

# Hera, Love & Revenge by Jenny Fox

## Chapter 3

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I wake up again, with that bothersome feeling of déjà-vu...

I quickly regain my senses this time. No more plane, I'm on a firm bed, and I can hear... birds? Birds, and a clock ticking, somewhere close. Steps, and people... breathing. The sounds from the street too. Cars, further away.

I open my eyes. It's daylight, this time... And it annoys me quite a bit. I frown, my eyes taking a couple of seconds to get used to it. Meanwhile, I get up, noticing the lavender sheets surrounding me, and the piece of nightwear I've got on. It's black again, a long silk gown... Quite pretty. I guess I'll have to get used to darker clothes? Nothing can ever go wrong with black anyway. I spot a movement in a corner of the room, but it's just a mirror, and my own reflection... Damn, I really look like shit. I climb out of the bed, heading barefoot to the mirror, too curious to wait. I don't know what I was expecting, but nothing quite like this. No red eyes, they're still blue as ever. No big fangs, no dark circles... Well, alright, there are dark circles but that's nothing new. No, the change is more... subtle. I keep staring, confused as to how that image is me without looking like me, yet I can't find a damn difference to put my finger on. After a good minute, I finally realize one thing: I've lost weight. Like... I'm really leaner. I have been dieting almost every day of my life and I can say for sure I would never have been able to get that slender on certain parts of my body no matter how hard I tried. My cheeks are slightly more hollow, my jawline pointier, and my collarbones more visible. Even my shoulder bones... It's a bit disturbing. I look taller... or do I? I can't tell.

I feel like my skin is drier, and I would like to say, better as well, but I was managing it carefully before, so it's hard to say... No, wait, the redness is gone. That's what I couldn't pinpoint before. My skin shade is perfectly even. No blemishes, no darker spots. My beauty mark is still there, but the little redness I'd seen close to it has vanished... Well, that's one good thing at least. Somebody braided my hair in a long blond braid. ...Richard? Can't see him doing that, but then again, someone must have changed my clothes twice... And bathed me too. I definitely smell too clean for someone who spent hours on a plane, and before that, at the morgue.

I turn around to look at the room. It's surprisingly clean, and neat. There are fresh flowers in a vase next to the mirror, white tulips. There's a little bookcase on the wall too, with all sorts of books, but mostly old editions of classics. I can't tell the warmth of the wooden floor under my feet, so I'll assume it's lukewarm... The bed's big, but it's a modern one, not an old canopy like I'd imagine in a Vampire's home... Am I even in Richard's place? I glance outside the window.

That's definitely London... The narrow streets, the old buildings, the pretty trees. The street's empty, but it sounds like there's more going on a few streets further down. We're really in the midst of the City...

I decide to leave the bedroom. There's a dressing gown on the bed; I'm not cold, but I'm not sure about showing off some of my skin to whoever's living in this place...

I step into a corridor made of the same wooden floor. It's a bit narrow, but there are many doors, most closed except for a bathroom, and a storage room. Once again, I'm surprised how clean and neat it is. There are shelves on the walls, with more dried flowers and old books, but no portraits, no pictures. No spiderwebs in the corners either... I walk down towards where I hear the most noise coming from. Someone's moving pans and humming a song. It's odd how I can hear that from so far... I finally get on the doorstep of a large kitchen, with a big table and lots of dishes on it.

"Oh! Good Evening, Darling!"

Standing alone in the room, a tall woman smiles brightly at me. She's got flour all the way up her elbows, and is wearing an apron over her long red dress to protect the rest of her outfit from it. I've never seen someone with such gorgeous, silky black curls, and she's keeping them up with a large headband. From her smile, I can tell right away she's a vampire. The way she smiles hides her fangs, but her cheeks are slightly hollow, her skintone's a bit too pale for her southern, faint hispanic accent, and I have this same oppressing feeling as with Richard, although it's not nearly as bad...

"How do you feel?" She asks, wiping her hands on her apron. "Still sick? Thirsty, perhaps? Tired? Oh, you should have stayed in bed..."

"I'm alright," I nod.

"Oh, good, good. You were quite sick, you had me worried for a while! ...Oh, don't mind me, I just need to do something when I'm nervous, and it's usually baking."

"I-I'm June," I mutter, unsure what to say next.

"I know, Darling, but you should introduce yourself as Hera now."

Oh, right... I'll have to get used to it.

"I'm Catherina, but you call me Cata, Dear."

"Nice to meet you, Cata. Can I ask... Where are we? Is Richard... around?"

"Oh, he's sleeping!" Cata exclaims. "He's not used to traveling, so he must be quite tired, but don't worry, you'll see him a bit later. Our poor Richard isn't all that young, we should let him sleep for now, hm?"

I agree with a faint nod. Her chirpy voice is nothing like I would have imagined a vampire to be... I'm slowly scratching every bit of the stereotype I had in my head into oblivion. Cata's making little jumps left and right, her curls bouncing along,

still visibly busy and entranced by her baking. Her movements are quick, sharp and incredibly silent, considering the utensils she's using.

"This is his main residence," she explains, while stirring. "We're in London, England. You're familiar with London, Dear?"

"A bit... I was born... around here."

"Oh, marvelous!"

No idea what's marvelous about me being born around London, but I don't dare say anything to break her over-the-top spirit. She keeps grabbing glass jars one after another to add a spoonful or two to her preparation, and I kind of wonder what she's preparing without a hint of a recipe around. Is it a vampire-friendly mix?

"Oh," she exclaims, noticing my eyes on the food. "Do you want to eat something? It's your first meal as a vampire! What do you want? We can have anything you desire, Dear, even order from a high-end restaurant... Or I can cook you something! Those cookies won't be ready for another hour, but don't be shy, tell me!"

"...Can I have McDonald's?"

Her enthusiasm melts like snow under the sun. I grimace.

"Sorry, that's..."

"Oh, no, no, no!" She immediately exclaims. "Don't worry Darling! It's just that we haven't had a new member in the family in quite some time, and... uh, well, it's the first time one asked for such food, you just threw me off a little bit! Give me a second."

She moves across the room and, to my surprise, grabs something that looks like... Is that seriously a phone? It's one of those very old antiques, like literally just a copper cone to speak into, with a tube connecting up.

"Bart, get down here please! I need your phone. ...Right now!"

Immediately, I hear some loud noises from above us. I hear the wooden floors creaking, louder and louder, for a long while until the steps get to our level.

"What the heck, Cata, I was sleep-... Who the fuck is that?"

I barely get to see a bit of white hair before he suddenly steps back, dodging the pan flying in his direction, and catches it with his hand.

I'm speechless. All that happened in less than a second. I didn't even have time to react, let alone move. Cata is glaring at him, her hand still mid-air.

"Your manners!"

"What the heck!"

He jumps back into the kitchen, furious and hissing, a strange sound I've never heard before that immediately gets me on edge. To my surprise, he stops as soon as his eyes get back down on me, with a grimace.

That guy looks younger than expected. Younger than me, actually. He has short bleached hair as I'd seen, although it's poorly cut, too long in the front and uneven behind, with the piercings of his ears visible underneath. He's wearing denim jeans and the t-shirt of a rock band I've never heard of before, and flip flops. There's the scar of a burn coming up from under his collar, something his transformation didn't heal, or he got after, perhaps. He's scrawny, with a small round face, a small nose and dark eyes. Another vampire, I can tell.

"...Wha- Who is that!"

"I'm Hera," I introduce myself, before I get anymore pissed by his tone.

"Where did you fetch her from?" Bart asks, visibly upset.

"I did not," retorts Cata. "Richard did."

His expression falls.

"...Richard? Richard's back? Are you kidding me? Since when?"

"Last night, but it looks like you didn't hear us. Were you playing those video games again?"

She walks over, and grabs the smartphone out of his hands, handing it to me, with an app open to order food from. Bart doesn't even protest; the news about Richard seems to have left him jaw-dropped.

"Where was he?" He suddenly growls. "Where the hell did he fetch you from?"

I've upgraded from "that" to "you", apparently. But I'm not sure I'm allowed to answer, and I don't like his tone either, so I just decide to ignore him and rather focus on my order. Cata sighs.

"He told you he'd be back. He was in New Amsterdam. And you'd better start being more polite than that with the baby!"

"New Amsterdam? ...Why the hell was he in New Amsterdam!"

...Is that supposed to mean New York? I finish my order, and hand him back the phone; there was a credit card already in use, I hope it's fine I used it. I kind of

hope it's Bart's. He takes it with another weird movement of his mouth, and starts pacing around the kitchen nervously.

"Richard doesn't have to tell you, Bart," says Cata, going back to her baking. "He just came back with Hera last night, that's all you need to know. And you'd have seen him if you stopped using those stupid headphones!"

"Hera?"

Is he finally going to bother remembering my full first name? He stares at me for a while. Oh, damn, I recognize that look. I hope my nuggets come soon...

"You... You're that chick I saw on TV! From that movie, the remake of the old one! What was your name again... April Starr!"

"It's June," I groan.

"Yeah, whatever. ...Wow, we've got a celebrity! Isn't your family super rich or something? Hey, you were alive not long ago, right? What on earth happened to you? No, let me guess! Murder? No, an accident? I'm sure that's it!"

"Bart, that's very rude," Catherina retorts.

"No, but seriously, who's your Sire?" He asks, sitting his ass on the table, Cata and I at each end.

"My Sire?" I repeat, confused.

"Who transformed you!" He rolls his eyes, as if I was supposed to know that. "Your Overlord. Don't tell me he picked up a stray again? Why would he bother to go all the way to New Amsterdam for-"

"Bart," hisses Cata, that same sound from before. "Are you playing stupid? She's a Heartgraves. She's Richard's."

His expression falls. This time, all of his attitude from before's gone. He glances my way, frowns, and then turns back to Cata again.

"...For real?"

"Yes. Everyone's coming down."

"He called everybody over?" Bart raises an eyebrow.

"Mh-mh. We have a new member in the family," says Cata with a smile. "Isn't it a good occasion to gather?"

Judging from Bart's expression, things are not as merry as she makes it sound. He sighs, and turns back to me.

"Alright... Guess the old man had his reasons. Welcome to the family, Baby."

"Thanks, but you look younger than me," I can't help but say out loud.

"Thanks, but I'm the oldest one in this room," he scoffs. "I'm a century older than Cata."

Seriously? Cata looks in her late thirties, and this brat is... older than her? Damn, I should have known. Can't underestimate a vampire's good looks. Oh, well, I'm not going to complain if I can look my fair twenty-five years old for the next century or two...

"Is Richard the oldest then?"

Cata giggles.

"By a lot."

"Not that we know exactly how much," sighs Bart, getting up to walk to one of the big wooden cupboards that turns out to be a fridge. "It's kind of a game to guess how old he really is in the family.... Sometimes I wonder if he remembers himself."

"So he's the oldest of the... Heartgraves?"

"He is the Heartgraves," says Bart. "He founded this family, turned every one of us like he did you, apparently."

"Earlier, you used a different word. Overlord?"

Bart takes out a bottle without any label, full of a red liquid... And my throat immediately tickles. It's not as overwhelming as before, but I do feel the strange need to get up and take it off his hands. I would have, if our eyes hadn't met one second before. Bart snickers, and grabs two glasses, pouring one he hands to me. I take it with an embarrassed word of thanks.

"That's what we call the very old vamps like Richard. Those who can turn humans into one of our kind."

"You mean not everyone can?"

"Nope."

I put the red liquid to my lips, trying hard to not think about what I'm drinking, but immediately, I spit it back into the glass. Bart laughs.

"That's gross!"

"Not your type, eh?" He chuckles. "Sorry, Baby. Looks like you're going to have to learn to hunt..."

"You're supposed to take her," suddenly says Cata.

"Excuse me?" Bart protests. "I'm not done with my game!"

"Richard said you can go out to hunt if you also take Hera to teach her how to," she shrugs. "I can take her if you don't want to..."

Bart grimaces, and glances at me, then down on his drink. Does that taste better to him? I felt like I was drinking something expired by a couple of years! After a few more seconds, he sighs.

"...Fine. It'll be easier with a girl anyway."

"Sun will be down in half an hour," says Cata, glancing at the window. "You have time to shower. ...and that's not a suggestion."

He groans, and leaves the room without adding a word, leaving his cup behind.

"He's a good lad," she winks at me.

Suddenly, the front door bell rings. My food!

"Oh, no Darling, you stay here."

Shit, I almost forgot... I can't just show my face like that. Catherina goes to retrieve my food for me. I hear her politely thank the delivery guy before she brings it back. To my surprise, instead of simply handing it to me, she prepares it on a plate, getting rid of the packaging as if this was a real meal... When it finally gets in front of me, I can't hold it anymore; I open the sauce, dip a nugget and bite it.

...Yuck. I try another bite, but no. I feel like I'm just biting a piece of chewy cardboard... I try a fry. It's just... salt. I can barely feel the potato. I put it down, grossed out, and almost depressed. Facing me, Cata is giving me a sorry look.

"...Not good?"

"I think I hate my new taste buds," I grumble.

"Sorry, Darling. It's different for everyone, but yeah, most human food probably won't taste good for you. You may get used to some of it, though! ...Would you care for a nice steak? With wine sauce?"

"...Yeah, please."

It's not my usual thing, but since Cata suggests it, I'm taking a leap of faith. She gives me a big smile and jumps to the fridge. I glare at my plate.

I can't believe I've been on a diet all my life, and when I can finally eat all the crap I want, it tastes like actual crap.

Life regrets, I guess.