figure just walked in, and I thought I recognized him, but how can it be? ...Did I just dream it?

"The vampire?" He asks, glancing in the same direction.

"No. No, I thought I saw... But... No, nevermind. Let's just go home."

He doesn't ask any questions, just lets off the brakes, and slowly drives me home.

...Did I just dream that? It could have been any guy walking into a police station, but I was almost sure it was him. ...What the hell would Rick be doing in London? Did I imagine that because I saw him on the tape last night? But he was wearing different clothes... Is it even possible that he would be in London so soon? What the heck am I thinking now... I rub my eyelids, feeling very tired all of a sudden.

Swithin doesn't say a word on the way home, and I kind of appreciate that. We get back to the Mansion, and I have a feeling Rebecca and Cecily are in more trouble than I am. Bart comes down with an amused grin.

"Somebody tried to play the bad girl?"

"Somebody needs better supervision," Swithin retorts, glaring at him before walking up to his bedroom.

Bart grimaces, and waits until he's out of sight to turn to me.

"...You alright, Baby Vamp? You look like you saw a ghost. It can't have been that bad, was it?"

"Not exactly."

We walk to the living room, and I tell him about the incident, including how I saw Rick. It's just the two of us at first, but Felicia then walks in to listen, and I can hear Cata, in the kitchen as always, probably keeping in ear out also.

"...I probably imagined it," I mutter.

"Perhaps you should consider checking if it's actually him?" Felicia suggests.

"No. It can't be."

I don't want to think it might be true. If Rick is here in London, there's only one possible reason why, and that reason has to be me. I can't have that. I need to focus on my revenge instead. And I have been thinking about how to do that, since earlier.

"...Bart, I want to be hired by him. I'm going to keep up with my plan. Be hired, dig up all the dirt and destroy him from the inside."

"Aren't you afraid he's going to... realize it's you?"

"The guy saw me dead," I shake my head. "I'm sure even he couldn't imagine that I'd come back for him. I'm not even sure my best friend would realize it's me now, I can barely recognize myself. No, I'm sure I can approach him just fine, the bastard wouldn't bat an eye."

"Will you be fine, though?" Felicia asks.

I turn to her. I didn't expect that question... She's curled up in the armchair, her arms wrapped around a pillow and legs crossed, looking at me with a worried expression. I force myself to breathe, and nod.

"...I'll be okay," I mutter, only half-convinced.

I'll just hope I don't murder the bastard right on sight... I feel my cold blood rising to a boiling point just thinking about him, who knows what I'll do when push comes to shove? ...Yeah, I'd push him off any cliff or building.

"How do you plan to join his company, though?" Bart frowns. "It's not like he'll just welcome anybody with open arms. You also can't leave Europe, you promised Richard."

"I don't plan to leave Europe," I nod. "He's already coming here. I just need to get his attention."

"Does his company have a branch here?"

"No..."

That might be an issue. How am I supposed to infiltrate a company that's overseas?

"We could always create an opportunity."

I turn around. Swithin is standing at the entrance of the living room, Benedict and Lancelot right behind him.

"...How?" I ask, interested.

"If that man is as greedy for money and narcissistic as you said, all we need is to make him think he's just landed an amazing opportunity to branch out here, in London. You just need to decide on the Business, and we can work to make him want it, and have it."

I take a second to think. I don't know if that will be as easy as they make it sound, but to be fair, I'm pretty sure Swithin knows his business like the back of his hand. If half of what Bart told me about him is true, he can definitely hook Charles on a business opportunity. Even better, he can get Hera on that bastard's radar, and that's all I'm asking. So, how do I intend to trap him? Charles hung on to what my father had taught him to diversify his company's actions, but his favourite part was the entertainment industry. I remember how competitive it was for any actor or actress in the agency but me, and even more for the models... I had seen some of the girls cry and quit under the pressure. ...maybe it wasn't just all because of the contracts.

"...What about a modelling agency?"

Benedict raises an eyebrow behind Swithin, while Lance chuckles.

"Why?" Swithin asks.

"Charles is a narcissistic asshole and a control freak. I remember his modelling agency was very hard on all the girls, and when one of his models quit without warning, he gloated about dragging them to court, his lawyers made sure she had to repay him thousands for breach of contract."

"Didn't that bother you at the time?" Bart frowns.

"I learned about it long after it was over," I shrug. "And only because another actress I knew told me about it. I barely even interacted with the models... or with anyone that worked for him, really."

"Best way to manipulate your employees," Benedict shrugs. "Keep them from talking and exchanging too much info. Information is power."

"...I think I should become a model," I suddenly declare. "If that's who Charles mistreated and abused the most, I want to start this way. Plus, I don't see what else I could do. I don't want to be an actress again, and I don't have a degree that would get me a job in any other field he controls. Moreover, he's the type to

underestimate female staff, even more so the models. He won't see me coming..."

"You could probably pass for one," nods Lancelot. "You're rather tall and skinny. Plus, models usually avoid the sun so their skin won't be damaged... That could work."

"You're coming out of nowhere, though," Bart frowns. "How do we make him recruit a newbie model out of the blue?"

"...We give him one he'd be interested in recruiting," smiles Swithin. "We create a modelling agency in London, put it on the verge of collapse, make Charles Williams think he can buy an amazing business opportunity for pennies and get a future top-model to be as a bonus."

"Make that two!"

Cecily and Rebecca just walked in, and the first completely ignores Swithin's glare to walk into the salon, hands on her hips.

"If Hera becomes a model, I want to be one too!" She exclaims.

"You two did receive my text that I had to go and get Hera out of the Police Station, right?" Swithin frowns.

"That's a great idea, Hera," Rebecca smiles, ignoring him. "If the Agency looks on the verge of collapse, it would make sense that they have let most of their models go except for a handful."

"We don't have much time, though," frowns Benedict. "How do we set up a modelling agency, make it look on the verge of collapse and get the man's attention while he's staying in London?"

"...A business on the verge of collapse could use a lawyer," mutters Swithin with a creepy smile. "What if the lawyer in charge of Miss Starr's penthouse just happened to also have Miss Heartgraves as a client, trying to sue her current agency for unpaid work? We'd let him know that he's got first-hand insight on a future business opportunity. If he's so proud, he won't let it pass, and he'll jump on this thinking it was just his luck."

"I like that," Rebecca smiles. "Nothing better to trap a man than his ego..."

Oh, now it's starting to look like something...

"You can't just pretend to become a model overnight, though," frowns Cecily. "Ever done actual work before?"

"I got a few contracts as an actress," I nod. "Photoshoots for a brand here and there, or promotional pictures for a movie, but nothing as an actual model. It

wouldn't be completely new, but not something I can claim to have a lot of experience in either..."

"Well, we can help with that," smiles Rebecca.

"That won't be enough," says Cecily. "You need to get a book, proof you've been working in this industry for a little while at least. We need to find an actual photographer and get you started as soon as possible."

"...I think I have an idea," I mutter.

"Alright," nods Rebecca. "Then, Swithin dear, can you take care of setting up the fake agency with Benedict, and Cecily and I will work on preparing Baby a decent book for a model!"

"Why do I always get more and more work?" He groans. "You Ladies do know I have other things going on, right?"

"Come on," laughs Lancelot, patting his shoulder. "Your Empire isn't going to collapse because you help the little sis' for a while, big boss. I'll give you a hand."

Swithin rolls his eyes, but the three of them walk away to another area of the ground floor, most likely an office, while I take out my smartphone.

"What are you looking up?" Asks Cecily, interested.

"I'm searching the forums of Models in London. I already have a good idea where to start, now I just need a name and an appointment..."

If I'm going to have to make a name for myself quickly, I need a photographer with a big reputation.

Luckily for me, the best photographers often turn out to also be the worst...