

Hera, Love & Revenge by Jenny Fox

Chapter 5

Chapter 5

To my surprise, we leave the house shortly after nightfall, with just a quick goodbye to Cata. Still no sign of Richard, but from Cata and Bart's actions, it's apparently normal. For some reason, I'm both nervous and curious to see him again. It's strange. I feel like he's a... root for this new life I've just taken my first breaths in. I keep looking for him, unconsciously.

For now though, Bart's my guide. We walk away from the mansion, and I just start to realize how rooted their home is in London. From the outside, it's like any other house out there. It even looks somewhat better kept than the other houses, the paint seems fresh and there isn't a leaf left neglected...

"Disappointed?" Scoffs Bart.

"Yeah. I was expecting spiderwebs and bats."

"We used to have rats," he chuckles. "But we have a house cleaning service coming in twice a week, and Cata's a bit of a cleaning freak, if you haven't noticed."

I chuckle, and he offers his arm, helping me walk around. One thing I had forgotten is that London is full of old cobblestone streets, a nightmare for heels... Thankfully, my legs feel stronger. Like, really strong. I don't shake, I don't waver, and if there's a hint of unsteadiness, my body adjusts in a millisecond. I feel like one of those models who walk effortlessly on twelve inch heels, when I always felt like a baby deer with the smallest ones. I've never felt so... in tune with my body, nor this strong. I don't feel like I could lift a truck, but I can take long steps without the slightest fear of face-planting despite those high heels, which is definitely a win.

"So," I ask. "What's the lesson? I still don't understand why I'm dressed like I'm about to audition for a gothic adult movie."

"I've seen you with kinkier shit on," he chuckles, glancing at my legs.

"So you really did see that stupid movie...." I groan.

"I looked you up, Miss Starr. I'm kind of curious though. You had one hell of a career on track, and it suddenly went downhill. I hate the mainstream shit, but you didn't seem that bad of an actress either."

"Isn't it rude to ask about someone's death or something like that?"

"I'm not asking about your death, baby vamp. I'm asking about why the gossips said you left the public scene for months out of the blue. I looked it up. You were one of the most promising young actresses of your generation, carried by one of the biggest acting agencies, and all of a sudden, things started going to shit. What happened?"

I don't want to answer. I thought I was getting a clean slate by being transformed, not that I would have to answer questions like it's a fucking press conference all over again. We walk a bit longer, but Bart's still waiting, and this is awkward. I sigh.

"Some... things happened. Did you read about the accident?"

"Yeah, and that wasn't your fault. The guy was literally chasing you and he had a car accident that was bound to happen."

"It doesn't change that a man died because I didn't let him take a photo," I mutter. "...He had two kids, Bart."

"Yeah, and you were twenty years old."

"Alright," I declare. "But if you ask questions, I get to ask some too."

"Oh, feel free to," he shrugs, amused. "I'm an open book, and an incredibly boring one at that. Bartholomew Heartgraves, nice to meet you. Tell me what question tickles your little mind."

"How old are you?"

"I died at twenty-two. Want to guess what year?"

"Well, I already know you're a century older than Cata, so that's a bit scary... Eighteen something?"

"I'm flattered," he chuckles. "Born and raised in London in sixteen-forty four, I died in sixteen-sixty-six. So, yeah, nothing as grand as an acting career to report. I was an apprentice in a workshop, which honestly tells you all you need to know about my future prospects."

"How did you...?"

He chuckles.

"Sixteen sixty-six," he says. "...It doesn't ring a bell?"

Was there a war or something I'm supposed to know...? Damn, I wish I had a better memory of my History classes. After a while, Bart rolls his eyes.

"The Great Fire of London! Damn, what do they teach you in school these days?"

"I went to school in the US, not England," I protest.

"I thought you were English?"

"You listened to my conversation with Cata? ...Of course you did. I was born here, but my father sent me to California after my mother died, I was four at the time."

"That explains it..." He sighs.

"So," I said. "When does my lesson actually start?"

"What an obvious way to change the subject," he chuckles.

I don't answer. I know pretty much what I wanted to know about Bart already, and while I'd love to hear about his three centuries of life, it's not worth letting him dig any further into my pathetic childhood... or my botched career.

We keep walking, visibly getting into a more crowded area. After a little while, I recognize Soho. The mansion must be near Hyde Park, as I suspected. Night fell just a while ago, but we're in October, so it's still pretty early in the evening.

"Does it take that long?" I frown, confused.

"Hunting? No. But we might as well have fun laying the trap..."

While I'm still confused, Bart wraps an arm around my waist, and guides me towards a pretty crowded area. The streets are more and more flooded with people, and I don't mind him being close as I'm legit worried about losing him. Luckily, he's already set on this bar with the loud music, quite an old but fancy one, with loud punk rock music and all, but there's a crazy queue... Nevermind that. To my surprise, the bouncer doesn't even flinch and lets us through after just one glance from Bart.

"..You know him?" I ask as we walk in.

"Nope, but he's been charmed enough times."

Oh, so it's literally a conditioned reflex... Damn, I need to learn that.

"Is it hard to charm someone?"

"To charm a human, depends on the human," he chuckles, taking me to the bar. "A vampire? You'll learn to dominate one if you live to be a couple centuries old."

I might not master it, but I'd really like to grow somewhat immune... I'm a bit worried about what they could make me do. Not that he's used it on me at all. Bart's presence isn't as imposing as Richard's. In fact, for someone a century older than Cata, I don't feel much of a difference... How freaking old and powerful is the Heartgraves patriarch?

While I'm left to wonder, I also have to navigate between the sweaty bodies moving all around us. Compared to some of the girls here, the napkin I'm wearing for a dress is just fine. Bart's gone from holding my waist to just pulling my hand, and I follow the little path he effortlessly makes amongst the dancers. His bleached hair and smooth criminal look gets him a few glances, and I can't help but try and keep my head down when those stares get to me. Thankfully, we soon reach the bar, and I'm impressed how quickly Bart gets the Barman's attention, given all the screaming people and the loud music above us.

"Two whiskeys on the rocks, the best you got. Keep the change."

This time, he doesn't charm the barman to get those for free and just hands him a big bill. I guess there are some rules...

He hands me the glass, and we clink it. He turns around, glancing at the humans moving their bodies around with a smirk, scanning the crowd. I keep my elbows on the bar; I'm still worried about showing my face. I take a sip; oh, it's sweet... I think I'm going to have to trust them when it comes to anything I eat or drink for a while.

"How's your thirst?" He asks.

I take a second. I'm... thirsty. Like, really thirsty. I just empty my whisky, but it does absolutely nothing, it's like I just took in some air. I groan.

"Still there."

"Yeah, the first year's the worst," he scoffs. "I bet Richard would have taken you to hunt himself if he wasn't tired. My lucky day."

"Why? You don't usually get to... hunt?"

"I'm on house arrest," he grimaces. "I made a bit of a mess a few months ago... I have to drink that bottled crap until Richard lets me hunt by myself like a big boy again."

"What kind of mess?"

"None of your business. ...Now, listen. There are rules when you hunt, so you'd better listen. First, and the most important, we don't kill."

"I didn't intend to," I frown. "What do you take me for..."

"You say that now, but wait until you taste the real thing," he scoffs. "Trust me, it's going to be harder than you think. So just try to remember that, but we'll see how you do in practice. Secondly, we don't leave our victims anywhere that could put them at risk. So when you're done, you walk away but you make sure they make it home alive."

"...A bit weird, but okay."

"Third, we never touch children. You understand? No kid, and I mean anyone underage. If you have a doubt, it's a no. We also stay away from junkies, Cops, Military, and religious ones."

"That's one weird mix."

"I know, but trust me, you want to stay off those. Also try to avoid people that could be useful or see you often, like the staff of the places we hunt at."

"Got it."

I mean, most of this sort of makes sense so far, but I'm getting a bit tired of the lesson... of the theory. I finally turn to face the room, glancing around. The people here are already intoxicated, for most of them anyway. I'm starting to understand why Bart brought me here. We get to actually confirm that they're all adults since they made it into the bar, for one. Moreover, I'm definitely the bait... A group of guys are eyeing me from afar, and not being subtle about it. Bart chuckles.

"Looks like you got your prey all ready, Baby."

It's easy. I'm a sexy blonde in a rather tempting dress, my legs exposed, and from where those guys stand, Bart probably doesn't look like he's with me either. Those guys look a bit drunk, drunk enough to be daring and want to impress their buddies.

"Pick one."

I already did. The most arrogant looking, a tall dude with a square jaw who's been giving me creepy looks since earlier. I stare at him, using my best acting skills to act like a young, impressive girl thinking she just caught the bad boy's eye. It's almost too easy. I've always been aware I'm pretty, and guys like him just love an easy but out-of-their league conquest to impress their buddies.

"Good job," chuckles Bart. "Now, time to isolate him away from the pack."

"...How?"

"Emergency exit."

Seriously? ...I launch another fiery glance towards my prey, and slowly walk away. One last glance back... I got him. He's following me. I look for the emergency exit sign, hoping Bart's right on that. He is. I push the door, and find myself in a tiny street, a small dead-end no sane woman would want to find herself alone in. I can hear the music of the bar pulsating from the other side of the building, but here, there isn't even a window.

"Hello there, hot stuff..."

I turn around, and greet Big Guy with a meek smile. The door closes behind him, and I take off that smile, looking almost scared. I slowly retreat, grateful for my heels, finding myself back against the wall. This guy is just enjoying it... He looks down on me without an ounce of respect. He's here to get his prize, and then go back to gloat to his friends.

"What's that, darling? You can't just tease me and walk away like that..."

Oh, I have no plan to walk away, darling. Not when dinner's almost served...

He comes closer, and I'm getting excited. Not with lust, but with a ravenous hunger. There's something waking up, a gripping sensation in my stomach, in my throat, something that makes my fangs tingle a bit. It crawls under my skin, like a hot shiver. He comes closer, and my eyes just fall on his thick neck. I want it... I want to bite that skin and taste the sweet, warm blood under it. It's haunting my mind, a vision so clear, I open up my mouth. He smells... appetizing.

"Hey," he mutters, unsure.

I direct my eyes to him, and I see the worry in his face. ...It excites me even more. I grab that fear, and I twist it even more, his eyes opening wider. He can't run away. He's my prey. I step closer, so close to that... delicious... looking skin. That pretty vein that's softly beating, with a gorgeous, perfect purple color.... I lick my lips, impatient. I want it. I want to taste it now... I grab his neck, and open my mouth. I inhale again... and I can't resist anymore. His skin makes a satisfying sound as my fangs pierce their way into that delicious, hot stream of blood. It floods down my throat. So good... It's so good. It's heaven and hell on my tongue, a nectar that fills my mouth, and finally frees my throat from that pain. I can't stop... I want more. I bite again, deeper. He makes a sound, but I don't care. More. Give me more. I need more! I want it all. Another sip, and again, so good, it's so good...

"Alright, that's enough."

My prey's taken away from me. I hiss, but immediately, Bart's threatening growl makes me jump back.

I blink. What... What the heck did I do... Bart holds the guy by his collar and glances at the injury. It's large, and covered in blood. I cover my mouth. I can't believe I just did that! Worse is, I want to do it again. Just the thought of that taste... No, no, snap out of it.

"You little savage," chuckles Bart.

He takes out a handkerchief, and wipes the guy's neck, before looking at him.

"You're going to text your friends and tell them you're going home with your date," he says. "You're going to go home, go to sleep and forget this. Understood?"

"...Yes."

Bart lets go of the guy's collar. We watch him slowly take out his phone, type the text, and turn around, slowly walking away, looking in a bit of a daze.

"...What about the... injury?"

"It will be healed in less than five minutes," explains Bart. "Our fangs contain a venom which works both as an anesthetic and a powerful coagulant. At worst, this guy will look like you gave him the hickey of his life."

That's a relief... I take a deep breath, trying to calm down. My gosh, I can still feel the hot shivers from that... Bart walks over and grabs me by my chin, wiping off the blood with a clean corner of the handkerchief.

"Don't worry, you did good for your first time, Hera. A lot of people would have attacked me, or fought to grab their prey back."

"How do you learn to... stop?" I mutter. "I would have... sucked him dry."

Bart takes out a lighter, and sets fire to the handkerchief, throwing it to the ground and, once it's burnt enough, steps on it to stop the fire.

"Practice, Dear. Practice. ...Ready for round two?"

I nod. Yeah.

I want more, and I want to learn to stop...