

Hera, Love & Revenge by Jenny Fox

Chapter 4

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"So meat is going to be fine?" I ask while Cata seems overjoyed to prepare it for me.

"Red meat is usually the easiest," Cata nods. "Whatever is closest to our actual diet anyway... With time, most vampires learn to eat pretty much anything, we just get used to the taste. It doesn't kill us, and some are surprisingly good at times. Oh, and alcohol doesn't affect us!"

I'm not sure if that's going to be a good or a bad thing... Cata seems absorbed in her cooking again, preparing that wine sauce from scratch, even the shallots. I get mesmerized by her movements, and my eyes go to the batch of cookies she was preparing just before. Why does she bake so much if she can't really eat it then? Is that just a hobby?

Meanwhile, I just rest quietly, listening to her humming. I glance outside. Looks like wherever this house is located, we're surrounded by bushes and trees. As Cata said, the sun's going down behind the windows. Is it alright that I'm awake during the day? Cata looks like she's been up for hours too. If I didn't already know, I would never suspect she isn't human. I'd probably just feel like there's something off about her. I have so many questions... I sigh. I guess I have eternity to answer them now. I simply rest. I feel a lot better than before, at least. Like... just good. Not hot, nor cold. Not tired, not hungry. A bit thirsty, but I'm learning that's going to be a lasting sensation. My body still feels a bit strange to me, but I am now starting to get curious about the changes that occurred.... Like my hearing. I realize Cata's movements are mindful of each noise she makes, and swift. I can hear her spatula on the pan, but also the bird outside the window, and a squirrel running between leaves. If I really close my eyes and focus, I can also hear water running down the plumbing, the wooden floor creaking, and even more street noises from afar. That makes me realize, this house is probably bigger than what I've seen. My room was on the ground floor, but from what I heard, there are at least two or three floors, maybe more. And the only noise I can hear from above is Bart taking that shower... I hear nothing of Richard, but I guess vampires don't snore or even need to breathe while sleeping?

"...Cata, how many people are coming over, exactly?"

"Mh... some of them we haven't heard from in a few decades, so I'd be surprised if they showed up. Plus, some really don't get along, so they avoid each other... Well, like any large family, I guess! But, I'd estimate about a dozen of them will come?"

"How many people did Richard, uh... turn?"

"Oh, I wouldn't know! Probably dozens and dozens over the centuries... But not many survived until today. In fact, many vampires don't make it past the first years."

"...Really?" I frown. "Why?"

"Many things," she sighs. "... You'll see when you go hunting with Bart tonight. Just be sure to listen to him, alright Darling?"

I nod, but I'm still confused. What the heck should vampires be worried about? Catherina doesn't seem to want to expand on the matter, and I don't dare ask; as she said, I guess I'll have to find out later... She finally puts the plate in front of me. The steak is bloody, covered with a red sauce and, I have to say, smelling and looking appealing.

"There you go!" She smiles.

I smile back, and grab the fork and knife to try it. Oh... That's much better, actually. Not quite the taste I'd expect it to be, but with the combination of the red wine sauce, it's more flavorful and palatable.

"Thanks, Cata, it's delicious," I nod.

"Glad to hear that," she smiles. "... You know, I'm thinking we're going to have to do something about your appearance."

I grimace. I suppose so... I can't just go out in the streets. News of my death probably reached this part of the world too, thanks to the new technologies. If someone out there recognizes me, it's going to be quite a mess...

"I'm open to anything," I tell her honestly.

In fact, I'm open to completely erasing everything. I'm never going back to being June Starr again... I'm a bit surprised Bart and Cata didn't ask more about my death, either. Perhaps vampires learn to be respectful of others' circumstances. I'm so used to people tearing apart every part of my life to speculate, this is actually quite a nice change, I won't complain. For once, I'm the one with all the questions. I eat my steak slowly, but after a while, I realize I wasn't hungry to start with; I'm just mechanically feeding my organs, or so it feels like. The thirst in my throat doesn't disappear, no matter how much of that sauce I get; I'm even starting to reconsider the glass from earlier...

"You probably don't need to do anything tonight as you and Bart won't be going out in public, but... I will contact Riki!"

"...Riki?"

"A friend of the family!" She smiles. "She's helped us with a couple of... transformations before. I mean, things used to be so much easier a while back, before all those new technologies. All we had to do was move overseas, relocate

to a new city for a few decades! Nowadays, we have to be careful, with all those cameras and everything. It's quite bothersome, really..."

That explains a couple of things... Like why this house seems low-tech. They probably prefer a not-too-old mansion over some penthouse place where there would be more cameras. Also, why not all of the family lives here. I could barely stand my own family, and I'm just twenty-five. I can't imagine seeing the same faces for decades, let alone centuries. I'd want to move to a remote corner of the world too. And I can't say I've never dreamed of being far away from any camera...

"So most of... the others live elsewhere?"

Cata nods.

"Everyone has their own life... We see them from time to time! But only a few of us still live in London. Most of the others are scattered all over Europe, a few overseas. They don't need to report to us either, it's all up to personal affinities now."

"So, even if Richard summons them... Not everyone comes?"

Cata shrugs.

"It depends on the occasion. If they are curious about their newest little sister, they will!"

So, if it was something more serious, it would perhaps be enough to bring more home. I guess a new vampire isn't very much news if they've all been around for a few centuries... Now I'm a bit intrigued to meet those who will show up.

"So it's just you, Bart and Richard here?"

"Oh, there's Agnes too, but she doesn't really come out of her room often. You'll be lucky if you run into her! I'll introduce you to her sometime. Claude also comes here often, but he's been moving around a lot, so there's no telling when he'll show up next. Maybe tomorrow, since Richard contacted him... He's a bit of a loner, otherwise, you'll see he's a bit... different. Oh, John and Juliet also live not too far from here, they bought a house in Canterbury about ten years ago. Those two will definitely come!"

"A couple?" I ask, intrigued.

"Oh, yes! John and Juliet have been together almost since they met, and have been stuck together for a while now... Juliet was actually the youngest before you!"

The youngest, uh... I wonder what year she got turned, and why. I won't ask, though. From Cata and Bart's interaction earlier, I understand asking about one's circumstances isn't considered polite. Vampire rules, I guess. I need to get

familiar with those soon. I feel like I've left everything of my previous life behind without regret, but now I have a puzzle lying down before me that I need to solve and master quickly to fit in. I finish my plate, and lie back on the chair. I realize Cata doesn't really push me for conversation, either; whether I talk or not, she just does her baking thing, which seems to be taking an amazing amount of time. I genuinely have no idea how long it takes to make cookies, that said. I glance around, still a bit curious about this place. It seems like they've opted for furniture that would pass in any century. Everything is in tones of white or beige, and wooden furniture. There are plants here and there, but a lot of dried ones that won't grow over the years. Once again, there is literally no sign of any personal item, not even a hint of color that could pop out. Not a single photo anywhere, not even a clue about the residents' favorite snacks... In fact, it feels like a furniture magazine's picture. Or one of those places you can rent for a short stay. Literally anyone could be living here. Cata's cleaning after herself as she's done with each dish, putting everything back in place as soon as she's done with it. In ten seconds, everything will be spotless, I bet.

"So this mansion is about as empty as it sounds..." I mutter for myself.

"Most of the rooms are occupied though," smiles Cata. "...Richard bought this house after the bombings of London."

"...You mean the Blitz? World War II?"

She nods.

"The wars were hard on vampires too... We don't die from natural causes, we aren't affected by diseases outbreaks that affect the humans, but bullets and bombs? That was chaos. We didn't have the means we have today to communicate, either. A lot of vampires simply fled the main cities and remained in hiding for years. So, Richard thought we would need a place... Where everyone could always come back to, at any time."

"...Your home."

"Yes," Cata smiles. "It's a big, empty house, but every Heartgrave has a room here, even if most only sleep a couple of times a year at best... Usually for Christmas!"

"Vampires celebrate Christmas?"

"We're a family, and it's an occasion like any other! ...Plus, I think some just like to regroup here, when something happens. Or to make sure the others are alright, for those who aren't really up to date on technology...and to see Richard, too. He's the one thing we all have in common, after all."

So this is the patriarch's house everybody still has a room at... It's odd to think that the woman baking cookies in front of me lived through an actual war. It means she and Richard were in London in the 40's then? I wonder how it was... Suddenly, I hear Bart's steps coming back to us; he appears, a towel wrapped around his waist and another drying his hair. His upper half is exposed, and on his rather thin torso, I can't help but notice the impressively large burn scar.

"Hey, Baby," he says. "If you want to go and hunt you'd better start getting ready!"

Oh, right, I'm still in some sort of night gown... I turn to Cata.

"Anything I can borrow?"

"Naturally!"

I follow her light step out of the kitchen, and two floors up. She keeps looking around the doors, visibly unsure which one to open.

"Mh... You look about Juliet' size, but she doesn't keep many clothes here. Susan or Anne's would definitely be too big for you... Becca's is probably not a fit either... Oh, let's try Grace's!"

She tries a room, but it's locked. Cata rolls her eyes.

"Oh, Grace, seriously... Nevermind. Let's try Juliet's."

We go back to another room, which this time opens without issue. Cata simply walks in, and I follow. This time, it's a bedroom with much more personality than I've seen in any other room. There are pretty flower paintings on the walls, nothing like those old museum pictures but simple pastels and soft watercolors. The bed sheets seem clean, soft green, and all the furniture is white, with a soft feminine touch to it. The vanity has a pile of romantic books on it, as well as a couple of booknotes, and a rather recent makeup palette of a brand I know. There's also a couple of dvd's on a shelf, and a small tv on the side. Cata walks to the large wardrobe, opening it wide. Everything is perfectly neatly arranged.

"I don't know if there's going to be anything fitting for a hunt," sighs Cata, quickly going through the clothes hung up. "Juliet always hunted with John... Oh, this isn't bad!"

Yikes. She takes out a short, very tight piece of black fabric that's meant to be a dress with thin straps. I'd eventually wear this on a summer night to sleep, but seriously, to go hunt? I was thinking more like a black leather ensemble...

"No offense to Juliet," I mutter, "but this is..."

"Just put it on," suddenly says Bart, walking by at the same time, now wearing black jeans and a black shirt, still with a towel on his head. "We're going hunting Baby, and you're the prey!"

I turn to Cata, who gives me a little apologetic smile and hands it to me anyway.

"I'll go and find some make up, right?"

She moves on to Juliet's bathroom while I'm left with that thing in my hands. ...Is that even going to fit?

To my surprise, it does. A double-check in the mirror confirms I'm definitely more slender than ever, and the dress is a bit short on me. I don't understand how a girl who paints watercolor flowers can wear such a thing at all.

"Oh, it fits you!" Exclaims Cata, reappearing. "Here, some makeup... And I found a hat for your hair too. I mean, you and Bart are probably not going to show yourselves but it's better you make sure no one recognizes you, Darling."

"What am I going for, exactly?" I ask, wrapping my arms around my body and the tight dress covering barely a third of it.

"Just make yourself pretty, but not June Starr pretty," says Cata, giving me a wink.

What's that supposed to mean...

I don't think she realizes I haven't done my own makeup in a long, long while. Although, that's perhaps a good thing. I'm not as talented as the makeup artists I was used to, and I don't give two shits about what I look like anymore. I'm a vampire now... I decide to go for something simple, but a bit heavy on the kohl and mascara. Cata lets me play with the makeup and brushes my hair for me, quickly arranging it in waves with a little satisfied smile. I also grab the reddest, darkest lipstick I find, something no one would have left me do before. I was known as the little doll of the agency... I had to maintain an image of the blue-eyed, pretty, innocent and cute blonde. Even when I tried to graduate from that image by acting in a risky role, people only loved my "dangerous lolita charms" even more. I guess I really had to be reborn to finally decide what else I could be...

Once I'm done, I do look different. On top of what I'd witnessed earlier, I now look like a sexy, dark version of myself. The little cap hides my forehead, and Cata grabs a pair of high-heel boots.

"Hello there," Bart whistles, checking me out up and down.

"Is that okay?" I ask, still utterly confused about the heels.

"It's great," he chuckles. "I haven't had a date that hot since 1982."

I chuckle. Okay, I might start to like that old man. Bart underwent some changes too for our date. He actually cut his hair, so his white short hair actually looks somewhat cool now. He's got a bunch of his silver piercings revealed, and with the black outfit giving a decent frame to his skinny body, I'm kind of digging his modern vampire look. Compared to him, I look like an emo teenager trying to act sexy for once. I definitely need to upgrade my game some day.

He offers me his hand.

"Ready to hunt, Baby?"

“There’s a first for everything,” I nod, taking his hand.