The Many Adventures of Jenny and Vastra

by JMDelOach

Summary

This is the story of Jenny Flint, street urchin, and Madam Vastra, Silurian Detective. And how they met and became unlikely allies and eventually, more. Follow a young Jenny and an impatient Vastra from before they meet to their eventual introduction into the WhoVerse.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Chapter 1: Jenny’s Story, Part I

The harsh reality for children of Victorian London is that if they were poor they had to work to help support the family. And there were few appealing employment options available to these unfortunate souls. Boys often worked as chimney sweeps, in a factory, or any number of hard labor jobs along with the men; girls were often match girls or chamber maids if they were lucky enough to find an employer. Even “honest” work was dangerous for girls; and it was especially dangerous if those girls didn’t have a family to look after them or care for them. Men would take advantage any way they could, and most assaults and rapes went unreported and unchallenged. Runaway and orphaned girls had only unsavory and dangerous work options; typically either prostitution or petty theft. Jenny had no intention of letting men grope and assault her; she would find another way to survive. Most households would not hire runaways even as chamber maids, and that’s just what Jenny Flint was considered even though she didn’t run away, she had been unceremoniously kicked out onto the street when she was only fourteen.

She spent the first few days and nights on the streets huddled, starving, and shivering as the seasons changed from winter to spring. She begged and pleaded with passersby for a scrap of food but no one was willing to help. She found herself drinking rainwater and eating whatever was thrown out by the shops and restaurants. She was getting ill, not from the lack of food and water, but from the food and water she was eating. Desperate, she stole her first piece of food from the market on her fourth day on her own. It was the best thing she’d ever eaten, even though it was only a loaf of bread. But it wasn’t dirty or moldy and she didn’t fish it out of the garbage.

Within a month, she had gotten proficient at stealing enough food to survive either from shops, market venders, or abandoned plates in pubs. Although, the latter got her banned from pub after pub when they caught her snooping around tables and filling her pockets. But she did what she had to do feed herself and keep herself alive. Within a couple of months she realized that food wasn’t the only thing she needed to survive. The heavy onslaught of spring rains reminded her she needed to find regular shelter and she needed at least a change of clothes so she wasn’t soaked to the bone all the time. Sopping wet and about to catch her death of cold, Jenny sat huddled in a doorway in some back alley in the market district trying her best to avoid the rain. She was weak and desperate for food and was hoping for a handout as she was in no shape to sneak and run.

“’ello there,” a young girl about Jenny’s age said. “You look like you could use a dry place to stay.”

Jenny looked up at the girl with her big brown eyes, but she couldn’t muster any words.

“A’right then,” the girl said, “I’m Emma. Emma Dunn, if it pleases you, and I know a thing or two about bein’ on the streets and being’ cold an’ hungry. If you can keep up, I can get you some food and a dry place to stay tonight.”

Jenny nodded that she understood and slowly stood up. Coughing, she nodded again to let the girl know she was ready. The stranger took off at a good clip and it was all Jenny could do to keep up. They headed south towards the Thames and the warehouse district. Jenny followed as the girl took odd twists and turns through the streets and alleys and was just on the verge of losing her when Emma stopped short and pointed to a burned out hull of a warehouse.

“That place burned down a while ago,” she said. “They never bothered to fix it up, so some of us use it for shelter in the bad weather or just when we need to hide away for a while. Unless there’s a
lot of us there, the bobbies don’t bother us much. But you have to be careful ‘cause ever now and again it’ll get raided for workers. And you don’t want the work they’re offerin’. ’” She looked at Jenny, who had yet to say a word. “Come on then. Let’s get you inside.”

The warehouse was black with soot and burned wood. There were bricks and rusted iron rods scattered about and the building looked about as unsafe as any Jenny had ever seen. Most of the roof was gone, but there was a corner still intact and that’s where a few kids were huddled around a small fire.

Emma stopped before they were too close to the others and turned to Jenny. “Now you gotta tell me your name so I’ll know how to introduce you. And don’t let any of the boys get to you. They like to pick on new kids, but they’re ‘amrless.”

Jenny was shivering but managed to muster up enough strength to tell Emma her name. “Jenny.” She said weakly, “Jenny Flint.”

“Pleased to meet you Jenny Flint.” Emma beamed. “I can tell you ‘aven’t been out ‘ere too long, then. Am I right?”

Jenny nodded.

“It’s a’right, we’ve all been new,” Emma said as they started toward the group and the fire. “You’re with me now. I’ll teach you a few things.”

And teach her a few things, she did! Over the next few weeks Emma taught Jenny a lot about living on the streets. She had been here since she was twelve when her parents could no longer afford to feed all their kids. She was the oldest, so she was sent out to find a job that paid more than what she was making as a match girl. When her dad suggested that she turn to prostitution, she left her family behind and never looked back. She hadn’t seen them for over two years.

“Lesson one,” Emma started, “there’s no use beggin’. Won’t do you any good, you’re too old. No matter how desperate you are, no matter how hungry you are, no matter nothin’ the good people of London will just tell you to piss off, or worse. Beggin’ only works when you’re young and cute, once you’re our age you don’t get nothin’ for free.”

“I kinda figured that out m’self,” Jenny admitted. “One night I was so hungry I begged and begged for a crust of bread and not only did no one offer me anything to eat, several men offered me something else to put in my mouth.”

Emma laughed. “Oh you’ll get lots of that!” she said. “Honestly, it ain’t too bad if the guy is young enough and handsome enough. Sometimes all they want is for you to handle their root and ballocks.”

“No thank you!” Jenny said firmly.

“Blokes are easy marks,” Emma told her. “You wink and smile and flirt with ‘em and you can get all kinds of things. You can get a meal, maybe a pretty dress, and if you’re really lucky, a place to stay for the night. And you don’t have to really like the guy. You just have to pretend you do. The more they believe you really like them, the better they are to you.”

“I don’t think I’d be too good at that,” Jenny said.

“What?” Emma asked, “Pretending to like a guy you don’t really like?”

“Pretending to like any guy,” Jenny said. “I’m not too keen on boys.”
“You’ve never been sweet on a boy?”

“No.” Jenny shyly looked down and shook her head.

“No worries, Jenny,” Emma said. “Let’s talk about where to get a free meal.”

Emma took Jenny around pointing out which shops would put out their scraps and stale bread for the poor and which ones would throw it in the gutter and laugh as starving children watched and begged for a morsel. “The bakery over there will give out two day old stale bread to the poor. But they’ll give it to a mother or children before they’ll give it to girls like us. But they aren’t hateful about it, they just think mothers and children need it more.”

They journeyed on and Emma continued her lesson. “The butcher over there will pay you a half farthing a day to run deliveries around town. And if you’re really lucky, the kitchen maid will give you something to eat when you drop off the meat. It’s a really good job, if you can manage it; but the butcher only has so many deliveries a day ya know. So he don’t need a lot of help. But there are other venders who need deliveries run. It don’t pay much, but anythin’s better than nothin’.”

They walked a little further, and into a better part of London. They stood outside a confectionary, surely they didn’t throw anything away, Jenny thought. “Of course the best way to get the best things,” Emma said, “is to steal ‘em right from the shop.”

“That’s what I been doing,” Jenny confessed. “ Mostly loaves of bread and apples and the like.”

“Well you can get a lot of things, a lot better things, if you know where to look.” Emma said. “Let’s go get you some sweets.”

Jenny was very apprehensive. “But I only steal what I need to get by,” Jenny said.

“Startin’ today, you steal what you want, Jenny Flint” Emma took Jenny by the hand and led her into the shop. Within minutes Emma’s pockets were stuffed with lemon squares, biscuits, and toffee. Jenny was too scared to take anything by the time the clerk spotted them and shooed them out like cats. But when she was sharing the spoils she was starting to see the benefits of Emma’s lesson.

Over the next few months, Emma taught Jenny how to pick pockets, steal from shops, and swindle tourists. Jenny was a natural. She was quick, charming, intelligent, and articulate if she put her mind to it. They became fast friends and virtually inseparable. The only time they were apart was when Emma would meet a boy and play him for whatever she could get. Jenny never followed this lesson. She concentrated on stealing and swindling and never had the desire to play men the way Emma did.

Jenny and Emma had created quite an act. Jenny would cause a distraction, usually either pretending to faint or yelling for help and while onlookers were distracted Emma would sneak through the crowd or behind the individuals and pick what she could from their pockets. This act gradually morphed into Jenny doing all sorts of theatries to entertain or otherwise occupy onlookers. She even learned how to juggle and memorized some poetry, anything to captivate the audience. Emma began to tell Jenny she missed her true calling as an actress. Jenny would just blush and hold onto Emma’s arm as they walked around London deciding how to spend their hard earned coin.

It was late summer going on fall and Jenny and Emma were bored and looking for an adventure. “Fancy a show?” Emma asked as they walked past the Elysium Musical Theatre.
“Sure,” Jenny smiled. “But I don’ think they’ll let the likes of you an’ me in there. Those people are dressed fancier than the Pope on Sunday!”

“You just watch and learn Jenny Flint,” Emma teased and smiled at her friend. She grabbed Jenny’s hand and led her around behind the theatre to the alleyway entrance. A quick glance inside and they were running backstage darting in and out of costume racks and set props. Finally Emma saw who she was looking for.

“Oi, Ian,” she called in a hushed tone.

A tall, small framed, red headed young man looked around at the call of his name. “Emma!” He rushed over and scooped her up in a hug. “Long time, Love,”

“I’ve been otherwise preoccupied for the theatre, darling,” Emma said in a mocked high society tone. They all laughed. “Oh,” she said in her normal voice. “This is my friend Jenny.”

“’ello Jenny,” Ian nodded his head slightly. “’aven’t seen you around before.”

“She’s new to the life,” Emma said. She turned her attention to Jenny. “Ian ‘ere was living in the burned out warehouse when I first found that place. Now ‘eh’s Mr. Bigshot with a proper job here at the theatre.” She said “theatre” in her high society voice.

“Are you an actor then?” Jenny asked.

“Oh blimey no,” Ian laughed. “I’m a stagehand.”

“Wut’s a stage’and?”

“Well, we move props and set pieces onto the stage and set ‘em up,” he started. “And we have to put ‘em just right so the actors ‘hit their mark’. They get real particular. We’re the guys who change the scenes between acts and then pack it all up if it’s a traveling show.”

“Sounds like hard work,” Jenny smiled.

“Nah,” Ian flexed his nonexistent muscles, “not for a strappin’ young lad like meself.”

“That’s enough flirtin’ you two,” Emma said. Jenny turned as red as Ian’s hair. “Kind sir, please show us ladies to our seats.” Emma said in her mocking high society voice.

“Certainly darling,” he joked back and offered them each an arm to hold onto.

Ian took them to a rope ladder that lead to a suspended walkway above the stage. Jenny looked up and looked at Emma then to Ian. “We’ goin’ up there?”

“Best seat in the house, m’lady,” Ian said. “You can see everything from up there. Even some stuff behind the scenes. But you have to be quiet. No laughing or talking.” He put on a stern face and Jenny couldn’t tell if he was serious or joking.

“Well that does it, Jenny can’t go up,” Emma said giving Jenny a grin.

“Shut your gob,” Jenny lashed back. “I can be quiet if I want.”

The girls headed up the ladder after Ian. “There’s nothing going on up here tonight. The show is pretty straight forward. But usually this is where I’d be to lower props and what not.”

“Like wut?” Jenny asked.
“You know, like if there was a scene where the moon was in the sky I may have to lower down a big full moon or somethin’ like that.”

“Oh,” Jenny said.

“But, like I said, nothin’ like that tonight. So you birds should be safe, even if it is the catwalk!”

Jenny laughed. She liked Ian.

The girls got situated and dangled their feet off the catwalk and talked waiting for the show to start.

“You like Ian, then?” Emma asked bluntly.

“Sure,” Jenny said. “’es’ a nice enough bloke.”

“Maybe you could ask ‘im out for a walk along the park or something,” Emma suggested.

“You mean like a date?” Jenny scrunched up her nose.

“Yeah,” Emma said. “It’s ok for a girl to ask a boy out on a walk. No shame in that.”

“I don’t like ‘im like that!” Jenny exclaimed.

“Why not?” Emma demanded. “You never go out with any boys. You’re almost fifteen now. Don’t you think it’s about time you took an interest in boys?”

“Oi! You sound like me mum,” Jenny said and hung her head.

Emma could see a single tear fall from Jenny’s cheek to her skirt. “Jenny wut’s wrong?”

Jenny sat for a long minute wringing her hands and summoning the courage to speak. “I don’t like boys, Emma,” Jenny was sobbing now. Several tears streamed down her face. “I like girls.” It felt good to say out loud. But she was suddenly terrified. What would Emma think? What would she do? Would she still want to be her friend?

Emma put her hand on Jenny’s back and tenderly patted it. “That’s a’right Jenny. Don’ cry. Nothing to be sad about.” Emma continued to try and comfort Jenny. “Is that why you got kicked out of your mum’s house then? Cause you like girls?”

Jenny looked at Emma with swollen red eyes. She was beyond excited that Emma was still sitting there. But not just sitting there. She was touching her, comforting her. She wasn’t disgusted or telling her how she was going to go to Hell. “You mean you’ll still be my friend?”

Emma laughed. “Of course, silly. I figured you didn’t like boys. You never look at ‘em or talk about ‘em. And so wut? What’s it matter? Doesn’t if you ask me.” She smiled at Jenny. “So, is that why you got kicked out?”

“Yes.” Jenny wiped her eyes and stopped her crying. She smiled at Emma and felt better than she had in months. “I didn’ even do anythin’. My mum caught me and a girl ‘olding ‘ands. But nothing had ‘appened and she told me to either like boys or leave. Wut choice did I ‘ave? I can’t stop liking girls. I jus’ do. And I can’t jus’ start liking boys, I jus’ don’t. It was either leave then or pretend for a while and get kicked out later anyway. So I left.”

“Parents are right shite!” Emma smiled at Jenny. “That settles it. I’m never ‘aving kids.”
“Me neither!” Jenny said. Then they both laughed out loud.

Ian ran across the stage and looked up at the two girls. “Oi! Shhhhhhh!” he said putting his finger up to his mouth. “Show’s about to start. You wanna get kicked out?” he said in a hushed tone.

Emma put her hand to her mouth and pantomimed a key locking a padlock. Ian shot her a look and went on about his work.

The play soon started and the girls laughed along with the audience at the antics of the actors. Only once did they laugh out of turn when an actor tripped and fell over during a costume change back stage.

It earned them a scowl from the actor, Ian, and who they guessed was the stage manager. They clammed up before they got escorted out.

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It was a year now that Jenny had been on her own. She had survived a summer, her fifteenth birthday, and one winter on the streets. The winter was the worst. Street life was hard but she had learned how to make the best of it. She spent any money she earned or stole on places to stay so that she never had to rely on anyone for shelter. Usually this meant renting floor space in a flat with a dozen or more other homeless children. Occasionally she could get a room for a week or so with only a few other people, she much preferred this. Food was easy for her to get between the handouts from a few good shop owners and lifting things off carts in the market. She had a real knack for petty theft but she was never too greedy with what she took. And she always did what she could to help others; even some days not eating so that a young child or a new mother could eat.

She and Emma snuck into the theatre at least once a month with the help of Ian and took their place on the catwalk. They even got to help on one occasion when the other stagehand didn’t show. That was very exciting. And they got paid!

In April Emma shared some news with Jenny that made her both extremely happy and extremely sad. “Oi, Jenny,” Emma called to her best friend. Jenny came running up to meet her, she hadn’t seen her in days. “I’ve wonderful news, Jenny.”

“Go on then,” Jenny said. “Wut’s this about?”

“You remember Peter, the boy I’ve been seein’?” It was a rhetorical question. “He’s asked me to marry ‘im and move to Liverpool.”

“Liverpool?” Jenny was surprised, to say the least. “But that’s so far away. I’ll never see you again.”

“Nonsense,” Emma said. “Peter ‘as a really good job lined up there and I’m sure we’ll come back ‘ere to visit. His mum still lives ‘ere.”

“What kind of job?” Jenny wasn’t sure this sounded like a good idea. “Who’s he gonna be workin’ for?”

“Construction’s all he told me,” Emma said. “Said he got word that Liverpool was growing faster than it could house all the people moving in. Said they were ‘iring any and all able bodies to build all the new apartment buildings and ‘ouses needed for all the folks moving that way.”

“So what will you do?” Jenny asked.

“I suppose I’ll take care of the ‘ouse,” she said. “I’ll be a good lil ‘ousewife.” She straightened up
and batted her eyelashes.

“’ousewife?” Jenny couldn’t help but laugh. “You? No more thieving’ an’ runnin’ the streets? All tied down and settled?”

“Sounds kinda borin’ when you say it like that,” Emma said lightly slapping at Jenny’s hand. “But I reckon so.” Emma looked lovingly at Jenny. “Jenny, I’m tired. I’ve been on my own since I was twelve. I’m tired of fightin’ an’ stealin’ just to survive. Peter’s a good guy. He’s good to me, and I think we can make it work. I really do.”

“Then I’m happy for you, Emma,” Jenny smiled at her friend. “I really am. I’m jus’ gonna miss you, that’s all.”

“I’ll miss you too Jenny,” Emma hugged onto Jenny with all her strength, “I’ll miss you so much. But I’ll come back and visit, I promise.”

Jenny and Emma spent the rest of the day together and Emma left with Peter the next morning. She wouldn’t come back to London for years.

Jenny went about her life as best she could, although she really missed her friend and almost constant companion. Within a month she sank into a depression. She stopped sneaking into shows (a favorite pastime of her and Emma’s), traded her theatrical swindling for simple pickpocketing, and stopped stealing enough to make sure she was able to help out others. She did just what she had to do to keep herself fed and a roof over her head. Each day she passed by the opium dens deep within the worst of East End, but she hadn’t sunk that low, yet. She did pick up the nasty habit of gin, but she tried to limit this to when she had a place to stay. She had seen what happened to young girls who passed out drunk on the streets.

She found company in the occasional “lost girl” but no one could replace Emma. Most of the girls that clung to Jenny did so because she was safe and she often had a place to sleep. But they didn’t care about her. Emma had always cared. Sometimes she thought that Emma would have made a perfect wife for her, not Peter. But their relationship wasn’t like that. Not at all. Besides, Jenny knew she’d never have a real relationship with a woman, which was ironic given that was exactly what her parents had kicked her out of the house for a year ago.

Curling up in the corner of an overcrowded flat, Jenny was half way through a bottle of gin when she started to reminisce. And it wasn’t good. It was never good on the gin. Jenny’s mom knew something was “off” with her little girl. She wasn’t like the other girls who dreamed of a wedding and a prince charming or a courageous soldier; no, if anything Jenny was the one pretending to be prince charming! She hated dressing up for church much preferring to play in the streets with the boys. She liked what the boys liked, and her mother feared this would mean that she would also like girls when the time came for her to start courting. Her mother was so paranoid about this that starting at age 12 she actually encouraged Jenny to only play with boys. This pleased Jenny, as that is what she wanted to do anyway. She didn’t understand that her mother was trying to encourage romantic feelings between her and her playmates.

Those feelings never came for Jenny, at least not for boys. Her mother was right and when she started to notice other kids, her eyes went to the girls. She never acted on those feelings until the spring of her fourteenth year. There was one girl she knew in the neighborhood who always smiled at her. She was like Jenny in a lot of ways, she’d rather play in the dirt with the boys than play dress up with the girls. They hit it off right away, but to Jenny’s mother, they hit it off too well. She watched them like a hawk. Looking for any sign of “deviant behavior” as she called it. She wasn’t going to let her daughter disgrace her. No sir. But when her mother found them one day holding hands, the simple, innocent act was misinterpreted by her mother who had been looking
for any reason at all to chastise her daughter about the aberrant thoughts she just knew Jenny possessed. Jenny begged and tried to explain that they were just friends and there was nothing to the hand holding. The only truth to that was that nothing had happened, yet. But they both felt the mutual attraction.

After a proper scolding Jenny’s mother marched the little girl home and that’s the last Jenny ever saw of her. She was certain her parents either sent her away or threatened her to stay far away from Jenny. Jenny challenged her mother only to receive an ultimatum: swear off the deviant behavior or leave. Jenny left. Now Emma had left. Jenny was truly alone.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 2: Vastra’s story

How long had it been since the Doctor saved her? Was she really saved or was she in some sort of a hellish nightmare, was this Hell itself? She was utterly alone. None of her sisters had survived. And what had she awaked to? Victorian London was a stinking cesspool of filth and poverty to Vastra. She saw little difference between the slums of East End and the grand buildings of Piccadilly. But she had learned to tolerate the apes and make a life for herself despite having to hide her face and stay her tongue, both from killing and communicating her disdain for apes.

The Doctor insisted that Vastra live with him in the TARDIS after rescuing her in the tunnels of the underground. It took months just to get her to the point where she didn’t want to skin every last human alive. But the Doctor pointed out the folly of this line of thought and she soon accepted that she had little choice other than to do her best to fit in. He offered to take her anywhere in space and time, but she flatly refused stating, “Earth is my home and if I am unlucky enough to have awoken in such a sophomoric stage of human evolution, so be it. I shall make it work.”

Combining the TARDIS translator with her high intellect, Vastra was able to learn English quickly with the help of the Doctor. She regarded it as a very primitive language and cursed it’s inconsistencies in both spelling and grammar. “A language should be functional and follow a pattern or a code,” she’d say to the Doctor. “There is no pattern or code to this frivolous language. It is haphazard and seemingly random! Mathematics. That is a language.”

After her initial stay on the TARDIS, she would alternate spending weeks in London and days back on the TARDIS while the Doctor taught her as much as he could about humans and Victorian society. For her time in London the Doctor had set her up with a small flat and a generous sum of money at the Central Bank. She wouldn’t need her own place until they were sure she could fit in and make a real go of life with the humans, or apes as she insisted on calling them. He introduced her to a tailor and a butcher, each of whom he had paid handsomely for their service and discretion; both would play a vital role in the Silurian’s ability to move about the city incognito and keep her fed. He strictly forbade the use of humans as food, a promise that she begrudgingly kept, for now. Once she had a proper disguise, he told her, it was up to her to secure further connections for other provisions that would prove life or death for the Silurian, such as a hefty and steady supply of firewood. Ultimately, she had no trouble making the proper contacts to acquire all the things she needed for basic survival.

It took a year of this back and forth living before Vastra was ready to leave the Doctor behind and start her new life. The Doctor decided that with her keen intellect and logical mind he knew exactly what profession she should undertake in Victorian London. “Madam Vastra, the Great Detective,” he said, waving his hands as if to reveal a great banner spanning midair.

“How’s that?”

“You have a mind for it: intelligent and logical. And you are meticulous and organized,” he went on, “and a nose for it, or should I say tongue. That keen sense of smell will be the thing that puts you crest and shoulders above the blokes down at Scotland Yard.”

“Scotland Yard?”
Vastra seemed to only be able to communicate in single words or phrases in the tone of a question.

“Right-o,” the Doctor seemed very proud of himself. He produced a folder and slapped it down on the table in front of Vastra. “You solve this case and you’ll be able to ask your price at Scotland Yard. I’ve already put in a good word with Detective Chief Inspector Lang.” He paused here looking a bit unsure of how to proceed.

“However?” Vastra knew there was something he wasn’t telling her.

“However,” he continued quite sheepishly, “you have to understand, Vastra, this is Victorian London and women do not hold certain professions. Detective is one of those professions reserved only for men.”

“Then it seems you have doomed me from the start, Doctor,” she said.

“Nonsense,” he said. “Like I said, you solve this case and you’ll be able to name your price. They said they would require a test of your skills, what with you being a woman. So they gave me their coldest case file...”

“Coldest?” Vastra interrupted, looking puzzled.

“It means it hasn’t been solved in years and they have no leads,” he said very quickly. Almost too quickly to understand.

“No leads? Years?” Vastra exclaimed. “How am I supposed to solve a case to which the crime committed has not happened in years?”

“Well that part is up to you,” he said. “Many different ways it could all go. I’m sure you’ll find one.”

If looks could kill, the Doctor would have suddenly found both hearts quite still.

“Look,” he softened his tone a bit, “they have no intention of giving a freelance contract to a woman. They gave you an impossible case, but you will solve it. And when you do, they will give you a contract. You’ll just have to negotiate the terms. The point is you can do this. You will do this. And you will thrive here. You’ll see.”

Vastra didn’t know if the Doctor was speaking from knowledge he had gained through time travel or if he was just really good at giving pep talks, but she grabbed the case file with a new found vigor and swore to solve it and show the prejudiced humans at Scotland Yard that a female Silurian was far more capable than any ape male. She would command their respect.

Vastra flipped through the case file for a few minutes and looked up at the Doctor. “Who gave you this file, Doctor?”

“DCI Lang,” he said. “Handed it to me with a grin on his face. Why?”

“Because I need to know whose scent is all over it before I march in there and demand the physical evidence held in custody,” she smiled.

“That’s my lizard!” the Doctor exclaimed. “Already using that beautiful Silurian brain.”

“You should expect no less, Doctor.” Vastra stood up straight and smiled at her friend. “I think I’ll rather enjoy showing up these apes.”
Vastra set to solving the case straight away. The file read “Clock Tower Strangler”. She saw straight away that she needed a proper spot to work and some supplies in order to properly investigate the clues in the case file. Before day’s end Hodges Fine Furnishings was delivering a magnificent cherry wood desk, which looked conspicuously out of place in the humble flat. She stocked up on pencils, ink, quills, paper, and a pocket sized notebook among other necessities at the general store. She was ready.

She pulled out the pages within the file one by one reading each carefully and making notes. As the hours ticked by she saw the simplicity and complexity of this case unfold. The case was gruesome. A dozen women had been discovered, one by one, strangled and left lifeless at the base of the great clock tower. There had been no physical evidence found at the scene or on the women. They had not been raped, simply strangled and abandoned. Sprawled in the street like discarded trash. There were no witnesses. This was a relatively heavily traveled part of London, yet no one saw a thing. The bodies were just discovered either in the middle of the night or the early morning hours. The murders spanned two years, and there was no noticeable pattern as to when the attacks had occurred. In that regard, they seemed totally random.

“No wonder they never caught him,” Vastra said aloud, “there is virtually nothing to go on. There are no witnesses. There is no physical evidence. Nothing!” Vastra slammed her fists on her desk. “The Doctor has indeed set me to a fool’s errand.” She took a deep breath and calmed herself. “There must be something. There has to be something.” She stacked everything back up and went through all the papers again, one at a time. It was midnight before she gave in to her fatigue and went to bed.

The next morning Vastra walked confidently to Scotland Yard. She was quickly stopped by a young constable and asked if she needed to report a crime. “No,” she said bluntly, “I am here to speak with Chief Detective Inspector Lang.”

“Is he expecting you?” asked the confused constable.

“No.” Vastra knew she had to remain confident. “Tell him it’s Madam Vastra, Detective. I am here about the Clock Tower Strangler case.”

The young constable choked back a laugh which did not go unnoticed by Vastra. “Detective?” he said an octave higher than he was just speaking. “And what about the Strangler case? That case has been on ice for years.”

“And I am here to solve it, Sir.” Vastra was furious. It was all she could do to keep from lifting her veil and ending this puny ape’s life with a flick of her tongue. “Now if you will please direct me to Detective Chief Inspector Lang’s office and stop wasting my time.”

The constable was stunned. No one talked to him like that, especially not a woman. But her imposing stature and commanding tone had obviously worked on the young man, because with a huff he turned on his heel and headed down the hallway.

“DCI Lang,” the constable said as he arrived at the door of the office. “Madam…” he looked back at the veiled woman.

“Vastra,” she reminded him.

“Madam Vastra to see you Sir,” he said, saluting to his superior.

“So you’re the woman the Doctor couldn’t speak highly enough about,” he said as he came over to meet Vastra face to face. She immediately recognized his scent from the folder. She was half
expecting the constable to try to pass someone else off as DCI Lang just to shut her up. How would she know the difference?

Not being that well versed in human etiquette, she failed to recognize the cue to extend her hand to DCI Lang. This further added to her mystique. Also not one for small talk, she jumped right to the point of her visit. “I have reviewed the case file for the Clock Tower Strangler and I must say that I can see why it remains unsolved all these years later.”

“Giving up so quickly then?” DCI Lang was not joking, yet he laughed as though he had said something hilarious.

“Indeed not,” Vastra responded, tilting her head to the side, not understanding the man’s merriment. “I have come to review the physical evidence mentioned in the folder. Apparently the women’s clothing was saved and is stored here at Scotland Yard.”

“You could plainly see their clothing in the photographs,” he said. “Why do you need to examine the actual garments? There was no evidence on the clothing. No hair or blood or stains. There was nothing special about the dresses. It’s all in the report.”

“Nevertheless Detective Chief Inspector Lang, I would like to examine the actual articles.” Vastra made no attempt to hide the fact that she felt she wasn’t being taken seriously.

“Very well,” he gave in. “It will take my boys a bit to dig them out of storage. Can you come back later in the week?”

“If it is all the same to you, Detective Chief Inspector Lang, I’ll wait,” she said pointedly.

“Madam Vastra,” DCI Lang was trying to be courteous now. “It will take hours to locate all of the boxes of evidence and get them into a room for viewing. There are a lot of large dresses and they do take up a lot of space.”

“Then pray have them bring them to me one at a time as they find them and I shall inspect one while waiting on the others to arrive,” she offered.

DCI Lang looked at Vastra and raised an eyebrow. Perhaps this woman was more capable than he would have ever given her credit. She was certainly persistent.

Vastra was escorted to a room with nothing but a large table and one chair. Taking a seat, she took out the case file to continue making notes and organizing her thoughts. It was three hours before the first box arrived. She was glad she had such a large breakfast.

Box after box was brought in. She asked that the men not open them, to leave them sealed and let her open them herself. She carefully tasted the air inside each box before removing anything. Within each box she picked up a particular consistent scent mingled with what was undoubtedly the scent of each female and all of the officers who had handled the garments in the initial investigation. Five boxes had been brought to her, but not nearly all of them before DCI Lang came to tell her she would have to resume her investigation the next day. He wasn’t about to let her stay there without being in the building himself.

“What time should I arrive tomorrow, Detective Chief Inspector Lang?” she asked.

“You can call me DCI Lang, or just Lang, you don’t have to say the whole title,” he said a little put out by her stamina. “I arrive at seven. You can resume any time after that.”

“I shall see you promptly at seven a. m., Detective Chief Inspector Lang.” She gathered up her
notes and headed for the door. “And please ask your men not to touch the evidence I have out. I have it arranged just so.” The truth was, she wanted to preserve it as much of that one scent as possible on the clothing. And she did not want anyone contaminating it.

The scent stuck with her because of its pheromone signature. It was different than one might expect from a constable or a detective simply doing his job collecting evidence and investigating a crime. No, this was different, but she wasn’t quite versed in human pheromones just yet. She was able to pick up on two specific aspects of human pheromones. One was the scent unique to the individual and two was the emotion behind the pheromone. Two humans would smell completely different to her, but if they were both scared, she would be able to taste the fear in each of their signature scents while discerning who was who. Their unique scent would smell different if they were happy or excited or aroused. She needed to figure out this emotion that lingered on the dresses of the victims.

Once home, she reviewed her notes and matched them up with the photos from the case file to make sure all the garments that had been catalogued were still accounted for. She found no discrepancies. She noted this for each of the five victims she had been able to examine physical evidence for. All of the women had been clad in fancy dresses as though they were out for a night on the town. There were varying degrees of petticoat, bustle, skirt, and dress assigned to each victim. The colors, fabrics, and style of each garment was different, there was not a pattern that she could discern. She noted this as well. Satisfied she had made some progress today, she ate her supper of raw mutton and went to bed.

Seven a.m. sharp she met DCI Lang in front of Scotland Yard. “Right then,” he said barely acknowledging her. She followed him inside where she was promptly handed off to a constable. She was escorted back to the room and again box after box was brought to her. She took meticulous notes and again tasted the same scent within each new box. She couldn’t quite put her tongue on it, but she knew it was important. She worked straight through the day and by three p.m. all the boxes had been brought to the room. She had just finished her notes on the last one at six p.m. when DCI Lang came to escort her out of the building.

“Find anything that wasn’t in the photographs?” he asked with a very cheeky tone.

She couldn’t very well tell him about the scent she had picked up. “Actually,” she had to choose her words very carefully, “sometimes it is what is not there that is the clue.”

DCI Lang wasn’t buying it. She had nothing and was bluffing. There was nothing there and he knew it. He had faith that the case would continue to sit cold, locked away. “Will you be back tomorrow?”

“No,” she said bluntly, “I have a theory to work through which will occupy me for a several days. I will be back when I have more information for you, Detective Chief Inspector Lang.”

Lang smirked, he knew for sure now that she had nothing. He doubted at this point that he would see her again. “That was easy,” he thought to himself, glad to be rid of the woman. “I’ll need that case file back when you’re done playing detective.”

Vastra clinched her fist and held her tongue. She was more determined than ever to solve this case. Arriving home she had supper and compared her new notes with the photographs. Again, all items were accounted for. She now had two tasks: one, to figure out what that pheromone signature was and two, to find what was missing from the photos and the evidence boxes. She wasn’t sure why, but she had a feeling that something was indeed missing.
For days Vastra poured her attention into the case. She walked the streets of London in all manner of neighborhood trying to get a whiff of some pheromone that resembled the one from all the evidence boxes. She knew it would not be the same person’s, but these things came in “flavors” if you will. Fear was pungent, but so was greed and hate. Love, as she surmised from the couples walking hand in hand looking longingly at one another was sweet and subtle like honey or morning dew. And lust, as she found out when she walked into a house of ill repute, was salty with a hint of spice and musk. Of course these were generalizations and emotions rarely came one at a time. So what she sensed was generally a “cocktail” of emotions. Fear and hate often intermingled. So did love and lust, as they are most certainly not mutually exclusive.

After she had visited a few more spots, including a popular underground boxing club near the docks, she began to piece together the emotions that made up the mystery pheromone signature left in all the evidence boxes. They were, in no particular order of magnitude, lust, excitement, fear, and success. Success? This was huge. Had the perpetrator had access to these boxes? Or was his signature still simply on the dresses from the attack? It smelled too fresh for that. In that case, did he work for Scotland Yard? And if so, how would she prove he had committed these heinous crimes? It isn’t like DCI Lang would take the word of a stranger, a woman, over that of an officer of the law. And what would she tell him anyway, “I smelled this officer’s scent on the dresses?” No, she would have to find irrefutable proof.

Now that she had a suspect, or at least the idea of where to look for a suspect, she could hopefully find him at the Yard and begin surveillance. She still had no idea how she would link physical evidence to the perpetrator even if she did identify him through scent.

Looking at the case file she did not see a registry of who had access to the evidence boxes or who had accessed them throughout and since the investigation. This was the first order of business, so first thing Monday morning she found herself on the steps of Scotland Yard waiting for DCI Lang to arrive.

“Ah, Madam Vastra,” DCI Lang called to her, unmistakable in that black veil. The Doctor had told him of her “skin condition.” “Have you finally decided to bring my case file back to me?”

“Yes, Detective Chief Inspector Lang,” she corrected. “I am here to ask for further information that is unavailable in the case file.”

Lang stopped on the steps beside Vastra. “Madam Vastra,” he sighed. “There is nothing else. You have seen the case file and you have seen the physical evidence. There is no other information.”

“What about a log of who had access or who has accessed the evidence boxes,” she said plainly. “Is that something you have?”

“That should be in the case file,” he said.

“Well it is not,” Vastra informed him.

Lang was taken aback, but had a strong poker face and showed no physical reaction that Vastra could discern. “And tell me, Madam, just what do you hope to find by knowing who has accessed the evidence?”

She had to be careful. She could not trust anyone at Scotland Yard and she could not simply accuse someone employed here of being the Clock Tower Strangler. It was just a theory after all and even though she truly felt she was on the right path she could still be wrong. She calculated that her best course of action may be humility and she would ask for help.
“Anyone who has worked the scene or handled the evidence has surely formed some opinions about the case,” she said. “I was hoping to speak with these individuals to see if there is some insight they can offer.”

“So you’re telling me you have nothing of your own and you want to see what the officers here have come up with so you can have a direction to go in?” DCI Lang was brutal. He had no intention of giving this woman an inch. The only reason he was even entertaining this nonsense was because of the debt Scotland Yard, possibly all of London, owed the Doctor. He huffed out an audible sigh. “Look, Madam, the only ones interested in that evidence would be the officers involved in the case. I can’t imagine anyone else taking the time to look at a bunch of dresses on a dead end case. The case file is well documented with names of all the officers who were either on site or investigated afterwards. You can compile a list. I’d start there.”

“Already done,” Vastra smiled and produced a piece of paper from her messenger bag. This was by no means a conclusive list of individuals who had opened the evidence boxes, but it was a start and she would take this as an invitation to interview all the officers involved in the case. She didn’t need them to talk, she just needed their scent.

Case file in hand she roamed the halls of Scotland Yard looking for each of the officers on her list. After being asked half a dozen times if she needed to file a complaint, she had finally visited a fourth of the officers. Most were unwilling to talk to her and the ones who did were not helpful in the least, more often than not presenting a line of questioning about why she wanted to pursue a man’s profession instead of staying home and raising a family. But worst of all, none of them had the scent signature she was searching for.

On her way out, past the row of desks in the detectives’ shared office space, she got it. It was faint and it was made up of different “emotions” than the signature in the boxes, but it was his. The desk placard read “Detective Sutton Parker.” She stopped by his desk and took in a large inhale of air letting it rest on her tongue. She saw a wool hat and a pair of gloves and assumed this was what was holding his scent so strongly. She had her man. Sort of. She still had no idea who he was or what he looked like. But at least she knew where to find him. He was not a detective assigned to the case. However, this certainly did not mean he couldn’t have accessed the evidence or left his scent from the act of the crime. Either way, he had nothing to do with the case; therefore she had no reason to interview him as far as Scotland Yard was concerned. She would have to come back when he was at his desk to put a face with the name in order to begin her surveillance.

Vastra poured over the case for a few more days and finally got tired of looking at the same notes and photographs and lists. She needed some fresh air to clear her head. She decided to take a cab to within a few streets of the clock tower and then walk from there. She wanted to see how the lighting was, where any officers may be, and what the general foot traffic was at this time of night. Of course she couldn’t expect the conditions to be the same today as they were when the crimes were committed, but at least it would help her get an idea of things.

As Vastra strolled along she noticed that there was a fair bit of street traffic and a few people were out and about on foot. She passed the clock tower and strolled onto Westminster Bridge where she stopped and looked out upstream along the stretch of the Thames. She saw young couples out, arm in arm, on romantic walks and men in suits and ties rushing to get somewhere.

She watched as people came and went and cabs rolled by and a few constables patrolled the streets. Then, something caught her eye. She observed a passing couple for what was obviously a little too long as the man wrapped his arm tighter around his date and they picked up their pace. It was the glint of the gem in her necklace that had caught Vastra’s attention. Then it hit her. “He’s keeping trophies!” She thought back to the all the photos and none of the women were wearing necklaces;
yet they were all dressed for a night out. Vastra wasn’t a fashion expert, even for Silurian garments, but she had noticed that a lot of the women wearing low fronted dresses often adorned their necks and chests with jewelry. She now thought it odd that none of the victims had such adornments and it made perfect sense for a strangler to keep such an item as a trophy.

Her objective was now clear even if she had no idea how to accomplish it. She had to find the trophies. That was her proof. Where would Detective Sutton Parker hide his trophies? And how would she find them? Would she have to break into his home and search it? And even if she did find them, how would she link them to the victims? So many questions. It would be so much simpler if she could just get paid for making the attacks stop. But the attacks had stopped. So no one would know if she simply killed the murderer. No, her work was cut out for her.

Finally, after coming back day after day with the guise of interviewing the remaining officers on the list, she was able to catch Detective Sutton Parker at his desk. He was an older man, fit and handsome for an ape. He seemed to get along well with the other detectives and, like them, he seemed to not care for a woman helping out the Yard. Vastra tried to taste the air around him as best she could beneath her veil. He wasn’t exuding anything resembling fear or apprehension when she was around. If he was the Strangler, he had complete confidence that this woman was no threat.

Now having a face to put with the name she began her surveillance of Detective Parker. First she would learn his routine. After a week she surmised that his regular work hours were seven a.m. to six p.m., but like all detectives he spent a great deal of time out of the office and on the streets. She didn’t know what case he was currently working, how would she, but he seemed to spend a lot of time at shady establishments. More than once she saw him leaving a pub in a not so nice part of town with a woman on his arm, only to disappear into a nearby housing building. She was certain this was not part of a case and that he was paying for the company of these women.

Disgusted as she was by this man, she was resolved to catch him, not simply kill him. She decided it was best not to inquire about him at these establishments. If he had any inkling he was suspected he may alter his habits and not give Vastra any new information at all to go on. Or worse, he would come after her directly. After all, how many veiled women would have reason to inquire about his seedy outings? She maintained a healthy distance and simply took notes as to his schedule and habits.

It was a Tuesday night and she had followed him home. She was just about to take her leave, assuming that like every night, he wouldn’t be coming out until he left for work the next day; but just before she left, a cab pulled up to his house. Shortly, out came Detective Parker with a woman on his arm. She was around his age and Vastra guessed this to be his wife. They were dressed up and appeared to be heading to an event. Vastra moved in closer, careful to stay in the shadows. She overheard the instruction to the driver, “Strand Music Hall.”

Vastra took note of the destination and contemplated whether or not she should try to break into the house and search while the couple was out. Eventually she decided against it. There was no point in jeopardizing the entire investigation so early on. She opted to wait for the couple to return. She moved to a different location and simply waited. Finally, they arrived back home, and from her new vantage point Vastra got a good look at the wife. She was modest looking, conservative. A far cry from the women on his arm in East End. She also noticed the necklace. It was a complex weaving of gold and garnet with beading and a large garnet pendant dangling front and center. She committed the necklace to memory.

Arriving home, she quickly sketched the necklace to the best of her abilities. She decided she needed to interview the family members of the victims and inquire about any necklaces they may
have possessed. It took days to track down the families of the victims while still maintaining surveillance on both Detective and Mrs. Parker, and she still wasn’t able to find them all. Some of them had no knowledge of any necklaces their loved one may have owned. A few were able to describe some necklaces to Vastra, which she attempted to sketch in as much detail as the family member could provide. But no one was able to produce a necklace for her to see. This fed her theory that the strangler had kept the necklaces as trophies. Finally she spoke with someone who recognized the sketch she had drawn of Mrs. Parker’s necklace from that Tuesday night.

“Yes,” Mrs. Harper said. “Sarah had a suitor. He had given her a necklace that looked remarkably like that one. She had been on a few dates with him, but she wasn’t impressed. She said he seemed like he was trying too hard. Desperate. And he was older. Which may explain why he was so desperate. She didn’t see him again after about three dates. She tried to give the necklace back to him, but he told her to keep it, that it was a gift. She was wearing it the night she.” Mrs. Harper choked up. “You don’t think he could have…” she trailed off.

Vastra was not very comforting. As a Silurian, she lacked the compassion of a human. “Would you recognize Sarah’s suitor?”

Mrs. Harper attempted to compose herself. “No. I never met him.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Harper. This has been most helpful.” Vastra said and excused herself.

She had managed to pair one necklace in Detective Parker’s possession with one victim. She would need more to take the theory to DCI Lang. The bastard Parker was giving gifts to young women, killing them, then giving the necklaces to his wife as a constant reminder of his deeds. Disgusting. Silurians were warriors. Some may even say they were cold blooded killers, but this turned Vastra’s stomach.

Vastra continued her surveillance, now on the wife as much as the husband. Mrs. Parker went to luncheon with a group of ladies every Thursday. This week, she left the house with another noticeable necklace, this one was sapphire and gold and of unique design, but much simpler than the one she had worn before. Most notable was the teardrop shaped sapphire that fell just above her cleavage. It matched a sketch Vastra had obtained from a victim’s family. She was hoping this would be enough evidence to take her theory to DCI Lang.

At seven a.m. the next day Vastra met DCI Lang on the front steps of Scotland Yard. “Madam Vastra,” he greeted her.

“Detective Chief Inspector Lang, I must speak with you in private.” She was insistent.

DCI Lang escorted Vastra to his office and closed the door. “Madam Vastra,” he began. “I have tolerated your little investigation for long enough. Don’t you think it’s time you admit you’ve failed and go on about your business?”

“Failed indeed.” Vastra was insulted, but not surprised at DCI Lang’s response. “I have substantial evidence to name the Clock Tower Strangler.” She paused. This was it. Once she showed her hand this would cement her place with Scotland Yard one way or another.

“Really?” DCI Lang was yet to be impressed.

“As I studied the photos of the women, I felt that there was something missing. Although all of the women wore bustles with most of their chest and neck exposed, none of them were photographed wearing necklaces, which is the fashion. If you read the coroner’s examination carefully, there was slight bruising from an unaccounted source on the necks of several of the victims. This was simply
chalked up to the strangulation in general though none of the marks were consistent from victim to victim. The bruising was noted and forgotten. I believe that the slight bruises were caused by necklaces worn by the victims. The metal would be light enough to leave marks when pressed into the skin but not severe. The necklaces were missing, because the Strangler kept them as trophies.”

“That is an interesting theory, Madam, but other than interesting, what proof do you have to point to a particular suspect?”

“After many days of surveillance of a particular suspect, I have managed to link two of the suspect’s wife’s necklaces with necklaces that the victims’ families can identify as being owned by two of the victims. My theory is that the perpetrator, after strangling the victims, gives his wife the necklaces as a way for him to relive the strangulations over and over again.”

DCI Lang suddenly took an interest in what Madam Vastra had to say. He sat up straight in his chair. “This is a most interesting theory indeed. Tell me, Madam, how did you come to suspect this man in the first place?”

“I’m afraid that bit of detective work is mine and mine alone, Detective Chief Inspector Lang.” Vastra was certain he was not ready to know all of her secrets.

“Pray tell, why so much secrecy when a very lucrative contract is on the line for you?”

“Because Detective Chief Inspector Lang, the suspect I would name is one of your own.” Vastra let that sink in. She watched tentatively from behind her veil for Lang’s reaction.

Lang’s poker face was stone solid. “That is a hefty accusation, Madam.”

“I am aware,” Vastra said, but didn’t back down. She produced her sketches from her briefcase. “I interviewed the families of several victims. Five of them were able to describe necklaces that victims had acquired shortly before their death but were now of unknown whereabouts. I sketched each of these necklaces as described and labeled them for each victim.” She laid out five sketches each labeled with the appropriate victim. “Some even went so far as to say the necklace was given by a suitor shortly before the victim’s death. One family member was able to identify this necklace,” Vastra produced the sketch of the necklace Mrs. Parker was wearing, identified only as ‘Suspect’s wife’s necklace Tuesday night’ with corresponding date and time. She laid it below the sketch she had made from the victim’s family’s description. “The victim’s mother said she knew for a fact that her daughter was wearing it the night she was murdered. She had been out on a date, but she did not know with whom. This sketch,” Vastra pointed to a drawing, “Detective Chief Inspector Lang, is of a necklace I personally observed on the neck of one of your officer’s wives this week.” She purposely didn’t use the title ‘Detective’ in order to keep the suspect field open as wide as possible to DCI Lang.

Vastra paused, watching Lang’s body language.

“And this,” Vastra produced a sketch of a necklace labeled ‘Victim 3’, “matched another necklace I observed on the suspect’s wife just yesterday.” She produced another sketch labeled ‘Suspect’s wife’s necklace Thursday’ with a corresponding date and time.

“I have inquired at various jewelers about the uniqueness of the pieces in question. These necklaces are not entirely unique, but are highly uncommon. In other words, they are not mass produced and are of good quality. None of the jewelers would release purchaser names or information to me without a writ from the Yard. They took me more to be a jealous wife than a detective.” Vastra noticed DCI Lang had taken an interest in the sketches. “I hope to remedy this type of incident in future investigations as I intend to procure proper paperwork from the Yard in future
investigations.”

DCI Lang was barely listening at this point. He picked up the sketches and carefully looked at them one by one. “This is all well and good, Madam, but you have yet to name a suspect and quite frankly all you’ve proven to me is that you can sketch a necklace.”

“I understand your hesitation, Detective Chief Inspector Lang. Please understand that I am also hesitant to produce the name of my suspect for fear of being,” Vastra chose her word carefully, “dismissed. But I believe if you find the trophies, more of the family members of the victims will be able to identify them.”

“Then it appears we are at a stalemate, Madam,” DCI Lang said. “Without a name I cannot investigate an officer. If I cannot investigate I cannot find the trophies. And since you are unwilling to tell me how you even came to suspect this officer, there is nothing I can do.”

Vastra thought for a moment. “What if you saw the necklaces for yourself? Would you accompany me on my surveillance this coming Thursday? I believe my suspect’s wife has a weekly standing lunch date. If you were to see her, wearing one of the necklaces I have sketched from the victim’s families would you believe me then?”

Lang thought for a minute. “It would still be circumstantial, but I would interview your suspect.”

Thursday finally arrived and DCI Lang joined Vastra on her surveillance at Detective Parker’s residence. Just before noon, a well-dressed Mrs. Parker exited the house, and much to Vastra’s relief, was wearing yet another necklace, this one topaz, that matched a sketch she had taken from a victim’s family.

“That is Detective Sutton Parker’s wife,” Vastra said. “And the necklace she is wearing matches the sketch here,” she pulled out a sheet of paper labeled ‘victim number ten.’

Lang couldn’t help but be impressed. The sketch was uncanny. “Where is her standing lunch date?”

“It is a tea room,” Vastra said. “The Cup and Saucer.”

“We will follow her there and I will speak to her when she leaves. You are to remain out of sight, do you understand?”

“Of course Detective Chief Inspector Lang.”

The two detectives waited patiently for Mrs. Parker to finish her lunch date with her friends. Lang had positioned himself nearby just before two p.m. so that he could easily run into her on the sidewalk. “Mrs. Parker? Hello, Mrs. Parker.” He made what appeared to be idle conversation. “How are you this fine day?”

“Why, Chief Lang,” she smiled. “I am just lovely. How are you?”

“I’m well, Mrs. Parker,” he smiled. “That is a lovely necklace. My wife has been hinting about an anniversary present and I am simply no good at picking out such things. But if I could get her something like that. Pray tell, where did you get yours?”

Mrs. Parker blushed. “Why my husband gave me this. I’m embarrassed to say it was some time ago, perhaps even a year or two, but precious stones never go out of style do they?”

“I should say not,” Lang said. “I think she would like garnets, however. It is her birthstone.”
“Oh, I have a lovely garnet necklace Sutton got for me as well.” She put her hand to the large topaz. “Sutton does have an eye for jewelry. He is always giving me nice things. But I do wish he would branch out a bit. It’s always necklaces, never rings or bracelets. Just last week he gave me a lovely gold chain with a single opal pendant.”

“Last week? Well you are a lucky woman, Mrs. Parker,” Lang nodded. “Please don’t tell my wife how generous your husband is or she’ll have my head.”

“Oh, Chief Lang,” Mrs. Parker laughed. “I shan’t mention it.”

Lang tipped his hat, held the cab door open for Mrs. Parker, and bid her farewell. He continued down the block until the cab was out of site and met back up with Vastra.

“Well?” Vastra asked when Lang approached her.

“She said Detective Parker gave her that necklace years ago,” Lang paused, “but, she also said he gave her another necklace just last week.”

“Last week?” Vastra asked.

“Yes,” Lang said. “If he is the Strangler and these are his trophies, then it’s possible he has changed his M.O. and continued killing.”

“That is a terrifying possibility,” Vastra said.

“Perhaps we got too close to something back then and didn’t even realize it.” DCI Lang was thinking back to all the leads they investigated at the time. “That would have caused him to have changed M. O. if he felt threatened.”

“Or perhaps he simply found a more efficient way to dispose of the bodies. If there are no bodies, there is nothing to investigate. To anyone keeping track of the murders, it would simply look like the killer had stopped.”

“But killers don’t just stop, do they?” DCI Lang asked.

“No Detective Chief Inspector, they do not.”

“You must tell me how Detective Parker became your suspect,” Lang insisted.

“I am sorry. I cannot do that,” Vastra said firmly. “But I can assure you that it was by perfectly legal means.”

“Very well, Madam Vastra,” said Lang. “I’m afraid you will have to relinquish the investigation at this point. I cannot have you investigating one of my own. And especially if further investigations reveal that he is the Strangler and is still committing murders. I do not mean to offend you, but this is how it must be. If we find him guilty you will be given credit and you will be given the contract that the Doctor negotiated for you. But at this point I must ask you to step aside. I would appreciate the sketches you have of the necklaces and all the notes you have gathered.”

Vastra didn’t know if she could trust DCI Lang or not, but at this point she had no choice. She detected no ill will in his pheromones. “Of course.” She handed over the case file and sketches.

Weeks later, Detective Sutton Parker was arrested for the murder of seven women. They were only able to tie him to the victims they could match necklaces to. But over thirty necklaces were found in his home that his wife testified he had given her over the course of five years.
The rest, as they say, is history. Vastra put a down payment on a modest home with the money from her first several cases. It wasn’t the grand home she would eventually settle into at Paternoster Row, but it was impressive enough for the Great Detective. She now had to keep up appearances.

Chapter End Notes

Feedback/reviews encouraged and appreciated. Thank you.

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Chapter 3: Jenny’s Story Part II

Alone in a pub on a Saturday night celebrating (if you call it that) her sixteenth birthday, Jenny couldn’t help but notice the man who kept looking at her. With a few pints in her, she sauntered up to the stranger to halt any intentions he may have. “Oi! You been starin’ at me all night and I’d appreciate it if you took whatever thoughts you’re ‘aving and go on about your business. I ‘ave nothing for you and you sure as hell ‘ave nothin’ for me.”

She turned to leave and the man spoke. “I actually think I do have something you’d be interested in Miss.”

Jenny didn’t stop walking or turn back. “Doubtful,” she yelled back at him.

The man raised his voice. “I’ve seen you pick three pockets tonight to pay that bar tab.”

She stopped in her tracks, turned, and walked back to the stranger. “Wut business is it of yours?” she asked, hoping the man was not going to turn her in, or worse, attempt to blackmail her.

He lowered his voice a bit and looked around to make sure no one was paying them too much attention. “There’s a better way to get your hands on money so you don’t have to rely on a few coin you pull out of a stranger’s pocket.”

Jenny studied the man’s face. He was middle aged, weathered, bearded, and hard to read. “I got no interest in bein’ your whore, mister. Now if you’ll excuse me, I got somewhere to be.” She turned to walk away but stopped at the man’s reaction.

The man laughed a big belly laugh, “I ain’t a pimp. And I ain’t offerin’ you a job being a whore.” He reached out and grabbed Jenny’s arm and turned her around.

She wrenched her arm from his grasp. “Touch me again and I’ll ‘ave you stabbed and left for dead behind this pub. I got friends who owe me favors and I’ll call ‘em all in to ‘ave you away from me.”

He quickly put both hands up in a sign that he meant her no harm. “I think we got off on the wrong foot. My name is Simon and I can spot a fellow thief easy in a pub; especially one who’s piss drunk and practically knockin’ over her marks. All I was offerin’ was a chance to put those skills of yours to better use. There is a lot better ways to get money than pickin’ pockets. But that’s a good start.” He could tell she still wasn’t quite convinced. “Look, Love. Hear me out. Just listen to what I can offer you and see if you want to join up.”

Jenny missed having a companion to spend time with and make mischief with. But she wasn’t sure that this Simon bloke was what she was looking for. “First off, Simon, I ain’t yur ‘Love’ and don’t ever call me that again. Second off, I do pretty bloody good on me own, thank you. But since I’m feelin’ nice, I’ll let you buy me a pint and tell me all about what you ‘ave in mind.”

“Fair enough,” he smiled. “Can I get your name though? I mean, if I can’t call you ‘Love’ I should at least know your name.”
Jenny hesitated and thought about giving him a fake name, but in the end she decided to be truthful. “Jenny. Jenny Flint.”

“Pleased to meet you, Jenny Flint.” He extended a hand but she simply kept eye contact and did not return the gesture. He lowered his hand understanding that trust would have to be earned. “I’m Simon Higby. And I think you and I are going to make a lot of money together.”

He ordered a pint for Jenny and he began telling her about himself and his life. He too was orphaned at a young age and was forced to make his way the best he could. His journey had been quite different than Jenny’s however, more violent and often spent behind bars. It was in a London jail where he met the man who would change his life.

“Eli was an old man by the time I met him,” he continued his story. “He was a master burglar, but as he explained to me, burglary was a young man’s game.” He sipped his ale. “See, Eli may have been old, but he still had a mind for business. So if he couldn’t do the burglarin’ anymore, he figured he’d recruit a gang of young boys to do the dirty work for him, and he’d share in the profits.”

“Wy’d they need to share with ‘im?” Jenny asked. “W’y not jus’ do it themselves and keep it all?”

“You ever broke in a place, Jenny Flint?” he asked bluntly.

“No.”

“Well there’s part of your answer right there. Burglarin’ ain’t somethin’ that comes easy. Not if you don’t want to get caught that is. It takes trainin’ and skill and patience and cunning. You need a teacher if you’re gonna be profitable. Otherwise you’re just a petty thief livin’ hand to mouth.”

He took a long draw of his pint. “You consider yourself patient and cunnin’, Jenny Flint?”

“I consider myself capable,” she said flatly.

“That’s not what I asked,” he clarified. “Do you have patience? Are you clever? Can you think on your feet if you get in a jam or do you panic? Can you adjust to a situation if things go off plan?”

“I think so,” she said. “I’ve been makin’ it ok on the streets for a long time on me own. Didn’t nobody ever prepare me for that. I ‘ad to adjust. I ‘ad to know who to trust and who to steer clear of.” She paused. “But I ‘ad help. I ‘ad a teacher.”

“Where’s your teacher now?”

“Gone.” There was obvious sadness in her tone. She missed Emma more than she ever missed anyone, but that chapter of her life was over. Simon was offering her something new. Could she adjust now? Could she be clever? Yes. She thought so. “What about you? Where’s your teacher now?”

“He’s long dead. I’ve taken over his gang.” Simon let out a quiet laugh. “I never liked the word gang, but that’s what Eli used and that’s what the bobbies call us.”

Jenny laughed, “The bobbies ‘ave called me a few colorful names too. Usually when they’re chasin’ me through the market and can’t keep up.” She looked really proud of her self.

“Tell ya what, Jenny Flint, you meet me and my boys tomorrow down at the docks for your first lesson and we’ll take it from there.” He pulled a piece of charcoal from his pocket and motioned to Jenny’s hand. “May I?” Jenny wasn’t sure what he was up to, but she extended her hand to him anyway. He drew a crude map on the back of her hand. “This is the dock master’s station and this
is the rope factory right off Ratcliffe Highway. We’ll meet at London Docks. Now, memorize that before it rubs off.”

Jenny was supposed to meet Simon at noon, but she got to the docks at eleven so she could see what was going on when he and his gang got there. The last thing she wanted to walk into was a trap. She looked around and spotted the high windows in the rope factory facing the spot they are supposed to meet. Sneaking her way up to the third floor, she found a window sill and took a seat. There were no workers up here on Sunday so she freely sat and ate the apple and bread she lifted from the vendors.

Just before noon, she watched as Simon arrived and some boys who were already there went to his side. He looked around and pointed over to an area on one of the docks and they all wandered that way. They were out in the open and there were lots of people around which made Jenny feel better, like she wasn’t walking into a trap.

As a nearby church bell struck noon, she watched from her perch as Simon began talking to the boys. She gave it a quarter of an hour and went downstairs and out of the rope factory. She headed out on the dock toward Simon and his gang.

“Miss Flint,” Simon said as she walked up. “We started promptly at noon. You’re late.”

“What was that you were telling me last night about patience?” she quipped.

“There’s also something to be said about punctuality,” he shot back.

“I had to be sure I wasn’t walking into a trap,” she said.

Simon smiled and motioned for her to join the others. Jenny was the first girl he had ever approached, but he could tell there was something different about her. Something that made her tougher than other girls and more able to handle herself on her own. She didn’t seem the sort to beg or use her feminine “attributes” to get what she wanted.

The lesson continued. “It seems Jenny here has already found one motive for staking out your mark. Jenny, why did you watch us from your perch up there in the rope factory?”

Jenny blushed with embarrassment. How had he seen her? He had no reason to look up there. “I told you, I didn’t want to walk into a trap.”

“So, to remain safe?”

“Yes.”

“Personal safety is a strong motivator. Never underestimate it. If you feel unsafe, there’s probably good reason. There is no sense in putting yourself in undo risk. Always think of being caught and never think you are above the law.”

Simon continued the lesson giving pointers and tips on how to successfully place oneself to overhear conversations or monitor movements without being suspicious. “The point is not always to be invisible,” he said. “What’s more important is that you are not obvious. Blend in by doing something that looks perfectly natural for the setting. If you are near a park take a seat under a tree with a book. If you are near a café, sit and order a cuppa and drink slowly. Crowds can be your best friend as long as you blend in. Always keep a change of clothes on you and a few other key items like a book or newspaper. You can’t just sit in the open looking conspicuous.” He finally, after a few hours, finished the lesson tasking each boy, and Jenny, to stake out a different address and return in a week to report on what they learned and when they surmised would be the best time.
to burgle the building based on their surveillance.

Jenny approached Simon after the lesson, “So I was obvious.”

“Probably not to most people.” He smiled at her willingness to come seek out advice. “I always survey my surroundings, you will learn to do that too; although I can imagine a young girl on the streets is probably already somewhat versed in that skill. You did stick out sitting right in the window, but like I said, most people wouldn’t have even looked up there. You would have been better hidden in a group or if you would have found a place deeper inside the building where you could still look out through the window. Sitting in the sill just puts you right out there, understand?”

“Yes,” she nodded. “Hidden doesn’t always mean can’t be seen; but if you can be seen, blend in.”

“You’re catching on.” He smiled again at Jenny and looked to the piece of paper in her hand. “I’ve given you a very special address. Most of the boys got dummy addresses with absolutely no value to stake out. Yours, however, is special indeed. You’ll want to memorize that address and destroy the paper. Never risk getting caught with something as insignificant as an address on a piece of paper that can tie you to a burglary or other crime.”

“It’ll be destroyed within the hour,” Jenny nodded. “What’s so important about this mark?”

“That’s information you don’t need, Jenny Flint. Just report back next week.” Simon smiled and walked away leaving Jenny to her new life and her new task.

Jenny staked out the address. It was a modest home to an older man and woman and no kids, at least none who still lived at home. The man left every weekday morning, presumably going to work, and returned every evening like clockwork. Not a single day varied. The woman mostly stayed home, but did run out for various tasks, with no discernable consistency from day to day. Once home in the evenings, the couple didn’t leave the house any of the week nights, but that weekend they went out Saturday night and again, presumably to church, on Sunday morning.

Jenny never followed either member of the couple when they left the house and today was no exception. She remained at her various posts surrounding the residency given that the assignment was to decipher when the best time would be to break in. As she watched this morning, she noticed someone else who seemed to also be hanging around the house with purpose. It was two men, large, with ill-fitting suits. They didn’t approach the house, but did seem to be taking in all the details of the structure.

“What did these men look like?” Simon asked as he ate his apple and hung on Jenny’s ever word. “And how long were they there?”

“They were there most of this morning,” Jenny said. “They looked ordinary: black hair slicked back, stubble on their chins, big, brawler types.”

“Anything else?”

“That’s not enough? Seemed right odd if ya ask me,” Jenny said. “Who do ya think they were?”

“No idea.” Simon smiled. “Good job, Jenny.”

Simon went through the group asking each to report on their findings and observations. After all the reports were in, Simon tossed a small pouch to each boy. Each contained coins, but Jenny could tell that some were obviously weighted differently than others by the sound they made when caught. Jenny was tossed the last bag, which was the heaviest. The boys all glared at the new girl.
“Today’s lesson will be lock picking,” Simon continued, “if you have already begun these lessons you may be excused from class tonight, but you must bring me something next week you gained through picking a lock. The more interesting the object, the better the pay. If you have not begun lessons, this will be the beginning class. You’ll need to talk to Reggie at the Sleepy Piggy to buy some lock picks. Then meet me tonight in the back room there for lesson one.”


“If you can’t figure that out, you don’t need to come to the class.” Simon smiled and walked away with no further instructions.

Jenny had no problem finding the Sleepy Piggy or Reggie and procuring a set of lock picks with her new bag of coins. She even had enough left over to buy herself a warm meal and a room and spend a little time studying her new tools. She sat at the table carefully examining each tool in the set. There were two files and an ordinary hat pin, but the rest of the metal implements were small and flat with their ends in varying degrees of twisted, notched, bent, and straight. One stood out as stouter than the rest and slightly curved on the end. “You must be important,” she said aloud holding the tool in her hand. She had no idea how a lock really worked, much less how to open one with anything other than a key. And if truth be known, Jenny had never owned anything that locked. Even her home growing up didn’t have a lock on the door.

She eventually made her way back down stairs and waited at the bar for Simon and the rest of the boys to show up. Familiar faces began to filter in around eight o’clock and Jenny followed along and took a seat in the cramped back room of the Sleepy Piggy. Soon enough Simon arrived and the lesson got underway. He pulled out a chalkboard from a stack of various objects and began to draw. “There’s a big difference between a lock on a door, a lock on a case or chest, and a pad lock. Eventually you will learn how to pick all of these, but tonight we are just going to focus on the differences between these locks and which tools are best for each type.”

The night went on with lots of drawings and demonstrations on actual locks. Several students broke picks and had to buy new ones from Reggie. “Now the tools you bought from Reggie are right shite,” Simon said. “But you can’t afford better at the moment and if you learn on shite you’ll actually be better for it in the long run when you have to resort to hat pins and some twisted wire because you lost your good set. True story.”

By the end of the night several of the students were able to open at least one of the locks Simon had brought. Jenny was able to open all of them. She had more patience than the boys and her fingers were more nimble and more sensitive from lack of calluses. She could feel the tumblers and springs as she moved the picks inside and if there was something she didn’t understand, she asked. The boys were more likely to use force and when they got frustrated they often broke the pics and threw the locks.

“Very good, Jenny,” Simon said as Jenny once again opened the pad lock. “You may be excused, but you’re assignment is the same as the boys from earlier. Bring me something next week and get paid accordingly.”

Jenny left the back room and ordered a hot supper before retiring to bed in her very own private room. She enjoyed winning these little competitions that Simon set for his students. She hoped to win this week’s as well. Pocketing her room key, she practiced her newly learned skill by locking herself out of her room and picking the lock to get back in. It took her a few tries, but eventually she was able to pick the lock with ease.

She searched all week for the perfect prize to bring back for Simon. She used some of her new surveillance skills to watch a few stores that had some appealing objects. She didn’t dare go for
anything like jewelry, she could see that the jewelry stores had more superior security than the average general store. And the bobbies patrolled them more frequently. The same went for banks, museums, and anything near Scotland Yard.

One thing Jenny learned as soon as she tried to pick a lock in London was that real world locks were not as easy to pick as the ones Simon had brought to class or the one on her pitiful room at the Piggy. The first attempt at finding something worth bringing back to Simon was a bust. As Jenny attempted to pick the lock on a small shop, she broke one pick and took so long she had to start over twice as two bobbies patrolled by along a route. She finally gave up and had to go back to her cramped, shared room empty handed.

The next day she set out to find the perfect thing that would once again win her the largest bag of coin. The week was winding down and she would soon run out of time. She may have to settle for anything at all instead of her desire to find something clever and unique. After the shops had closed she attempted another go at a different shop’s back door lock. She was successful in her entry into the building, but nothing clever or noteworthy was spotted upon first inspection. She went to the office and had to pick the lock on the door. She was quickly successful and began to search around the room. The bottom drawer on the desk was locked. This may be fruitful yet.

She worked for several hours in darkness. There was a small window that didn’t offer much in the way of light, and she wouldn’t dare light a candle or a lamp. But she finally got the tricky drawer open. She would have to practice a lot more and get better tools; this was obvious. The drawer contained mostly financial records and a list of IOUs. “Hmm. Looks like several people owe money to the shop,” Jenny said holding up a ledger in what little light was coming in through the window.

She scrambled around inside the drawer a bit more and felt a finger sized opening in the bottom. “Hello, what do we have here?” Placing a finger in the hole, she lifted up and a false bottom was revealed. “Oi!” She lifted the false bottom out and underneath found a small box. Taking the box out, she examined it in the dark. It was wooden, well-constructed, and also locked. “A locked box hidden inside a locked drawer inside a locked room inside a locked building; well that is something.” She placed the box into her satchel and reset the false bottom. She replaced the ledger and papers and closed the drawer. She attempted to relock it using the picks, but soon gave up as the task was just too much for her.

Poking her head outside, the alley was clear and she quickly disappeared into the shadows and headed to the Sleepy Piggy to get a private room. Once in her room she began the task of opening the box. She was sleepy and needed to get some rest, but she was too excited. This would require a delicate hand indeed. After pushing the small box all across the table, she finally figured out that she needed to put the back of the box against the wall. “Brilliant!” she said aloud, proud of her solution.

Her drowsy state kept her from getting the right feel for the lock. Eventually she would have to give in to sleep and hope for better luck tomorrow. She woke up refreshed and ready to tackle the box. Finally, after a half hour of failure, she heard the telltale “click” she was hoping for. Drawing in a deep breath, she slowly opened the box. “You have got to be bloody kiddin’ me!” she exclaimed. The box was empty. “Oi!” She sat back in the chair with a huff. “I hope Simon likes little cedar boxes!”

Jenny found it necessary to explain how many locks and false bottoms this box was behind in order to save face for the silly token. She didn’t win the biggest bag of coins this week, but she certainly didn’t win the smallest either. She was happy with her take but took it as a personal challenge to get better with her picks.
This training program continued week after week, month after month, and Jenny’s skills became better and better. Along with her lock picking and surveillance skills, she learned how to scale walls and enter quietly through windows. She learned how to navigate a house without a sound, even with the residents asleep in bed. She was well on her way to becoming a master burglar. But not all of Simon’s gang members were as adept as Jenny. The boys came and went as they dropped out due to either getting caught or just not having what it took to become a burglar. Meanwhile, Jenny excelled in lock picking and she soon was tasked with teaching all the lock picking classes. She often found herself the winner of the biggest bag of coins in Simon’s little competitions. Cash reward was an excellent way to motivate homeless thieves.

Eventually she was able to afford a small flat she could rent by the month as long as she stole everything else she needed. It wasn’t much, a single room without running water, a wood burning stove for cooking and heating, and a shared bathroom for the entire floor; but it was the first place she’d ever called ‘home’ since she’d been living on the streets. This was her home for all of three months. She still tried to house and feed very young children, especially girls, who were new to life on the streets. But she couldn’t do this and maintain a steady roof over her head. So she chose to help others.

She took a few girls under her wing from time to time, but a lot were lost quickly to prostitution, either forced or willingly with the lure of easy money. She would see them as young as twelve, high on opium, waiting for clients outside a brothel or rundown apartment building. She hated this and swore every time she saw it to do something about it. But of course she never did. She couldn’t save them all.

Simon would get extremely frustrated with her charity. He didn’t understand Jenny’s incessant need to help others. Sure he helped kids, in a way, but only because they helped him in return. The moment one of his gang didn’t pull their weight, they were cut off. None the less, Jenny continued to help those less fortunate than her, even at her own expense.

After two years of training and working with Simon, at the age of eighteen, Jenny decided to strike out on her own. Simon of course protested, but she had paid any debt to him she owed, she had made sure of that, and he couldn’t force her to stay. In the end, he was saddened more at her conscience, because had it not been there, they would be an unstoppable team. But truth was, she wasn’t bringing in as much coin as he had hoped despite her talents. She often refused to steal from some of the marks he had picked for her. Now that she was so successful, she would only steal from those she felt “deserved” it. For Jenny, those who “deserved” it were often those with the highest security. This made stealing from them an almost impossible task. It would take all of her time to properly stake out the mark, and Simon grew tired of her “wasting time” on such difficult tasks.

Finally, they parted ways and Jenny set out to find a new mark on her own. This was the first time she had to fend for herself in this manner. Simon had always done this part and simply given her an address. But she had heard that Scotland Yard had hired a new detective, a woman, who worked with them on high profile cases. She wasn’t a member of the Scotland Yard force, she was a freelance detective and as such she was paid handomely for her help. “What better mark than an overpaid bobbie,” Jenny thought. So she decided to seek out this female detective and see just what she could learn about her, and then take her for all she was worth.
Comments and reviews welcomed and encouraged. Thanks.
Chapter 4: Thieves in the Midst

Scotland Yard now regularly looked to Madam Vastra for help with its more difficult cases. She had come highly recommended by the Doctor and had proven her mettle again and again. She had a unique talent for locating criminals who seemed to evade the other officers in the force, but would not reveal her secrets or techniques. Those who worked directly with her respected her enough to not ask questions. Those who did ask questions were met with an icy stare from behind her signature black veil.

A recent rash of burglaries had the boys at the Yard scratching their heads. They had no leads, no suspects, and no way of getting the rare items back that had been taken. The victims of the thefts, all very rich and influential members of London society, were not very patient and the Yard grew tired of the daily harassment from them and insistence that this case be placed above all others and solved immediately. They were even threatening to hire their own private detectives, something the Yard was vehemently against.

Sitting across from DCI Lang in his office at Scotland Yard, Vastra glanced through the files as Lang gave her a quick rundown of the case. “In each instance the thief knew exactly when to break into the home and when he’d have enough time to crack the safe. He, assuming he is a male, knew exactly what his target was and wasted no time acquiring said target and nothing else. Even when other valuable items were within the same house, or even within the same safe, he let them be and only took the one item at each residence. Each item so far has been different. The only commonality with the items is that they are antique, unique, and irreplaceable; everything from jewelry to weapons and even documents. All with some sort of historical or cultural significance.”

“Given the single-minded focus and uniqueness of the items it is safe to say the thief is working on a very specific list,” Vastra said as she flipped through the case files. “My assumption is he is on someone’s payroll and is merely the ‘talent’ to get the items. He probably has no idea what actual value they may hold.”

“Exactly what we think,” DCI Lang said. “Given the distinctiveness of the items, there’s no way they’ll be fenced here in London. Our money is on someone with foreign connections or perhaps someone who is foreign to begin with.”

The last burglary had occurred just the night before. “I’ll need to visit the scene of last night’s burglary right away, Detective Chief Inspector.”

“Of course,” DCI Lang said. “I’ll have a constable escort you immediately.”

“That will not be necessary, Detective Chief Inspector,” Vastra said. “Please have a warrant written for me granting me access to any existing and future crime scenes for this case. I shall investigate at my leisure.”

“Very well, Madam Vastra,” DCI Lang agreed. “Please understand that getting the items returned is of paramount importance. Therefore, we need the thief or thieves captured alive if they are not still in possession of the items.”
“I shall endeavor to fulfill your request, Detective Chief Inspector.” Vastra shook hands with DCI Lang and turned to leave his office. “I shall stop back in at a quarter past the hour. Please have my warrant waiting for me at the front desk.”

DCI Lang was not used to taking orders from anyone other than his ranked superiors, much less a woman; but he had grown accustomed to the way Vastra spoke and managed herself with those she worked with. She meant no disrespect, of that he was sure, she was obviously a foreigner and London customs and etiquette were clearly not her forte. And as long as she kept solving cases for him, Detective Lang was willing to put up with a lot from the veiled Detective.

Vastra preferred to examine case files in her home office, but the urgency in DCI Lang’s voice pressed her to look over the files as soon as possible. She found her way to a small café and reviewed the folder of the most recent theft. The victim was one Horace Stanbury, collector of antiquities, history buff, veteran, full time commodities trader, and part time auctioneer. He had recently won, at auction, an eighteenth century stiletto dagger believed to have belonged to Prince Frederick, Duke of York and Albany. He had not had the dagger in his possession more than three months before the thief struck and procured it from his office safe.

“Please, Madam,” the maid insisted as she stood steadfast in the doorway of the office. “Mr. Stanbury requested that he be present when any and all investigations were made here in his office. I’ve sent the house boy to fetch him. He should be home directly.”

“Time is of the essence, my dear,” Vastra said as she ignored the blockade the maid attempted to make with her body and slipped past. “If your Mister wants his possession back then he must trust the Yard to conduct their investigations as they see fit.”

Vastra continued her search despite the constant protests from the maid. But she understood that like her, the maid had a job to do. The constant oversight however did make it difficult for her to use her most relied upon tool: her tongue. She discretely flicked her tongue out underneath her veil. The overpowering pheromone must belong to Mr. Stanbury; but there were others. Most likely the scene had been contaminated by the onslaught of overzealous officers desperate to solve the case as quickly as possible. But luckily for her, she knew the scent of most of the officers mentioned in the file. She remembered each person’s unique pheromone signature the way most people remembered faces and names.

She concentrated, blocking out the maid’s objections from the doorway, and drew in a deep breath. She bathed her tongue in the scents and searched for any that were unfamiliar to her. The maid’s was there, of course, but she could rule it out, she was no master thief. There was another; but it could have just as easily belonged to someone on staff. None the less, she committed the scent to memory. Scents have notes, tones, like music or fine wine. Of course these notes were lost on most ape noses, but her sensitive tongue could read them like poetry. This one belonged to a male, of that she was certain, but it was very difficult for her to piece together an exact pheromone signature without full use of her tongue. She did manage a partial signature with key notes. She memorized this for later.

She picked up another scent, not a pheromone, but an environmental scent that was pungent and distinct. It was earthy and smelled of burned plant. It was slightly artificial, not pure like a fire in a hearth. She had smelled this before, but where? She retracted her tongue fully inside her mouth and concentrated on the scent.

Cigar! She scanned the room for clues in order to ascertain whether or not Mr. Stanbury was a smoker. Seeing no ashtray, no cigar boxes, and no stray ash she asked the maid, “Does Mr. Stanbury enjoy a pipe or cigars?”
“Don’t most men?” she replied stubbornly.

She was certain there was no lingering odor of smoke in the study. “But I see no evidence of such activity.” Vastra said as she scanned the room again.

“Then why did you ask?” The maid snapped, still standing stalwart in the doorframe.

Perhaps Mr. Stanbury did not smoke in his home, but perhaps he did smoke when he went out. She had smelled cigar smoke like this outside the gentlemen’s clubs around London. Women typically weren’t allowed unless they were working so Vastra had never actually entered one of these establishments. She also knew from talking to men at the Yard that these places were sometimes used by the more “sophisticated” criminal elements to conduct business. This new insight gave her some direction and she quickly began to make a mental list of places to survey and search for the perpetrator’s pheromone.

“Other than you, the police, and Mr. Stanbury, who else has been in this room since the item in question was stolen?” Vastra asked the maid.

“No one,” she muttered. “Not even me. Mr. Stanbury won’t let anyone in except for the boys at the Yard, and only then with his accompaniment!” She raised her voice louder and louder as she reached the end of her statement.

“So you’ve mentioned,” Vastra said. “And before the theft? Who was the last person in the study before the theft besides Mr. Stanbury?”

The maid scoffed and made a face at Vastra from her position inside the doorframe. “You’ll have to ask him yourself once he gets here.”

“And who else on staff has access to this room?”

“Are you accusing me of something?” The maid was furious now. First to be ignored and now to be accused.

“It is merely a question and if you are innocent then you have no reason to fear it,” Vastra looked at the maid through her veil. She drew in a breath and watched for over exaggerated body language. She picked up no hint of guilt, only anger.

“There’s just me and the driver,” the maid finally said. “The driver will come up to fetch Mr. Stanbury when the carriage is ready, but other than that, I’m the only staff allowed in the office. The others are to stay in their stations like kitchen and garden.”

“Thank you for your help,” Vastra smiled from behind the veil. “I’ll show myself out.”

Having gotten what she came for, or at least a place to start, she left the house before Mr. Stanbury could arrive. She had discovered that what she hated most about being a detective was speaking with the victims. They either felt as though they had it worse than any other victim in the history of crime, or they truly had had it worse than any other victim. Either way, speaking with them was taxing for a Silurian.

She took a hansom cab home where she poured over the case files. She made lists of the missing items and took notes on the significance of each one. She made marked the locations of the thefts on a map and compiled as much information as she could about the victims before time to head out. Professional thieves are unlikely to boast about their heists, especially when the loot is so recognizable. She’d most likely have to rely on that tongue of hers to track down the criminal or criminals. She’d need to visit the other crime scenes to see if she could find a common scent, but
today she needed to get ready for a preliminary hunt tonight. Tonight she would begin her initial investigation of local gentlemen’s clubs and compile a list of establishments and corresponding map to coordinate future searches.

Armed only with her sensitive yet deadly tongue Vastra set out at ten p.m. She explored the streets making a list of all the gentlemen’s clubs, also known as scotch bars or cigar bars, she came across. Even outside the closed doors, the clubs were thick with the scent of cigar smoke, both stale and fresh, which seemed to push more insignificant scents into the background. She would need to go inside to pick up any distinct pheromone signature of the thief. But this was not her task for tonight, that would have to wait. She continued on until she was certain she had located all such establishments in a few select areas of London.

The fall night was cold and after hours of walking and searching, the temperature was beginning to take its toll on the Great Detective. She walked home around three in the morning cold and fatigued with the stench of cigar smoke coating her sensitive tongue. The cold weather could do her more harm than a fight, so she had to be smart despite her desire to catch the criminal. If she didn’t get warm soon, she could be down for the next forty eight hours.

Finally home, she opened the front door to her house and was immediately assaulted by the scent of an unfamiliar ape. A female. Carefully closing the door she snuck around the ground floor looking for any sign of the intruder. The female ape’s scent was strong in her study, but nothing seemed missing or out of place. A quick flick of the tongue at the French doors leading to the back yard revealed the method of entry and probably exit. Then, she heard the squeak of floorboards directly above her. “She’s in my bedroom!” Vastra hissed to herself. As she followed the scent up stairs it got stronger, she was close. She reached for her katana, but remembered she had not taken it with her on her scouting trip. No matter, her lethal tongue would make a more effective weapon and she wouldn’t have nearly the mess to clean up, merely a body to dispose of. And she could take care of that with great joy.

The scent was strong in the upstairs hallway and her tongue picked up more and more pheromones the closer she got to her bedroom. The door was open a few inches. Stopping to listen she heard nothing. Cautiously she opened the door wider with her foot, looked left, and slid in with her back against the wall so not to be ambushed from behind. The room appeared empty and the window to the back yard was open. She flicked her tongue out tasting the air over and over. It was obvious to her now that the culprit was no longer there; but had only just left.

She went to the window and looked out into the night, but there was nothing. She was in no condition to pursue the criminal, she was too cold. She took in a long breath and bathed her tongue in the scent. “I’ll keep you on my tongue, ape,” she said aloud. “I’ll find you soon enough.”

She searched the room, but nothing was missing. The painting that covered the safe from sight was sitting askew. The frame and canvas reeked of the female ape’s scent. “This was her target,” Vastra thought. She turned the dial and opened the door. Everything seemed to be in its place and accounted for. “Good, nothing is missing. I must have disturbed her before she could crack the combination. Wretched ape coming into my home and touching my things.” She hissed her disgust.

Flashback to ten p.m.

Jenny watched as the veiled detective left her home, got into the waiting cab, and went down the street and out of sight. She stayed put for half an hour before approaching the house. Simon had taught her never to approach immediately after the mark leaves. If they forgot something and need to return, that usually happens within a half hour. After that, you can be reasonably sure they are out for the long haul.
Even though the detective didn’t keep regular hours, during her surveillance, Jenny had noted that when the detective went out at night, she was usually gone for four to five hours. She decided to give herself only three hours in the house. This should be plenty to find her target: a safe. She didn’t know for a fact that the detective had one, but from what she had learned in the past two years with Simon, most people who brought in a lot of money had one. And in her surveillance over the past few weeks, she had not once seen the detective go to the bank.

Jenny approached the house and went through the gate on the side. She had checked this gate periodically over the past few weeks and knew it wasn’t locked. She quickly made her way to the back and looked around. There was one set of French doors, a wooden door, and a large window on the ground level and a couple of windows on the second level. “Know your exits,” she said aloud as she scanned the upper level. Then she noticed the glass room. “Wut the…” she trailed off. She had spotted Vastra’s greenhouse she had custom built on the second floor. Jenny shook her head and noted that she should check that out before leaving. She knelt in front of a set of French doors and got to work. Her view inside was obscured by dark heavy curtains. Ordinarily this would be enough to give her pause, but she had yet to see anyone enter the Detective’s home other than the Detective. She had the door opened in no time and quickly slipped in locking it tight behind her.

“A’right, this must be the study,” she said as she took in the room. Directly in front of her there were two chairs, then a desk, another chair, and a large fireplace with a stone hearth on the wall opposite her. A fire still burned in the pit casting flickering light within the room. The wall to her right was solid built-in bookshelves from the waist up with cabinets beneath them. The left wall had a set of French doors also draped in dark velvet fabric, much like the ones leading to the back yard, but nothing else other than a gas lamp. She scanned the bookshelves and noticed a large amount of dust had collected on the surfaces. “Does she not clean house?” Jenny asked quietly, already forming opinions of the Detective. She was careful not to touch the shelves or books and leave a trace. She looked around the room at the walls and there were no paintings, nothing that would conceal a safe. This was not the room.

She made her way to the beautiful cherry wood desk. There were some papers stacked on top, but these didn’t interest her at the moment. “Locked drawer,” she said and raised an eyebrow. “No, stay focused. Know your target and don’t get distracted.” Simon’s words echoed in her head. She quickly left the desk and went out the set of French doors opposite the bookshelves. She found herself in an entry hall. To her right was the front door and another French door on the same wall as she just came through. In front of her was a staircase, and to her left another door beyond the staircase. She quickly went to the French doors and room to her right.

The front room looked similar to the one she had just left. There were built in book shelves along the wall opposite the French doors and a bay window on the front wall overlooking the street. The room was lighter and the furniture was upholstered in white fabric. The bookshelves here had a similar amount of dust as the ones in the study, and there were also a few knick-knacks around like a small globe and a stein. This was clearly the sitting room but it looked as though it was not used, or if at all, rarely. There was a fireplace opposite the bay window on the wall that the office shared. There were some ashes in the fire pit, but they were old and scant. She could feel the heat radiating from the adjoining room’s fire pit through the bricks. There were no pictures on the walls or curtains on the French doors. “There’s no safe here either,” she said. She looked at the grandfather clock and saw that it was nearing eleven o’clock. “But this wall is thicker because of the double fireplace,” she said as she examined the wall that separated the study and the sitting room. “My bet is if there is a safe, it’s in this wall upstairs.”

She exited the sitting room back into the entry hall and headed for the door back behind the stairs. Carefully opening the door she entered the dining room. This room also appeared unused. There
was a cabinet to her right full of seemingly unused fine tableware and a dining table with six chairs to her left along with a picture window that looked out onto the back yard. Straight ahead was another door, through which was the kitchen.

The kitchen had a small table with two chairs, a wood burning oven with a kettle on top, a sink, and an icebox. A few cabinets were on the wall above the sink, but were bare save a single box of biscuits, a tin of tea, and a sugar bowl. Jenny opened the icebox out of curiosity and found it bare save a few packages wrapped in butcher paper. Through the kitchen was the scullery. It was similarly bare with only a few essential cleaning supplies, which appeared unused, and a copper tub. A door in the floor led to what she assumed was the basement, but Jenny had no desire to look down there until all other options were exhausted. “Basements rarely have exits,” Simon’s words kept echoing through her head. This part of the house could wait. Her money was still on the wall upstairs. “No time to waste down here then.”

Leaving the kitchen and dining room, Jenny made her way up the stairs. At the top there were three doors. Two led to rooms which appeared to sit directly above the sitting room and study on the ground floor, the other led into the area above the dining room, kitchen, and scullery. “That glass room is that way,” she said aloud. “But glass walls don’t hold safes, stay your curiosity, Jenny.”

She went to the room in the front of the house, the one above the sitting room. Opening the door, the stale air smacked her in the face. This bedroom was fully furnished, but she could instantly tell it was never used. A layer of dust coated everything and there were no ashes in the fireplace. There were also no pictures or other things situated along the interior wall to hide a safe, so she concluded very quickly that this was not the room and wasted no time backing out and closing the door tight.

Making her way to the other door, she was met with another bedroom. This one positioned directly above the study. As with the study, there was a fire still burning in the fireplace and quite an accumulation of ash. Well used fire place tools stood on the stone hearth and a bucket with a shovel and ashes sat to the right. The room was fully furnished with a wardrobe, small dresser, love seat, small table, lamp, and a queen sized bed that was obviously slept in. “Seriously,” Jenny said aloud, “can’t even be bothered to make the bed?” And there on the wall, next to the fireplace, hung a painting. This was it.

Pulling on the frame, the painting lifted from the wall effortlessly. She removed it from its nail and set it on the floor. The safe door with dial was right there begging to be cracked. But this was one skill Simon never got around to teaching Jenny. She had no idea how to properly crack a safe. She had watched Simon, but this was a hands-on art that she had no real experience in. She understood the theory, but had never put that theory into practice. All she could do was hope for the best, and if she couldn’t get into the safe, maybe she could trick the Detective into relocating its contents to a less secure location. The latter was a longshot, but possibly no more so than her actually opening the safe.

The downstairs clock struck eleven. “One hour down,” Jenny thought as she settled in for a long night. She quickly went to the window to check her escape route. The window opened easily and she had a decent route to the ground. This would be her way out if the front door opened unexpectedly. She left the door to the room open a few inches so she could better hear if anyone came into the house. Her curiosity about the glass room would have to wait. Tonight was all about attempting to get into that safe.

Placing her ear to the cold metal, she slowly began to turn the dial like Simon had done. She could hear the internal plates and mechanisms turning and clicking, but as of now, the sounds meant nothing to her, like someone giving her instructions in a foreign language. Still, she tried. She
turned and listened and hardly took a breath until finally the clock struck midnight. The chimes shook her from her trance and she stood up and stretched. “Oi, Simon made this look so easy! Maybe I left him too soon.” She walked around the room and got her blood pumping again.

Shortly, she began again. What seemed like only fifteen minutes later, the downstairs clock struck one a.m. and again Jenny was jolted from her trance. “I can’t go that deep in,” she thought. “I have to stay alert or else I’m gonna get caught up here.”

She decided to take some time off the task at hand, but didn’t want to stray too far from the safe and her prepared exit point. She sat on the foot of the bed and thought back to everything Simon had taught her. She decided that there was just no way she would break this safe and that the best she could hope for at this point was indeed to get the Great Detective to move whatever she stored in there to a less secure location, hopefully inside the house, maybe even that locked drawer in her desk. Jenny smiled at the thought. She decided she would just wait it out, and when she heard the detective come home, she would head out the bedroom window making it look like she was almost caught in the act and had to abandon her task before she hit pay dirt. It was a longshot, but her best bet. She placed the painting back on the nail, and made sure it was set off center. She then looked for a place on the floor where the boards creaked a bit and she placed herself on the other side of that spot from the window. Then she waited.

The clock struck three a.m. and was closely followed by the sound of a key in the front door. Jenny perked up. Her heart raced. This was the first time she had attempted such a tactic. She had to time everything just right. She listened carefully and heard the French doors to the study open. She stood and slowly stepped onto the board to make it squeak. Silence. Then she heard the faint footfalls on the stairs, it was time to go. She slid through the window and scaled the wall to within ten feet of the grass. Dropping down, she ran for the gate. Through the gate and down the street Jenny ran as fast as she could get away. Smiling, she hoped the risky tactic worked. Tomorrow she would begin her surveillance anew.

Jenny kept her distance, but watched from a shadowy perch the next day as the Detective left her home late in the morning, just before noon. She wouldn’t attempt another break in so soon, but she needed to continue her surveillance to see if she could discern any patterns in the Detective’s schedule.

Vastra did not keep a regular schedule as her work demanded her attention at all times of the day and night. But Scotland Yard was putting an undue amount of pressure on her to solve this particular case. She took today to visit all previous crime scenes to see if they shared the scents she had picked up at Mr. Stanbury’s.

After visiting all the crime scenes she had detected the same cigar scent at some of the more recent scenes, as well as a constant singular male pheromone signature; but some scenes were simply too old to still hold onto any pheromone or environmental scents that would be helpful. She felt certain that there was only one thief, male, and he was a consummate professional. She did not share her unique clue with Scotland Yard and they were wholly at a loss for suspects.

She returned home in the evening and Jenny watched from her new perch well into the night until she was satisfied the Detective was not leaving again. She would return the next day to see Vastra once more leaving around ten in the morning.

Today, Vastra visited the owners of the Gentlemen’s clubs and let them know she would be frequenting their establishments in the evenings. She did not ask permission, she told them of her intentions and dared them to protest. Scotland Yard had an unspoken rule when it came to these
establishments, they would rarely interfere, but when they did they expected full cooperation. The Yard knew that if they allowed “business” to be conducted at these establishments it would make it that much easier to find and speak with the criminal elements who used them when needed. However, this was the first time Scotland Yard was asking to allow a woman access. But all the owners reluctantly agreed.

There was no guarantee that the thief would conduct business or even show up at any of these locations. Even more of a longshot was Vastra getting lucky enough to run into him at one of these establishments. And as was most often the case, if she didn’t capture the rogue with some sort of proof there would be no point in apprehending him. But she had two pieces of the puzzle: a place to start and a pheromone signature; which was more than Scotland Yard had and simply all there was to go on. And despite the long odds, it really was the only option at this point.

After a long day of speaking with obstinate proprietors, Vastra went by the butcher to pick up some fresh meat and settle in for the night. This would be her last night off until she apprehended the thief. Jenny watched from only a few houses away as the gas lamps were all finally extinguished and the home of the Great Detective went dark. She would return tomorrow and continue to watch for a pattern and a time she could attempt another break in.

Jenny sat and watched all day, but Vastra did not leave the house until eight p.m. She maintained her vigil until Vastra returned some hours after midnight. Where she went, Jenny had no clue, but after three days and nights of the same schedule, the burglar concluded that this was the Detective’s new pattern. She would prepare for another break in.

It was Vastra’s fourth night of visiting the wretched smoke filled gentlemen’s clubs. The stench of cigar choked out most other scents and almost rendered the Silurian’s greatest detecting tool useless, but the ape pheromones were still discernable on her tongue in close proximity. She kept to herself and over heard many questions and rumblings directed at her and most men made no effort to hide their disgust of a woman invading their precious space. The bartender had started telling everyone that she was a jilted wife on the search for her cheating husband and that she was visiting anywhere and everywhere she thought she could find him. Most of the patrons laughed and assumed she probably deserved any infidelity that had come her way. Vastra could only sit and listen and let her Silurian blood boil at such stories and notions.

She had had enough when she finally left the bar at two a.m. She took a hansom cab back to her home as the fall was turning increasingly colder and she needed to limit her time in the elements. Opening the door, she was once again assaulted by the smell of the female ape. What a horrible stench! She searched the office, but found no evidence of tampering and then followed the pheromone trail upstairs. The ape appeared to be single minded in her purpose and wouldn’t settle for less than her target. The safe had been handled. And again, the window from her bedroom had been her escape route. The rest of the house was completely undisturbed but the painting hiding the safe was left askew. She closed the window and found herself now more aggravated that the heat from the waning fire had been allowed to escape and her bedroom was now as cold as the London night. She quickly got the fire blazing and warmed up for a few moments before deciding what to do about her domestic situation.

Finally, she decided on a new plan to protect her livelihood. “If this is her target, then I shall remove her prize.” Vastra said. “Let her labor with this safe only to find it empty.” She emptied the contents from the safe. For now she would resort to a previous hiding place to store her bank notes just in case the thief came back and managed to crack the combination.

Exhausted, she fell into bed with not one, but two thieves causing chaos in her dreams.
Jenny maintained her surveillance on the Detective and Vastra continued to visit the cigar bars. It was a regular schedule, which Jenny appreciated, but the times that Vastra would return at night varied greatly. She no longer felt she should remain the house after midnight, which only gave her a few hours when she decided to break in again.

Vastra continued to visit the gentlemen’s clubs and had all but given up hope when suddenly she sensed the faintest notes of a familiar pheromone signature on her tongue. She was certain she had found her thief. He was an older man, seasoned, and well dressed. He fit into the club with the men of status and power and had the posture and demeanor to blend right in. He no more looked like a criminal than Vastra and certainly did not stick out here amidst the suits and smoke as much as she did. “The Veiled Shadow” is what they were calling her around town at the clubs. The story of her manhunt of her promiscuous husband was now known far and wide and who should have been a feared hunter was now nothing more than a joke among the London high class and professional criminal element. No matter, the Silurian had no interest in letting petty ape opinion stray her from her course.

She moved from her seat at the bar to a table near the booth where the man had sat. He had joined another man, someone Vastra had seen here on more than one occasion. The man she recognized had a well-groomed mustache plastered in wax and formed into a curl on each end. He was well dressed in all black except for his white undershirt. He sported a black wool coat, gloves, and a bowler hat which lay beside him on the booth bench, despite there being a place to check such items at the front door. From this vantage point, she was able to tune her sensitive Silurian ears to their conversation without being at all obvious.

“My boss is getting impatient,” the man said. “He expected delivery of the remaining items before now.”

“Tell your boss this is no small task. I will not jeopardize my freedom and rush into a situation unprepared. I have completed my surveillance on the next job and will have the piece within the week. After that I will focus my surveillance on the last item and will have it to you within a fortnight.” The man lit up his cigar and took a long pull. “Please tell your boss that these things take time and I am not wasting any of mine or his by being cautious and careful.”

A smile formed on Vastra’s scaled lips beneath her veil. There was probably nothing she could do to stop the next theft, but she was beginning to form a plan of how to capture the thief for good. For now though, she took her leave of the bar and set up in a darkened perch allowing herself an unobscured line of site of the bar entrance. She had no choice but to wait it out and follow the thief home.

She waited for what seemed like hours until the man left the establishment. He left alone but she had already committed both his and the other man’s faces and scents to her memory. She kept her distance and trailed him as he walked to an apartment building some twelve streets over. He disappeared inside and she hoped that this was truly his residence and not a clever way to give her the slip. She was so cold she could hardly stand to be out in the elements much longer. But she stayed for two more hours to make sure the man did not leave again. Finally satisfied that this was the best she could accomplish this night, she walked two streets over and hailed a cab to take her home.

Arriving home, Vastra was confronted with a strong smell of pheromones in her office. She was too cold to investigate thoroughly, but could tell by the amount of scent she was picking up on the desk, the drawers had been picked and searched. This was a first. You would not have been able to tell if you couldn’t have smelled the scent of the woman on the outside and the contents therein. The locks had been carefully relocked. The contents in the drawers had been riffled through, but
great effort was made to put everything back as close to how it was found as possible. If it hadn’t have been her own desk in her home, Vastra could have admired the work as that of great skill and almost art. But this was her home, and these were her things, and she was beyond furious at the ape’s audacity to continue to invade her privacy and her belongings.

Checking on her hiding place, she was happy to find her bank notes safe and accounted for. She headed up stairs, following the female’s scent to once again find the painting askew and the ape’s scent all over the face and dial. “Remarkable,” Vastra said aloud. “She is still having trouble with that combination so she has opted to search a few other locked locations. And she went to great lengths to hide her snooping elsewhere. Well, she will not find my hiding place.”

Vastra struggled to get a fire blazing in the fire box. Her dexterity and fine motor skills were all but gone, robbed by the cold. It took her an hour to warm up by the fire and finally crawl into bed. She spent the next day and night cocooned under the covers coming out only to stoke the fire and add fuel. She should be out trailing her suspect, but she could barely move.

Scotland Yard was growing increasingly uneasy as they still had no leads and even the Great Detective appeared to be at a loss for suspects. The victims were getting very restless and the Yard did everything in their power to calm their fears telling them that if the items had been sold they would have surely gotten wind of the transaction with the network of informants who worked on their payroll. This did nothing to appease them.

And just like that, the thief struck again, this time hitting one of London’s top city officials. Vastra was called out along with only the senior-most detectives to collect clues from the fresh crime scene. DCI Lang met Vastra at the home. “This has just escalated, Madam Vastra,” Lang said. “Although I am sure it was not necessary for me to tell you that.”

“Indeed not, Detective Chief Inspector,” Vastra replied. “Have your men found any clues at all?”

“No, I’m sorry to say,” Lang rubbed his forehead. “As per the thief’s protocol, there are no fingerprints, no hairs, no articles left behind, absolutely no clues of any sort. Just an expertly cracked safe by an expert safe cracker who knows exactly what he is after and exactly where to find it.”

“I thought you had warned everyone to take their valuables to the Central Bank and store them in a safety deposit box until this rogue is apprehended,” Vastra said.

“We did,” Lang told her, “but you know how some people know better than the Yard.”

“Indeed.” Vastra agreed. “May I now have access to the scene? It is imperative that I get in there as soon as possible.”

“Of course,” Lang said. “I’ll tell the men to depart and give you the room.”

“Thank you Detective Chief Inspector. That will be most helpful.” Vastra followed Lang upstairs to the office and waited as the men cleared the room. She stood in the hall and discretely tasted the air as each walked by. She needed to be able to identify all the different parties who had access to the crime scene to rule out their scent when she was left to the room. Some of the men scowled at her, some whispered hateful things under their breath which her Silurian ears easily heard. They were not happy to be ousted from a fresh crime scene, especially to give the access to a woman.

Finally inside and alone, Vastra lifted her veil and freely tasted all the lingering scents of the room. Again the overwhelming and most abundant scent belonged to the city official who owned the home. This scent was both stale and fresh and permeated the soft materials like the curtains and
carpets. She was able to tease out the many scents of the Yard detectives, most of whom reeked of sweat as they were all nervous and under tremendous pressure at the moment. She focused on the safe, which stood open and was interestingly not emptied. The only missing item was the necklace in question. Much like the other scenes, the thief was single minded in his pursuit and took only what he was after. “If I didn’t know better, I’d say that my little thief trained under this chap. She too is single minded in her pursuit. Luckily for me, though, she is not as gifted as this fellow.” The single mindedness of the jewel thief only strengthened the theory that all the pieces had been taken by the same thief. And with the confirmation that the scent on the safe dial matched the man she had followed home not two nights before, she now felt confident taking her information to DCI Lang.

As with most briefings Vastra had given DCI Lang over the time she had been working with him at Scotland Yard, she had to omit certain details and as per their arrangement, he did not ask questions. “I have located the gentleman responsible for the robberies, however I have not located the items taken. Based on a conversation I overheard at a local gentlemen’s club, I suspected a certain individual may be the thief and it appears I was correct. I know where he is and I know he is starting his surveillance of the new mark now that he has acquired this piece. I also suspect that this is his last remaining mark, making it imperative we catch him red-handed. I do fear, however, that he has already given what he has stolen to a middleman and he has no idea who his true employer is.”

“This is great news, Madam Vastra,” DCI Lang said. “I suppose you have a plan of how you would like to proceed.”

“Indeed I do,” Vastra confirmed. “A sudden and noticeable police presence will alert the thief that he is being surveilled and he will surely cease any and all attempts to acquire the last item. I am confident he will strike again within only a few days, but he must first stake out his mark to decide the most opportune time to access the next home. It would be best to allow me to watch him and see if I can ascertain his next mark. Once I have this new information, you can set up a contingency of officers to close in when he is in the process of attempting the heist.”

“That is a good plan, but it is also very risky.”

“Yes,” Vastra agreed, “but it is the only one I can see where we capture him with the target. If he is captured empty handed, all he has to do is deny involvement. There is no proof other than a vague conversation I overheard in a crowded bar. And I have seen the middleman, we can always bring him in and say that the thief has named him in hopes of receiving a reduced sentence.”

“I am putting a lot of faith in you, Madam Vastra.”

“And you are wise to do so,” she boasted. “I have spent many hours and nights away from my home to bring you this information. And I must say it was not pleasant to spend those nights in the places I was in with the company they draw.”

“You said you overheard the conversation at a gentlemen’s club. What made you choose there to begin with?”

“You have often spoken of the more sophisticated criminal element using such places to conduct business. I was certain this thief was a professional and would not be found in common poverty stricken areas of town. I had to visit many establishments before I was lucky enough to overhear the conversation I heard.” Of course most of this was only half truths as she could not reveal how she came to know the type of place she must look to find the thief. And there was indeed a lot of luck involved that she happened to find the one bar on the one night the thief was there; but she had also paid a price by being away from her own home and leaving it subject to her own thief with her
own plans. But soon enough this case would be solved and she could focus her efforts on finding the rogue who harassed her.

The next several days Vastra left her home in her typical veil and dress for daytime surveillance, but shed her outer disguise for a sleek black leather suit for night time pursuit. The leather suit was meant to protect and hide her as she hunted the man that was now her sole focus. It worked well in the poorly lit streets of London. She was all but invisible as she used the shadows and buildings to her advantage. She followed the man every step he took until she was confident that she had identified his last mark.

The next day she reported the new information to DCI Lang. “It appears the new mark is located at this address,” she handed DCI Lang a piece of paper. “But it’s anyone’s guess as to when he will strike. My guess is the next time the occupant leaves for any length of time.”

DCI Lang studied the address carefully. “If I am not mistaken, this is the address of a French fine art and antique dealer. We have provided him with increased patrols in the past when he has housed exceptionally rare pieces at his home. His residence is highly fortified and has a large vault to hold art on the way to and from a bank vault or to and from auction.”

“That would explain why he would save this mark for last. It will undoubtedly be the most difficult to acquire.”

“And you are sure this is the place?”

“This is the home he has staked out for the last several days and nights. If it isn’t the mark then he knows he is being followed and he is attempting to throw us off the trail. But I have been very careful not to be seen as I have trailed him day and night for days.”

“I should not doubt.” DCI Lang looked at Vastra, “You have proven your skills time and time again. I have no reason not to trust you on this occasion.”

Vastra smiled beneath her veil, although praise from her ape employer was not something she craved or needed. It did ensure the bank notes kept coming in.

Plain clothed detectives staked out the house and watched and waited. When they were sure the thief was safely away they went to the home and notified the art dealer of the plan. He agreed to let two detectives remain in the house until the heist attempt where they would be in place to make the arrest. The art dealer was scheduled to host an exhibit two days later on the other side of London. They guessed this would be the time the thief would make his move. They were right.

Within an hour of the art dealer’s coach leaving his home, a dark figure was seen scaling the wall to the exact window he needed to enter. Within seconds of reaching the window the thief was inside and ready to get to work. He walked straight to the vault as if he had been in this room a hundred times and practiced these movements over and over. As he concentrated on the sounds of the mechanisms inside the door, the police made their way to their positions blocking all doors, windows, and exits. Madam Vastra stayed back, leaving the apprehension to the apes. She did not want this criminal to identify her as the woman in the gentlemen’s club. It was best for her if he never saw her.

“Once again Scotland Yard owes you a debt of gratitude, Madam. I do not know how you do it, but you always manage to get the criminal.

“Thank you Detective Chief Investigator Lang,” Vastra smiled beneath her veil. “I do hope he provides you with the name of his employer; but I highly doubt he does. In fact, I doubt he even
knows who hired him. I shall send my bill to Scotland Yard tomorrow.”

“That will be fine. However we will also require your services to find and arrest the man you spoke of in the bar. The one with the mustache. He will be the next link to apprehending the master criminal who is bankrolling this operation.”

“Very well,” she smiled. “I shall be ready tomorrow night. Be warned, Detective Chief Inspector, he will be long gone as soon as he discovers the thief has been arrested.”

“That is why we have as few men here as possible and everyone in plain clothes. We are hoping to get this man processed tonight and apprehend the other within days.”

“I shall be ever ready, Detective Chief Inspector. Until then I bid you good night.”

On the cab ride home Vastra thought of how excited she would be to be done with this case. She had her own thief to peruse and all she had to go on was a pheromone. But she was confident she could bring her female rogue to justice in time.

Vastra returned home and the familiar stench of the burglar immediately assaulted her senses. The scent was confined to the bottom floor. There was no trail leading upstairs this time. Throwing open the doors to her office she saw it. The hollowed out book where she had placed her bank notes sat opened upon her cherry wood desk.

It had been hidden in plain sight among the hundreds of books that filled the shelves built into her study. Her collection ranged from science to fiction, philosophy to travel, and she had read them all. She was very well read and had prided herself on the ability to learn ape culture and language. She had mastered several languages since she had awoken from hibernation and since her good friend, the Doctor, had convinced her to attempt to settle into Victorian London society. She had used this book to hide her valuables for a year before she had the safe installed. She had been certain that no ape would have suspected or managed to find the one book in all those of her collection that she had hollowed out and used as a secret place to stash her money. But this thief had.

Vastra approached the desk and the thief was so bold to leave the now empty book open on her desk with a hand written note that read, “You really should get a maid.” She snatched up the note and flicked her tongue around it taking in the scent of the thief. She placed the note in the book and went to where it had been filed on the shelf. There was a clean stripe in the dust where the book had been pulled across the surface. She examined the rest of the shelf and it was obvious that this book and only this book had been recently disturbed. She slammed the book down on the desk and cursed in her native tongue. She would not file a report with Scotland Yard; she would take care of this herself.

For weeks, Vastra tasted the air as she worked. She searched for the scent of the female who had robbed her. A scent she kept on her tongue and would never forget. She vowed to take her time killing this ape who had invaded her home, her privacy, and her finances. She would savor the taste of this ape’s flesh, her promise to the Doctor be damned! “Her blood will be mine,” she vowed.

Chapter End Notes

Feedback and reviews welcomed and encouraged. Thanks.
Chapter 5: A Doctor, a Lizard, and a Thief

Vastra recognized the “whooshing” of the TARDIS, and wondered why the Doctor had to park the obnoxious blue box right in her back yard. She exited through the French doors from her study and stood waiting when the Time Lord finally made his way out.

“Ah, Vastra,” he beamed at the welcoming party of one, “my favorite Silurian. How is Scotland Yard treating you? Well, I’d say from the looks of it.”

“Yes, Doctor,” she smiled, “very well indeed.

The doctor took in the yard and the house. This was his first visit since Vastra had moved from the flat to the modest middle class home. “Just look at that greenhouse you’ve had put in on the second story.”

“I must thank you again for all your assistance in directing me along this path. This arrangement has made living with these primitive apes much more agreeable.” Vastra smiled and looked up at her lush greenhouse with pride.

“Now Vastra,” he teased, “I’ve already told you I would be happy to take you to any place in all of time. Just say the word.”

“And you know I appreciate the offer,” Vastra said, “but ape infested or not, the Earth is my home. And though this time period has its difficulties, I’m sure they all would to some degree. Now. Tea?”

“Splendid!”

The two friends settled in the sitting room for a hot cup of tea and some biscuits. Vastra didn’t eat biscuits, but she tried to keep a box on hand for just such occasions. She couldn’t vouch for their freshness or palatability.

After a few pleasantries and the first cuppa, Vastra got to it. “So, Doctor,” she began, “pray tell, what brings you to my home?” Vastra was direct. She had little patience for games or inefficiency.

“Ah,” he said, knowing it was time to get to work. “I have been following a fellow who has led me all over the galaxy. He is acquiring articles, doodads, things; but I don’t know what his endgame is. I picked up his trail a few days ago here in London, but I’m sure he is long gone by now.”

“Then why are you here?” Vastra asked. “Why are you not already off to his next stop?”

“At the moment I am more concerned with what he’s gathering,” the Doctor said. “If I can figure out what he is collecting, I may be able to decipher what he is building and then beat him to an ingredient and foil all his fun.”

“So you are here to figure out what he has taken?”

“Precisely!”
“And you want to use me like a common blood hound to track his scent and lead you to his crime scene?” Vastra asked.

“Exactly!” The doctor looked very pleased with himself indeed. Then he realized the words that Vastra had said and the look on her face and he quickly backtracked. “No! I am not here to use you and I would certainly never compare you to a bloodhound! You are much more efficient than one of those creatures.”

Vastra laughed. She shared the Doctor’s ability to put one’s foot in one’s mouth. She was often met with blank expressions when she tried to converse with the boys at Scotland Yard. She had learned to just speak the facts directly and succinctly. “And how, pray tell, am I to pick up a scent of someone unknown to me?”

“Never fear,” the Doctor said, “I have a glove that he lost or simply forgot at one of his last stops.”

“And you are positive it’s his?” Vastra asked.

“Quite.” The Doctor pulled the glove out of his pocket and showed it to Vastra. It was a grey material that Vastra had never seen before with only three long slender fingers and a thumb. The material was embossed with a pattern that repeated across the top of the hand and the palm of the glove seemed to be as thin as skin, perhaps to enhance or maintain tactile sensitivity. It was quite distinctive. “When would you be available to start?”

“You are in luck, Doctor,” she said. “I am between cases at the moment. I will be happy to set out at dusk to try and track this chap.”

“Excellent!”

Vastra led the Doctor through the streets of London in a pattern that made sense to her, even if not to her companion. Occasionally she would taste the air with her tongue and turn this way or that. She’d refer to the glove every once and a while to make sure to keep the scent fresh in her memory, although the alien pheromone signature was quite unique. This was a skill Vastra had honed over the years and she was indeed much better at it than any bloodhound.

“I think the warehouse district by the Thames will be a good place to try next,” she said as she stopped suddenly in front of the Doctor. “There are certainly enough shady characters down there and it is a hub for transporting goods both into and out of London.”

They headed south and again Vastra flicked her tongue out occasionally to taste the air. All of a sudden, Vastra’s head snapped to the left and her eyes flashed. Something had definitely piqued her interest. Without warning, she took off down a street, then an alley, right, left, right again. She moved with the speed of a sprinter and the focus of a predator.

The Doctor struggled to keep up. “Vastra! Vastra slow down,” he yelled from behind her. “We aren’t trying to catch him, just know where he’s been.”

But Vastra didn’t listen. She had a bead on something and she was relentless in her pursuit. She increased her pace; the Doctor was woefully unprepared and fell further behind. Then, she was gone. The Doctor stood at an intersection wondering which way she went when he heard a scream. He raced toward the sound. Rounding the corner he saw Vastra. Her gloved hand was clinched on the throat of a young woman she had lifted off the ground and pressed against the wall.

“Vastra,” the Doctor yelled. “Put her down.” He couldn’t see her face, but he knew what was about to happen. This girl would have been dead on any other night.
“This APE has been in my home!” Vastra yelled. Her usual calm demeanor now nowhere to be found. “She has pilfered through my things. She has invaded my privacy. She has stolen from me!”

“Put her down, Vastra,” the Doctor begged, now slowly approaching to within arm’s reach. “Her crimes do not warrant the death penalty. If she’s stolen from you then you turn her in. Let the police handle it.”

The girl was terrified. Her brown eyes were huge and unblinking. Her hair, which had obviously been in a neat bun, was now falling about her face and shoulders. She clutched at her assailant’s hand and wrist, hitting and slapping, trying everything in her power to escape her captor’s grasp; but it was all to no avail. Vastra’s grip was strong and adrenaline was pouring through her. In her attempts to free herself, the girl did manage to swipe the veiled hat from Vastra’s head. As the hat fell the girl stopped fighting and became frozen in fear.

Vastra deliberately snaked her tongue out at the female and tasted the air around her. “I can smell your putrid ape stench that you left in my home not once, but so many times. And your pheromones tell me that you know you are about to die. You stink of fear.” Vastra’s eyes flashed again. The normally clear, sharp blue irises were now a dull dark grey that swirled like smoke with flashes of white flames. Her grip tightened as the female began to gasp for air. Her punches at Vastra’s hands and arms resumed and were now even more frantic.

“PUT HER DOWN!” the Doctor demanded.

“You do not command me, Doctor,” Vastra hissed through clinched teeth.

“She doesn’t deserve this, Vastra,” the Doctor now pleaded. “You can exact justice, but there is no need to kill her!”

Vastra was not convinced. This human was the sort who would never learn and never stop until she was forced to stop. She knew the type; she captured them all the time. “I cannot take her to the police,” Vastra said. “There is no evidence. I only know it is her because I recognize her stench and I am certain my money is long gone!”

“Let her work off her debt!” the Doctor said with great enthusiasm.

Vastra shifted her gaze from the female to the Doctor. “Work off her debt? Whatever do you mean?”

“Let her work for you,” the Doctor explained. “She can be your maid. Until her debt is paid.”

The female struggled to say something, but she was muted by Vastra’s tightening grip. Her eyes darted between the Doctor and the thing that held her in its grasp.

“She has stolen a great deal of money from me, Doctor,” Vastra said. “It would take her a year to work off such a debt. A year I would have to suffer through the stench of this ape in my home yet again!”

“But think of what you could learn from her,” the Doctor was trying everything he could to get Vastra to listen to reason. “Vastra, you still have so much to learn about human society and behavior. Things you cannot learn in all those books of yours. This girl could teach you.”

“She could teach me?” Vastra laughed.

“Vastra,” the Doctor pleaded. “look into her eyes. She doesn’t deserve to die. She can be an asset to you. Please, Vastra, do it for me.” He paused, sensing that the Silurian was about to give in. “You once said that you owed me your life. That if I had not been there when you were awakened
that you would not have survived the day. Repay this debt to me now by sparing the life of this girl.”

Without warning, Vastra let her go. The girl fell to the ground coughing and gasping, grasping at her throat.

“If she does not pay off her debt,” Vastra looked at the Doctor, “I will kill her and eat her!” She looked at the girl on the ground. “Look at me, Ape!”

The girl lifted her head to look up at the towering Silurian.

“You will be at my home at first light tomorrow or I will hunt you down. And next time the Doctor will not be here to save you!” Leaving the girl coughing and gasping and clutching her throat, Vastra snatched up her hat and veil and headed down the alley towards the Thames.

The Doctor tried to comfort the girl, but Vastra was already making a bee line for the warehouses to finish the job at hand. All he could do was make a final plea to a terrified girl. “Please. Show up tomorrow.”

Chapter End Notes

Feedback and reviews appreciated.
Chapter 6: Settling In

At first light the next morning there was a knock on the door. The bright “clank” of the brass knocker echoed through the entry hall. Vastra was there in a flash and angrily pulled the door. The brown haired girl stood there with her best game face on like this was any other appointment.

“Enter.” Vastra ordered, and led the girl into the sitting room where a large fire was already ablaze. “Sit.” Vastra motioned to a spoon back chair. She grimaced as the ape’s familiar scent once again began to infiltrate her home.

Jenny took a seat as directed and Vastra sat across from her. There was a small table beside Vastra’s chair with a full tea service for one. It was clear this was only for Vastra and she was not about to offer anything to the ape. She calmly poured herself a cup. Beside the service was a pad of paper and a pencil, but Vastra made no motion as of yet to take any notes.

Vastra wasn’t wearing her hat and veil, there was no need; the ape had seen the Silurian’s face in all its fury the night before. To hide it now would be moot. Besides, Vastra wanted to make this as uncomfortable as possible on the thief.

“Ma’am, I,” Jenny started in a hoarse tone, but Vastra quickly lifted her palm toward her and cut her off.

“What is your name, ape?” Vastra asked.

“Jenny, Ma’am,” she croaked. Her throat still sore from the Silurian’s gloved grip only a few hours before. “Jenny Flint.”

“You have stolen quite a sum of money from me, ape.” Vastra’s face was stoic, stern. “Tell me, Jenny Flint, do I frighten you?”

“Yes,” Jenny said. She watched the corners of Vastra’s lips curl upwards into a slight smile. “But, no. I was afraid of wut you would do to me last night; because I didn’ want to die; and I knew you truly meant to kill me. But I weren’t afraid to come here today. I ain’t afraid now.” She watched now as Vastra’s smile disappeared and her face became hardened.

“But you take me at my word when I tell you that if you do not repay the debt you owe, or if you steal from me again, there will be fatal consequences for you?” Vastra asked. “And you believe that as long as you pay off this debt you are safe?”

“Yes ma’am.” Jenny said.

“Good.” Vastra said plainly. “I am glad you take me at my word. And seeing as how you have shown up here today to repay your debt to me, I shall take you at your word as well. Do not make me regret that decision, ape.”

There was a silent pause in which Jenny was afraid to speak and Vastra was summing up the ape based on her pheromones.

“Is my money gone?” Vastra asked.

“Yes ma’am.”
Silence. Vastra’s tongue flicked out to test the air. She picked up no dishonesty in the girl’s answer.

“Your duties as my maid will be fairly routine,” Jenny started to speak, but one look from Vastra and she closed her mouth and just listened. “You will clean my home and wash my laundry. I do not require you to cook for me, as I only eat raw meat and blood. I have a deal worked out with a nearby butcher. He delivers fresh meat and blood three times weekly. You would simply need to place it on a plate or in a glass for me when I require it.”

“Yes Ma’am.”

“I trust then that you are not squeamish and are prepared to handle raw meat and blood?”

“Yes Ma’am.”

“You are not a guest; you owe me a debt and you are working it off. Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes Ma’am.”

“You will not ask me questions about my work and I will not discuss it with you.”

“Yes Ma’am.”

“You will not enter my office or my bedroom, under any circumstances unless I am home; and then, only upon my invitation. Do you understand?”

“Yes Ma’am.”

“If you step out of line with me, there will be consequences. Do you understand?”

“Yes Ma’am.”

There was another long pause in the conversation. Vastra picked up the cup of tea and took a long drink. She enjoyed the dominance she was exerting on the conversation. She enjoyed every moment the ape was uncomfortable.

“Now,” Vastra said sharply. “You may ask your questions.”

Jenny just looked at her. Yes, she had questions, chief among them what the hell was Vastra? But she was scared to ask.

“Come now,” Vastra said, her blank expression turning into a wry grin at the girl’s discomfort. “I know you surely must want to ask at least the most obvious thing on your mind.”

“Wut are you?” Jenny blurted out before she could stop herself.


“So you’re an alien?” Jenny asked with her nose scrunched up.

Vastra laughed. “Certainly not,” Vastra said. “I belong to an ancient race of Earth natives that far exceeds the evolution and existence of you humans! I am more of an Earthling than you are. We were here first!”

Jenny was understandably confused. But she soldiered on none the less. “But that don’t make sense. If you were ‘ere first, how come you’re the only one of you I’ve ever seen? Or that anyone
“How do you know I am the only one?” Vastra did love to toy with the ape. “How many whales have you seen? Surely you believe those exist even though you haven’t seen them?”

“Yes, but,” Jenny really didn’t feel much like arguing. It was still quite early and she had had a rough night. She quickly decided to stop this line of argument. “Why do you keep calling me ‘ape’?”

“Because that is what you are. You are little more than a tree dwelling mammal you would find in the jungles of Africa. You have simply lost most of your obnoxious hair and somehow managed to create a few primitive technologies based off the use of an opposable digit.”

“Opposed to wut?” Jenny was clearly confused and Vastra’s big words were not helping.

“Opposable digits, ape. Thumbs,” Vastra scoffed, “the only thing separating you from your hairier cousins. Goddess knows it isn’t your intellect.” Vastra took another long sip from her tea cup.

Jenny may have felt insulted if she cared even a little bit about what Vastra thought of her. She changed the subject. “Who was that man last night?”

“He is the Doctor,” Vastra said. “You have him to thank for your life.”

The room fell silent again and Jenny awkwardly looked around the sitting room. Confused and scared she was beginning to question if showing up today was the right thing to have done or not. Then suddenly she was reminded it was.

“Why did you show up today, Jenny Flint?” Vastra finally asked.

“You bleedin’ told me to,” Jenny said, defensively, “that’s w’y.”

“But you could have run,” Vastra said. “You could have tried to hide yourself from me.”

“You were pretty convincin’ in your threat to hunt me down and kill me,” Jenny said.

There was another long silence. But this time Jenny was the one to break it.

“I know sorry don’t bring back wut I stole, but I am sorry. Truly. I do what I ‘ave to do to survive. And I know theivin’ ain’t no way for a proper lady to make a livin’.” Jenny paused and sighed heavily. “But I ain’t no lady, Ma’am. Never ‘ave been.”

Vastra studied the girl for a moment. She tasted the air and found nothing but sincerity in Jenny’s pheromones. Until now her anger had blinded her from what was right in front of her face. Jenny’s clothes were tattered, frayed, and stained. Her shoes had holes and she could see that she had newspaper instead of socks on her feet. She noticed her short grimy fingernails torn from lack of care, her unkempt hair in a messy bun, and the thinness to the girl’s face and frame. She noticed the lack of warm clothing despite the dropping temperatures of the approaching winter. “Where do you live, Miss Flint?”

“Miss Flint,” Jenny chuckled before she realized she was being rude. “I ain’t got no place, Ma’am.” She smiled despite herself. “If I get a few extra coin, which hardly never happens, I can get a room for a bit. But I don’t ‘ave a proper home.”

“You stole quite the sum from me,” Vastra said. “That could have put you in a room for a long while. Why are you still living on the streets?”
Jenny considered her answer for a moment.

Vastra was becoming suspicious, but a quick taste of the air told her that whatever Jenny was about to say was sincere.

“I gave most of your money away, Ma’am,” Jenny held her head up and tried to maintain eye contact; she had never had to face one of her marks before. She always assumed that people with money didn’t need it and wouldn’t miss it. She fancied herself a modern day Robin Hood, even if she wasn’t familiar with the story. “There are a lot of people, good people, forced to sleep in the cold with barely a scrap o’ bread between a whole family. I took your money and I bought shoes and coats and food for those people and I got rooms for who I could. But even with all that I stole from you, it went rather quickly out there on the streets.” Jenny hung her head.

Vastra now realized that she was dealing with a homeless young woman turned petty thief, not a criminal mastermind. Who knows why she was homeless. Vastra did not care, but she wasn’t totally heartless. “Very well,” she said finally. “You shall live here. I shall furnish you room and board and I shall purchase you a suitable maid uniform along with proper clothing.”

“I can’t pay for that, Ma’am.” Jenny quickly said.

“And I can’t have a maid living on the streets continuing to steal to eat and put a roof over her head,” Vastra said firmly. “I’ll hear no more of it. It benefits me as much as it benefits you.” Vastra knew that last statement was a lie. But she saw now what this young woman was, and even though she was an ape, there was something about her. Potential maybe? Vastra wasn’t sure.

Jenny had never lived anywhere as nice as this. She could never imagine herself living in as nice a home unless she was a maid. And if this offer was sincere, it was a welcomed rest from her current life, especially with winter just weeks from hitting full stride. She never wanted to be a thief, but the alternatives for her would have been so much worse. This was honest work, even if it was to pay off a debt.

Jenny looked meekly at Vastra an asked, “Where would you like me to start?”

Vastra showed Jenny to her room, which was upstairs and situated directly above the sitting room in the front of the house. The air in the room was stale, just as Jenny remembered it from the very first night she had broken in. She would need to open the window and let in some fresh air, even if it was cold out.

“This is your bedroom,” Vastra said. “You’ll find extra bedding in the dresser and the firewood is kept in the back yard.”

Vastra gave Jenny scant instructions as they walked through the house, and for the most part she left Jenny to her own accord with figuring out her maid duties. “This is my bedroom,” Vastra said stopping in front of the closed door, “which you already know.” Jenny tried not to look away from Vastra’s stare despite her shame. “You are not to enter my bedroom if I am not home and only then with permission. You may enter it to clean, start or stoke a fire, or retrieve laundry; but you are not, under any circumstances, to linger in this room or touch my safe. Do I make myself clear?”

“Perfectly.”

The other door led to the only part of the upstairs Jenny had yet to visit. A narrow hallway was situated along the right hand side of the home, Vastra stopped at a door a little ways down on the
“This is my personal bathroom,” Vastra said as she opened the door. There was a claw foot roll top tub, a wash basin, a toilet, and a small chest of drawers in the room. The floors and half way up the walls were tiled, but by and large, the room was empty and felt like wasted space. There was no running water, Jenny could see that Vastra’s bath water would have to be heated on the stove and brought up from the kitchen. But luckily, there was a drain to the sewers so she wouldn’t have to haul the dirty bathwater away.

Walking a little further down the hall, Vastra pointed out a dumbwaiter. “This will allow you to easily lift water from the kitchen for my bath. You will also need to lift water up for my plants.” Vastra then opened the remaining door at the end of the hallway. This was the glass room Jenny had spied but never visited. Lush plants filled the room and in the center of it all, surrounded by sweet smelling flowers and broad leafed greenery, sat a peacock rattan chair. Vastra stepped inside and Jenny slowly followed. Even on this cold London morning, the room was noticeably warmer than the hallway they had just left. “This is my private sanctuary. You will have no business in this room unless I have specifically invited you. Do NOT let me find your scent in this space.”

Jenny perked up at what Vastra had just said. “Scent?” Jenny thought to herself. She kept saying this. She filed the information back to think about later. “Yes Ma’am.”

“When requested, you will send water up but leave it in the hallway, I shall take care of my plants.” Vastra pointed to a stovepipe that ran from the floor up through the roof. “Please keep a fire in the kitchen stove at all times, that helps keep it warm in here for both me and my plants.”

“Yes Ma’am.”

Downstairs, the tour continued with no instructions as they passed through the dining room and kitchen. Finally in the scullery Vastra offered little guidance. “Here are some cleaning supplies; I trust you know what they are for.”

“Yes Ma’am.”

“I keep a small stack of firewood in here for convenience, more if it begins to snow, and the rest is in the yard.” Vastra opened the door from the scullery to the back yard. Before stepping through the doorway she grabbed cloak from a hook and placed it across her shoulders, pulling the hood up over her crown. They walked to the stack of firewood and Vastra began to pick up several sticks, Jenny followed suit.

“There is a weekly firewood delivery, I do use a considerable amount of fuel; and there are three butcher deliveries that are received through this door as well. The boy places the packages in the ice box.” Vastra looked directly into Jenny’s eyes to monitor her response, “You see Jenny, you never had to pick the lock to my study to gain access to my home. If you had simply tried this door you would have found it quite unrestricted.”

Jenny took the jabs Vastra was throwing at her. Honestly she had no choice. But she could tell that working for the Silurian was not going to be easy if this was the type of harassment she would receive on a daily basis. She was tempted to jab back. But she held her tongue.

They reentered the scullery and added the firewood to the reserve stack. Vastra returned the cloak to the hook then walked over to the door situated in the floor. “This leads to the basement.” Vastra did not make to open the door; instead, she just stood there. “There is no need for you to go down there it does not require your services.”

Jenny’s mind instantly reeled from wild guesses as to what manner of sorcery or witchcraft the Silurian might perform in such a dark, dank space.
Vastra could see that the wheels in the young woman’s head were turning. “I will know if you have been down there. You will not appreciate the consequences.”

“Yes Ma’am.” Jenny snapped to.

“It is up to you to figure out how to occupy your time and complete your chores. I will write you a note to take to the tailor to get two maid uniforms and some new clothes. You will need a winter coat and hat and gloves as well. And some shoes. This will all be charged to my account. Please see to this today.”

“Ma’am, I can’t repay you for those things.” Jenny looked down at her scuffed and open shoes, her tattered clothes, and dingy skin.

Vastra wasn’t sure why it was such a big deal to buy the ape new clothing. This was what Jenny needed and she was working for Vastra now so she felt an obligation to provide them. Also, to be quite honest, Vastra has no idea what was proper or expected when it came to taking on a maid. “Nonsense. Just come by in a moment and fetch the note from me in my office.”

With that, Vastra turned on her heel and left Jenny standing in the scullery wondering what to do now. She went to the cleaning supplies thinking it would be as good a time as any to begin cleaning the kitchen. There was a broom, but no dust pan. There was a pail with some soap, but no scrub brush. There were some rags, but no wood oil or wax. It seemed Vastra had half of anything she needed, but not a whole set of anything useful. “No wonder this place is such a mess,” Jenny said quietly, but aloud.

Next she began to take a mental inventory of all the food in the house. This was not difficult. Excluding the meat wrapped in butcher paper in the ice box, the kitchen and scullery contained only a single box of biscuits, some sugar, a tin of tea, and tin of sardines in oil that was so old it looked to have been left by the previous tenants. During her search, she found the other end of the dumbwaiter. “How did I miss this before?”

Remembering that she saw a pencil and some paper in the sitting room, Jenny returned the tea service to the kitchen and began to make a list of things she would need in order to fulfill her duties as maid. She was not hugely proficient with reading or writing, but she knew enough to get by. The list contained some misspelled words that Vastra was quick to point out when Jenny presented her with the paper.

“You will require all of this?” Vastra asked. “Are you sure?”

“Quite sure, Ma’am,” Jenny assured her. “Your home is lovely, and richly furnished, but if we don’t get some oil and wax on these floors, tables, and chairs the wood will dry out in no time given how warm you keep it in here. And, if I may be so bold, your scullery could use a good stocking with proper food and supplies. I’ll need more than the butcher delivery for m’self, Ma’am.”

“Yes, yes,” Vastra said, trying not to sound too dismissive. She quickly added the name and address of the butcher shop to the shopping list Jenny had prepared. “Go by the butcher shop and add whatever you’d like to my order.” She handed the piece of paper to Jenny. “I’ll give you a weekly stipend for food and cleaning supplies. I trust you will use these funds as intended? You won’t be giving all my money away to hard luck cases.”

“Of course, Ma’am.”

“Very well,” Vastra said. “Wait here and I shall fetch you some funds. And don’t touch anything!”
Jenny waited in the study and listened as Vastra went to her bedroom directly above and retrieved money from her safe. Returning to the study, Vastra handed Jenny a generous stack of banknotes. For a split second Vastra’s ungloved hand brushed Jenny’s fingers and the girl fought the urge to pull away. If Vastra noticed she did not react. Vastra’s skin was cold, and although Jenny expected it to be rough, it was smooth. Jenny began to stare.

“You are out of warnings,” Vastra said coldly, snapping Jenny out of her trance. “Do not make me regret this arrangement.”

“I won’t, Ma’am,” Jenny assured her.

“And I should not have to tell you that if you tell anyone that I am not human it will be the last words uttered from your lips.”

“Yes Ma’am,” Jenny took the money and the addresses and headed out of the house. She stopped suddenly on the stoop and took a few deep breaths. “What have I gotten m’self into?” she whispered aloud.

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After a busy day out in London, Jenny now had two maid uniforms, night clothes, two everyday dresses, a cloak, gloves, a hat, a muffler, under garments, socks, and a warm pair of shoes. This was by far the most clothing Jenny had ever had at one time; and most certainly the best quality. The scullery was fully stocked with preserved foods, cleaning supplies, and a few personal necessities for Jenny. The kitchen was also stocked with fresh items like tea, biscuits, sugar, bread, cheese, and vegetables.

As it turned out, Jenny was very organized and took to her new duties as maid quite well. She wasted no time getting everything in order and set out the first week to deep clean the whole house, room by room, beginning with the entry hall. Every surface was dusted, the floors swept, and all wood from the floorboards to the top of the banister was scrubbed with soap and water. As one room dried, she would begin on the next stopping only to eat a modest lunch and continue her way through the house. After a room had dried, she waxed all the wooden surfaces within. Every inch of newly waxed wood shined as the glow from the oil lamp sconces danced about. She stood back and admired her hard work, proud of herself, and retired each night utterly exhausted only to begin again the next day.

On Wednesday she met the butcher’s delivery boy. He was humming as he entered the scullery and then backed into the kitchen, pushing the door open with his bum, his arms loaded with meats wrapped in paper and containers of blood.

“‘ello there,” Jenny said with a smile. She was sitting at the small table eating her lunch of bread and cheese and tea.

The boy jumped and turned around, almost spilling the packages in his arms across the floor. “Blimey! Who are you?” he asked spinning around.

“I’m Jenny,” she smiled wider at the boy. “I’m the new maid ‘ere. Wut’s your name then?”

“Tommy,” the boy said.

“‘ello Tommy. Very pleased to meet you. Do you always make the deliveries here?”

“Yes ma’am. The butcher gets lots of delivery boys, but I’m the only one allowed here. Said the lady of the house asked that the same boy make all the deliveries. I’ve never even met her.” He
fidgeted in place for a moment not sure if it would be rude to put the delivery away while Jenny talked to him or if he should stand there until the conversation was over.

“Let me ‘elp you, Love.” Jenny got up and opened the ice box and loaded the meat in one package at a time. Each was labeled in wax pencil across the back where it was taped closed. Liver, kidney, heart, all the organ meat that Vastra preferred; but also roast, sirloin, bacon, and sausage for Jenny. Finally, the containers of blood, one in each hand.

“Are you hungry, Tommy?” Jenny asked.

“Starvin’, actually,” the boy said looking down. “I don’t get fed til I make all the deliveries. And I only get fed once a day.”

“Then sit down and give me a minute.”

Jenny quickly fried up two eggs, tore off a hunk of bread, and cut a piece of cheese off the wedge for the boy. She put the plate in front of him with a warm cup of tea. “You eat that. It’ll help you til you get your supper.”

“Thank you ma’am,” Tommy said as he stuffed his face with the food and washed it down with the tea. “That’s mighty kind of you.”

“Don’ mention it, Love” Jenny said. “You just stay warm and be careful out there.”

“Yes ma’am.” With that, Tommy left out to continue his route.

By Friday, all the rooms were washed and waxed except for Vastra’s bedroom and study. The two women had hardly spoken all week except for Vastra to request daily meals and tea service. Since acquiring a new case from Scotland Yard, Vastra had spent most of her time in her office during the day and had retired straight to her bedroom after she took her evening meal, also in her study.

There was a knock on the study door and Vastra called out “Enter” without looking up.

Jenny walked, tray in hand. “Ma’am, I’ve finished deep cleaning the whole house except for your personal spaces. Would you like for me to start on your bedroom or office?” Jenny sat Vastra’s breakfast of liver, pig’s blood, and tea on the small table.

Vastra took a deep breath. She didn’t like her space disrupted, but she knew it needed to be done. Ultimately, she reluctantly agreed. “I have to go out today, so you may start on my office. But do not begin on my bedroom.”

“Yes Ma’am,” Jenny said and left Vastra to her meal.

It took her all morning just to dust, sweep, remove ash, and generally prepare Vastra’s office for scrubbing with soap and water. She decided she would work in stages, so as not to disrupt all of the office at one time. She started with the bookshelves. All of Vastra’s books were removed, dusted, and stored in the sitting room so that Jenny could began scrubbing the bookshelves and cabinets along the wall.

Vastra was not pleased to find all her books in piles on the sitting room floor. “Jenny!” she yelled from the entry way.

Jenny exited the office, she was sweating and rosy cheeked, her hair haphazardly fell from its once tight bun.
“Why are my things that are supposed to be in my office in my sitting room floor?” Vastra demanded.

“I ‘ad to take all those books down so I could properly wash the shelves, Ma’am.” Jenny said.

“Well are you almost done? I’ve been gone all day, surely you are finished by now.”

“It took all morning just to get the books off the shelf, dusted, and moved in ‘ere,” Jenny said. “Then I had to remove all the ash from the fireplace, which stirred up a lot of dust all about the room. Then I had to dust the shelves, the furniture…”

Vastra held up her palm toward Jenny. “Just,” she was clearly unwell at the whole spectacle, “how much longer until my office is ready?”

“Everything is washed and cleaned. I’ve built a fire to ‘elp it all dry, then I ‘ave to apply a coat of wax. But I can only do that once it’s fully dried. If I do it while the wood’s still wet it could damage it.”

“Very well,” Vastra said, exasperated. “I shall complete my work in my bedroom tonight and I shall take my supper up there when time. Do please go start a fire in there for me.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Jenny said. “Right away.” And she hurried up the stairs.

Vastra stood for a moment taking in the entry way and the sitting room. With the exception of the books stacked on the sitting room floor, her home had not looked better since she had moved in. Despite the foul smell of the ape constantly in her home, she was pleased with the cleanliness.

Jenny returned from market Saturday, mid-afternoon, not at all expecting what was in store for her. She had spent all morning waxing all the wooden surfaces in Vastra’s office and replacing her books in exactly the same order, so that her madam could return to her space as soon as possible. She was hoping that Vastra would find it ready and waiting when she returned from field work and would be pleased with all her hard work and effort. But what Vastra had found upon returning home had actually set her off.

No sooner than the door to the scullery had opened, Jenny loaded down bags and packages, did she hear her name being beckoned from Vastra’s office. Placing the things on the kitchen table, she hurried to the office, still in her cape and gloves and muffler.

“What is this?” Vastra asked pointing to a plate of bread and cheese on her side table.

“I put that out on the kitchen table for Tommy, the butcher’s boy,” Jenny said, confused by the ire in Vastra’s tone and why the plate was now in her office.

“The butcher’s boy gets paid and fed by the butcher, not me,” Vastra insisted. “I do not feed strays from my kitchen, do I make myself clear?”

Jenny was taken aback. She should have held her tongue, but she wasn’t about to let this slide. “Strays?” Jenny was livid. “He ain’t a cat, Ma’am, he’s a child. He’s probably ‘omless and on his own.”

“None the less, he is not my responsibility.” Vastra asserted.

“He gets one meal a day, and only after he has worked ten hours or more,” Jenny pleaded her case. “I was only offerin’ him a bit of bread and cheese to ‘elp him out.”
“And again, he is not my responsibility,” Vastra repeated her stance.

“But Madam,” Jenny started but Vastra cut her off.

“I consider this matter closed, Miss Flint. I do not feed strays.”

“You’re feedin’ this stray!” Jenny said as she pointed to herself.

“You are working off a debt. I am housing you. If you are not satisfied with this arrangement, there is only one other currency you possess that I will accept. A currency that the Doctor deprived me of a week ago.” Vastra stared at her maid with cold blue eyes.

Jenny knew that if the Doctor had not been there the night Vastra found her, her life would have ended violently in that alley. She would grit her teeth and follow orders and suffer through the year of being a maid for this vile creature.

“You are excused, and take that plate of dry crust with you.”

Jenny took the plate and stormed out of Vastra’s office and into the kitchen where she sat at the small table and cried.

Vastra could hear her sobs with her superior Silurian ears and wondered if she had overreacted; after all, it was only a bit of bread and cheese. Still, she thought, it was not her desire to run a charity.

It took three days and precise scheduling to deep clean Vastra’s bedroom without interfering with the Silurian. But after that, the deep cleaning was done and Jenny could settle into a routine to maintain the home.

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During the weeks that followed, Jenny tried to keep a regular schedule for the household, but Vastra’s schedule while on a case was anything but regular. Her madam was now fully engrossed in a murder investigation which kept her busy in her study throughout the day and out on the London streets most nights. She slept at odd hours and disappeared into the basement at least three times a week; for what, Jenny had no idea. All of this made serving meals tricky, but she managed. In fact, Vastra’s house now ran like a well-oiled machine, thanks to Jenny.

The Silurian and the human maintained a ballet of sorts where Jenny learned to anticipate her Madam’s needs: food, fire, and baths mostly; and yet remain almost unseen to Vastra, as Vastra had requested. Jenny knew the Silurian would ask for a hot bath to soak in after long hours in London’s cold night climate, so she had all the water heated and ready to send up the dumbwaiter when her Madam arrived home, no matter what time. She would then start a fire in Vastra’s bedroom so that her room would be warm when she exited the bath. She knew that Vastra required a meal just after finishing whatever it was that she did in the basement, so she always had one prepared. And, she had learned how to warm the blood and raw meat without cooking it, something that earned her rare praise from Vastra.

For the most part, Jenny enjoyed the work of keeping Vastra’s home. She was well cared for in terms of food, clothing, and shelter. She appreciated not having to steal for what she needed. But she was lonely. She craved human interaction. And she was not getting any of this at the house. Vastra was hardly someone she could call “friend,” in fact Vastra would still refer to her as “thief” on occasion, making Jenny’s blood boil, but in the end, she felt she deserved it. However, most of the time, Vastra simply referred to her as “ape” or “human” only using her actual name when she
was giving orders or correcting her; their conversations mainly consisted of Vastra giving Jenny orders and correcting her or Jenny asking if there was anything she could do for her Madam.

Jenny managed some social interaction at the market, hence market day was her favorite part of the week. She would dedicate almost all of Saturday—after starting fires throughout the house and serving breakfast, of course—to shopping. She would visit the open market for fresh foods and specialty shops for tea and confections. She would peruse the aisles of the general store for cleaning supplies, whether she needed anything or not. She would take her time and speak with the shop keepers and other customers.

It was while shopping in the open market one Saturday morning when Jenny met Frankie. “If you wait until the market is about to close, they’ll give you a better deal,” Frankie said to Jenny as she decided which onions to purchase.

Jenny looked up to see a warm pair of brown eyes looking back.

“They want to sell all their stock, so they’ll sell it cheap at the end of the day so they don’t have to take it home.” The woman smiled at Jenny. “Name’s Frankie.” And she extended her hand to Jenny.

The two women hit it off right away and would meet for tea each week on Jenny’s market day. Frankie was an artist. She was a singer and a dancer and all around entertainer. She worked as a waitress to secure enough coin to pay the bills, but she put on shows most Saturday nights at various bars around London.

“Why don’t you come out tonight and see my show,” Frankie nudged. “We’ve been friends for weeks now and you’ve not come by, not once to see me perform. I’ll give them your name and you can get in for free.”

“I don’t know,” Jenny said, smiling. “I have to be home in case Madam comes home from her work and needs a hot soak in the tub.”

“What sort of work does your Madam do that keeps her out at night and requires a hot soak upon returning home,” Frankie asked with a raised eyebrow.

A little slow on the uptake, Jenny didn’t immediately catch Frankie’s insinuation, then it hit her. “Oh. No!” Jenny was flustered. “No, nothing like that. If you knew her, you’d never even joke about that. She’s,” Jenny stopped. She wasn’t sure she wanted to give too much away at the moment. “She just keeps odd hours, that’s all. And when she comes in from work she likes a hot bath. I shouldn’t go out.”

“Maybe you should just tell her to fetch her own water for her own damn bath and come out and see me tonight,” Frankie reached over and touched Jenny’s hand.

Jenny was immediately uncomfortable and politely removed her hand and checked her hair in its bun. “I’ll talk to Madam,” she finally conceded. “I’ll do my best to come see you.”

“Great,” Frankie beamed. “I’m at the Rose and Thorn tonight. I go on at eleven. I’ll see you there.”
Chapter 7: A Year of Service

Winter
The blustery fall turned into a harsh, cold winter; and December was over and the new year upon them before they knew it. The ballet that was established in Jenny’s first few weeks continued with the two women only interacting when absolutely necessary. Jenny had a set routine to maintain the home and keep Vastra fed and warm: she shopped on certain days, the firewood delivery was set, and the butcher delivery was set. Jenny liked routine.

It was late January when, like so many other late night/early morning returns, Vastra stumbled through the scullery door barely able to stand. The cold had crippled her, dulled her senses, and slowed her movements to a crawl. But Jenny was prepared.

Like every night when Vastra went out in these conditions, Jenny kept plenty of water pre-heated on the stove and a fire blazing in the sitting room. Running to the Silurian before she collapsed onto the floor, she wrapped her arm around Vastra’s waist, pulled her arm across her shoulders - despite Vastra’s protest- and helped her into the sitting room. “You warm up while I get your bath ready.” She gingerly laid Vastra on the settee that she had arranged in front of the fire, the whole while Vastra hissed at her in Silurian.

As Vastra warmed up by the fire, Jenny lifted pot after pot of near boiling water to the second story and filled the tub. Eventually, the Silurian regained enough energy to walk herself up the stairs to soak until she had warmed her core. She would then retire to her bedroom, where Jenny had prepared another blazing fire, and fall asleep beneath a mountain of wool and down.

This was now Jenny’s primary responsibility-keeping Vastra warm. It was a thankless task that Jenny had grown accustomed to in the winter months. She didn’t mind being hissed at because she knew without her care the stubborn Silurian would surely die; or at least succumb to the cold and fall ill. And she knew how to handle it. She had developed a routine.

For Vastra’s part, she was beginning to wonder how she had ever managed on these cold nights without the human to tend to her. She remembered previous winters when she would return home and struggle to start a fire and end up falling asleep on the floor of her office. Though she would never admit it, she was beginning to depend on Jenny. Knowing a warm fire and hot bath would be waiting on her when she arrived home allowed her to stay out later and work harder to catch London’s most elusive criminals.

The need for Jenny to be home and be prepared for whatever condition Vastra would return in took precedent on these cold nights. As a result, Jenny’s only social outlet, Saturday nights spent with Frankie and her friends, were limited to those nights when Vastra stayed in, which had been seldom over the holidays and on into the New Year. But she liked that she was there for her madam and enjoyed being needed, despite all the hissing.

Spring
Winter finally gave way to spring and Vastra’s need for a hot soak after a night of work lessened. This allowed Jenny more Saturday nights out on the town. She had grown quite fond of Frankie, although she had to dismiss her advances on more than one occasion.

“Jenny,” Frankie said as Jenny recoiled once again from her touch. “Have I misjudged you in some way? Are you not interested in the company of women?”
Jenny blushed slightly and smiled at Frankie. “You’ve not misjudged me. I rather enjoy you and your company,” Jenny paused, “It’s just that right now I’m not at a place where I can really ‘be’ with anyone.”

“And why is that?” Frankie asked as she took a long pull from her pint.

“I’m,” Jenny started, clearly uncomfortable, “my time is not my own, at the moment.” Jenny wasn’t sure she would be able to explain her current situation without revealing why she was in the service of her madam.

“Just because you work for someone doesn’t mean they own you,” Frankie insisted. “Tell your employer that you have a right to spend your free time as you see fit.”

“I’m afraid it ain’t that simple,” Jenny replied.

“Then make it that simple,” Frankie insisted again. “You are her employee, nothing more. She can’t demand your time all day, every day.” Frankie looked at Jenny and a moment of realization washed across her face. Her expression turned to a furrowed brow. “Is there something between the two of you?”

“No!” Jenny blushed again. “Nothin’ like that. Not at all.” Jenny was a little flustered at the thought. If Frankie actually knew Vastra she would have never asked that.

“Then what is it?”

Jenny was determined to keep her secret. She had worked hard to leave her life on the streets behind. “Let’s just say I owe her a lot. It wouldn’t be a lie to say I owe her my life. So I do feel obligated to be there for her whenever she needs me, day or night, for whatever reason.”

“You owe her your life?” Frankie asked, confused. “Does that mean you are going to give her the rest of it? How long do you intend to be indebted to her?”

Jenny shook her head and thought about how to answer. She knew she owed Vastra a year’s worth of wages to pay back what she had stolen, but what would happen after that year? “I promised her a year of service,” Jenny said.

“Do you expect me to wait a year for you?” Frankie asked.

“I don’t expect anything from anyone,” Jenny said firmly. Reaching over, she took Frankie’s hand in hers and looked into the performer’s deep brown eyes. “I’ll be free from my debt come this fall, but I’m not sure I will want to devote myself to anyone right away.”

Frankie understood what Jenny was saying. Obviously Jenny did not feel about her the way she had come to feel about Jenny.

Jenny could see that Frankie was hurt. “I love my time with you and the friends I have made at the pubs. I love watching you perform…,” Jenny stopped suddenly as Frankie interrupted her.

“You just don’t love me.”

She was taken aback by Frankie’s directness. “No. I’m sorry. I don’t.”

Summer
It was a warm July night and Jenny had been out late with her friends. Frankie had landed a show at a prominent London theatre. This was a step up from the pubs, even if she was only a two song
opening act. Vastra was working tonight, but the summer months weren’t hard on her Silurian metabolism, so Jenny didn’t need to be home while her madam was out; or so she thought. She hadn’t noticed the trail in the back yard; but as soon as her hand landed on the doorknob of the scullery door her palm was coated in a thick, sticky substance. Opening the door she spotted the splatters on the floor where blood had dripped and made a trail into the kitchen.

“Bloody hell.” Jenny rushed into the kitchen to find Vastra slumped in the chair holding a blood soaked cloth to her right bicep. “Wut ‘appened?” Jenny asked, her accent thick.

“I’ll be fine,” Vastra snipped. “I just need to control the bleeding.”

“Lemme see,” Jenny demanded, but Vastra didn’t move. “Show it to me.”

“I’ll do no such thing,” Vastra protested. “You are my maid, not a doctor.”

Jenny stood with her hands on her hips. “I don’t bloody well see a doctor, do I? So if you want that looked at either let me at it or you can take a cab to the hospital.”

Knowing she was beat and had no time or reason to argue, Vastra nodded and moved the cloth away from the wound. It was a deep puncture and wasn’t clotting. The blood began to flow, bypassing the soaked fabric of Vastra’s dress and dripping from the tips of her fingers.

“What happened?” Jenny asked softly as Vastra applied the cloth to the wound again.

“I was stabbed.”

“Let me help you into the dining room. I need you up on that table so I can work,” Jenny demanded.

“Work?” Vastra asked. “Just what is it that you think you will be doing?”

“I’m gonna clean that wound so you don’t get infected and then I’m goin’ to stop tha bleedin’.”

“And just how do you propose to do that?” Vastra demanded.

“Cauterize it of course.” Jenny said very matter-of-factly.

“You will do no such thing!”

“You ‘ave a better idea? If you do I’d love to ‘ear it.”

Vastra knew what needed to be done. She just hated the fact that it would be this ape to do it.

“Have you done this before?” Vastra asked.

“No.” Jenny wasn’t going to lie. She’d never even seen it done. “I’ve ‘eard stories. Seems simple enough. Heat up somethin’ metal and stick it to the wound. But first I have to clean it up. So I need you to get on that dining room table now.”

With Jenny’s help, Vastra was able to get from the kitchen into the dining room and onto the table. The loss of blood had made her weak and she needed Jenny for support.

Jenny quickly gathered a pillow and two leather belts. She placed the pillow under Vastra’s head. “That should be a little more comfortable,” Jenny said as she smiled at Vastra. Using one of the belts, Jenny made a tourniquet and slipped it over Vastra’s hand and up her arm. “I need you to pull this tight. You need to hold it tight enough to stop the bleeding. You understand?”
Vastra nodded her head “yes” and held onto the belt.

Jenny got busy. She retreated first into the kitchen and got some water on to heat. She then scurried around the house gathering up alcohol, bandages, scissors, and clean linin. With everything gathered she got to work.

“I’m going to have to cut your sleeve out of the way. Alright?”

Vastra simply nodded. The dress was all but ruined anyway from the fight that had precipitated the stabbing.

Jenny cut a slit up the sleeve and moved the material away to expose Vastra’s skin. She had never actually seen Vastra’s arm before as the Silurian went to great lengths to cover every inch of herself, even at home. She noticed how the scales were different on different parts of her arm: lighter and softer on the inside, darker and thicker along the outside. Her skin was cool to the touch and Jenny thought back to the first time their hands had grazed one another in Vastra’s office. She cut the sleeve completely away and repositioned the tourniquet on Vastra’s bicep. Pulling it tight enough to slow the bleeding, but not too tight, she said in almost a whisper, “just like that.”

Vastra nodded and kept her grip on the end of the belt.

Soaking the clean linin in warm water, she carefully washed the blood from Vastra’s arm. Some had dried, some was still wet. It was darker and thicker than human blood, but with the same metallic smell. She was as rough as she needed to be to get the job done, but she was overall gentle and careful. She examined the scales and looked for other wounds as she cleaned, and did find a few other nicks and cuts, but nothing significant. There were quite a few scales missing from her arm and Jenny wondered if they would grow back. Lingered longer than necessary, she found herself completely fascinated with the Silurian skin. Finally she was done with cleanup.

What she was about to do next would be painful, but still not as bad as what would eventually come. She doubled over the second leather belt a few times and held it up to Vastra’s mouth. “Bite down on this. This is gonna sting. A lot.”

Vastra did as she was told and opened her mouth for Jenny to place the belt between her teeth.

As she endured the sting of the alcohol, the Silurian bit hard on the belt in her mouth and pulled tighter on the belt on her arm but she didn’t utter a single sound, not even a whimper.

“You’re doing great, love,” Jenny cooed. She could tell Vastra’s breathing was getting rapid. “It’s all cleaned up. I’ll be right back.”

Vastra took a breath and loosened up the tourniquet a bit. Some blood leaked out, but not like before. The stinging of the alcohol subsided but she knew the worst was about to come.

Jenny returned to the dining room with a knife in her hand. It wasn’t glowing red; it didn’t even look hot, but it was. It had to be. “I’m going to hold this to the wound for three seconds. I need you to lay very still for me when I do that. Bite down, scream, do what you have to do, but it’ll only be three seconds.”

Vastra nodded. She clinched the leather in her mouth and pulled tighter on the belt around her arm.

Jenny quickly wiped away the fresh blood and plunged the blade flat down on Vastra’s wound without hesitation. The smell of burnt blood and flesh filled the dining room.

Vastra bit down so hard onto the leather she cut into it with her teeth. Her breathing became rapid.
She pulled the belt around her arm so tight Jenny was afraid she would damage it further.

In three seconds it was over and Jenny pulled the knife away. Silurians didn’t sweat, but Jenny was sweating enough for the both of them.

Vastra spat out the belt and took some rapid breaths. She held onto the tourniquet and pulled it tight as she still reeled in pain from the burn.

Jenny took the tourniquet from Vastra, loosened it, and watched the wound to make sure the bleeding had stopped. When she was satisfied it had, she let out a sigh of relief and placed the knife in the bowl of water to cool and pulled the belt from around Vastra’s arm.

Vastra continued to breathe rapidly. She didn’t scream or even complain. She said nothing. Just breathed rapidly and shallow.

“You need to calm your breathing now,” Jenny spoke softly. “Look at me. Everything’s fine. The worst is over.” Jenny calmly breathed in and out as she looked into Vastra’s sapphire eyes.

Vastra followed Jenny’s lead as she stared into her soft brown eyes. Her breathing slowed and became more normal.

“That’s great. You’re doing great,” Jenny reassured her. “Keep your breathing slow and controlled. I’m going to leave you here while I clean up. Don’t move, I don’t want that wound to reopen. When I get done I’ll help you up stairs to bed.”

Vastra simply nodded. She was grateful for the help even if she hadn’t said “thank you.” She may have very well bled to death if Jenny hadn’t been there since she couldn’t take the pressure off the wound long enough to clean and cauterize it herself. Once again, she was indebted to the human.

For the next few days Jenny didn’t leave the house. She waited on Vastra hand and foot to make sure the wound healed properly and also that she ate enough to rebuild her strength.

Vastra relegated herself to desk duty while her arm healed. She was redundantly organizing her notes and maps for her current case, not really making any headway or discoveries. She really needed to be out on the streets, but Jenny insisted she stay home and threatened her with tagging along if she left. A knock on her office door was followed by Jenny entering with tea. It wasn’t even tea time. Vastra hated the doting. “I don’t need you checking in on me every minute. I am fine.”

“I know,” Jenny said setting the tea service on the table. “Can I see your arm?”

“You are not my physician,” Vastra said flatly.

“True, but I’d still like to make sure it isn’t getting infected,” Jenny smiled and Vastra just stared at her. “I just know that you won’t take it easy with that arm if I’m not here to watch you.”

“You are also not my keeper,” Vastra said.

“I know. I am neither of those things. I am just a filthy ape who sees to your every need, prepares your meals, builds your fires, washes your laundry, cleans your home, and brings you tea.” Jenny smiled. “But if you won’t let me look at it at least drink your blood then have some tea.” Jenny sat a cup of warm blood on the desk and began to pour a cup of tea.

Vastra found Jenny to be exhausting at times, this was one of them. And although she would never admit it, she was also beginning to find her endearing. Jenny was all the things she had mentioned
and more. Because of Jenny seeing to practically everything else in Vastra’s life, she was more efficient in her detective work. As she sipped the blood she wondered how she had ever gotten along without the human.

“I have things to do upstairs,” Jenny said pulling Vastra out of her thought. “And I’m watering your plants in the greenhouse. You don’t need to lift the water jug just yet.” Jenny didn’t ask.

Vastra didn’t argue, she didn’t see the use. “Do not rearrange anything in there. I have everything just how I like it.”

“Yes Ma’am,” Jenny smiled as she walked out of the study closing the French doors behind her.

That was the longest conversation the two women had had since Jenny had been in her home.

Fall
The leaves had begun to change and a chill was in the air. Jenny strolled around the market looking for fresh carrots, turnips, potatoes, and onions for a stew, her favorite cold weather meal.

“Jenny,” a male voice called her name in the crowded market. “Jenny, is that you?”

Dressed in her maid’s uniform and heavy cotton cape Jenny turned to see who was calling her by name. It was one of the boys from Simon’s gang. She struggled a bit to remember his name and must have had a dreadfully confused look on her face.

“It is you,” the boy said. “We looked for you for months after Simon got pinched. Figured you’d been done for then, didn’t we?” The boy could see that Jenny was still a little taken aback and had yet to speak. “Victor.” He said flatly. “Me name’s Victor. Remember.”

Shaking her head and coming to her senses, Jenny smiled at the boy. He was a few years younger than her, but he had certainly grown since she had seen him last. He was as tall as her and she hardly recognized him. “Yes, Victor. Sorry, Love. I’m terrible with names, I am.”

“No matter.” He took Jenny in for a moment and smiled at her finely tailored maid uniform, cape, and boots. “I see you’ve gone off and got yourself a proper job.” He thought back to how good Jenny was a set of lock picks and the many lessons she had taught him. “You a kitchen maid then?” He asked pointing to the bag of fresh food Jenny held at her side.

“I’m a housemaid for a Lady of London.” Jenny smiled, somewhat nervously.

“Lock Pick Jenny a house maid,” Victor shook his head. “What made you go straight then? Did you get caught or sumthin’?”

Jenny hesitated. She wasn’t about to admit she got pinched, threatened, and forced to choose between paying off a debt or being a meal for a lizard woman. “I have a room and three meals a day as a maid. And my Madam buys me clothes and keeps me safe from the London streets. That’s way more than I ever had workin’ for Simon, or takin’ care of myself.”

“That’s ‘cause you kept givin’ all your loot away as I remember,” Victor shook his head agian. “Simon would get so mad at you. He’d say you were the dumbest cleverest thief he’d ever met.”

“You said Simon got himself pinched? When did that happen?” Jenny asked.

“Not a year ago now,” Victor said. “Got nabbed doin’ some heist. He was almost home free when they got ‘im

“You said you were lookin’ for me after Simon got pinched, but then gave up. Why?”
“Why were we lookin’ or why’d we give up?” Victor asked.

“Oi!” Jenny yelled, then caught herself and calmed her tone. “Don’t be daft. Why were you lookin’ for me? I’d stopped workin’ for Simon. I didn’t know anythin’ about him gettin’ pinched.”

“He just said to find you wuz all. So we looked for you everywhere. We checked out all your usual places, the abandoned buildings, the gin houses, everywhere. After a couple of months with no one layin’ eyes on ya we just sorta gave up. We assumed you’d met your fate.”

“I’ve been at this job about a year. I haven’t been to those places since.”

“Well I’ve found you now and you should go see Simon. He’s not likely to be out for a while now. They’re still tryin’ to pin a lot more burglaries on him but they don’t have the proof and he ain’t talkin’. He said they gave him more time for assaultin’ an officer just because he stepped on one of the detective’s feet when they were manhandling’ him over at the Yard. Can you believe that?”

“I can believe anything these days,” Jenny said, a little absentmindedly.

“Wut’s that suppose’ to mean?” Victor looked confused.

“Nothin’,” Jenny recovered. “So where they keepin’ Simon?”

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Jenny sat across the table from Simon. He looked older, harder, and tired.

“You look great, Jenny.” Simon smiled and took her in. She had filled out from the luxury of three meals a day since the last time he had seen her. She had color in her cheeks and her hair was shiny and clean. She smelled faintly of rose. She was wearing a nice clean dress, a warm cap, and gloves. “You seem to be doin’ alright for yourself then.”

Jenny smiled at her former mentor. “I’m doin’ okay.” She wished she could return the kind words to Simon, but he truly looked worse for wear.

“Find yourself a sugar daddy?” Simon asked.

“I think you know better.” Jenny said. “I’m a housemaid now.”

“A maid?” Simon was shocked. “My little Lock Pick Jenny has gone and got herself an honest job.”

Jenny smiled. “Something like that.”

A crooked smile crept across Simon’s face. “Ah,” he said, “there’s more to it than that. There’s something you’re not telling me.”

Jenny tried her best to remain calm. She couldn’t let Simon know she had gotten pinched and was working to pay back a debt. “Nothing more,” she assured him. “The Madam’s just a little strange, that’s all. She isn’t from here and treats me different than most housemaids get treated. She pays me more than most housemaids get paid too: a room, meals, and clothes.”

“I see,” Simon pressed on. “So you have a sugar mamma.” He smiled an evil grin.

“Oi! No!” Jenny protested. “What is it with you men? I get a good job and you have to read sumethin’ into it. Besides, if you knew her you wouldn’t even joke about that.”
Simon studied Jenny’s body language and posture. He could see she was uncomfortable and decided to give her a break and change the subject. “So how’d you know I was here?”

“I saw Victor at the market. He’s grown up! He told me you were lookin’ for me after you got yourself pinched,” Jenny said.

“I was indeed,” he looked around to make sure none of the guards were listening. “I was gonna offer you one last job.”

“A job?” Jenny asked. “What kind of job?”

“I think I know who it was that put me in here,” he said discreetly. “I was going to see if you wanted to earn some coin to help me get a little revenge.”

“What do you mean, ‘who put you in here’?” Jenny asked. “You got pinched was all. Right?”

“No,” Simon shook his head. “I think there was more to it than that. The guards talk. And I listen. Apparently the Yard has some woman detective they use for certain cases.”

Jenny’s eyes grew wide and she sat straight up in her chair. There was no hiding her reaction and there was no doubt he was talking about Vastra.

Simon noticed her reaction but kept talking. “The say she’s called in on cases they can’t crack. Heard they let her do whatever’s necessary to get information to help the Yard.”

Jenny squirmed uneasily in her chair again.

“You done got squeamish with your new job then?” he chided.

“No,” Jenny quickly straightened up. “Just sounds odd, that’s all.”

“That’s what I thought. No way could a woman have pinched me. Not unless she was seducing my associates into giving her information,” he said.

“Seducing?” Jenny almost laughed at the thought of Vastra seducing anyone, much less a human. She thought them all hairless apes and detested the lot of them.

“What else could it be? The Yard’s finest didn’t have a clue how to catch me as I stole antique after art piece after war relic from some of the toughest safes in London. Then as I got to the bottom of my list, they were there to nab me just as I was about to grab a priceless piece of art. Only two other people knew where that art was and that I was going to get it. And one of them was paying me to get it.”

Wheels started turning in Jenny’s head. She thought back to a year ago when she had rummaged through Vastra’s desk and caught a glimpse of a case file. She had noticed the addresses of the burglaries, pictures of the safes, and the list of stolen goods: a rare sapphire ring, a dagger from France, and an oil painting, to name a few. It hit her like a ton of bricks. That case was Simon. But it was so much more than that.

It was Simon that Vastra was out hunting that gave Jenny the opportunity to break into her home and spend hours on end trying to crack that safe or persuade Vastra to move her money. If she had known then it was him, she could have warned him. But now? Now where would her loyalty lie? Vastra had almost killed her. She would have killed her if that man, the Doctor, hadn’t been there. But in the year since then, Vastra had given her a home, security, and a purpose. She had helped her off the streets and away from a harsh life of crime.
Simon snapped Jenny back to reality. “What is it?” He could tell she knew something.

“Nothin’,” she lied. “I remember readin’ about ‘bout that is all. I had no idea it was you. I think it was just about the time I went on as a maid. I stopped hangin’ out at all the usual dives. I had no idea.”

“That’s why they couldn’t find you when I sent some of my boys looking for you. Last I heard you had something big planned. When you were nowhere to be found we all assumed you’d gotten yourself pinched. Or worse. I told ‘em to drop it after a bit.” Simon studied Jenny for a moment longer. “Anyway, I kept my ears open around here and the guards kept their mouths moving. And they love to complain that some stuck up bitch is getting’ paid better than them to swoop in, spread her legs, and claim arrests. I perked up when they started guessin’ how much she got paid.”

Jenny knew exactly how much Vastra got paid. And it was a handsome sum indeed. She was appalled that people thought she got that pay by sleeping with whoever she needed for information. She also knew what Vastra would do to anyone who thought that about her and was dumb enough to say it to her face.

Again, Simon snapped Jenny back to the conversation. “That job’s still on the table, if you’re interested.”

“I have a job,” Jenny said.

“Just because you’re a maid doesn’t mean you forgot how to pick a lock,” Simon smiled.

Jenny was certain she could still do that. It came so easily to her. She could almost feel the metal picks on the tumblers now. Oh how she missed that sensation. “What exactly are you offering?”

Simon smiled and looked to make sure the guards weren’t listening. “You find this woman ‘detective’,” he said with sarcasm, “and you take her for all she’s worth. You can keep the loot. It isn’t even about that. I just want her to pay for what she did. You do that for me and I’ll tell you where some of those priceless artifacts are that I stashed. I didn’t give all the loot to the middleman, so there’s a fortune just laying about in London and only I know where. I’m willing to give you a piece of that if you help me. You’ll never have to work for anyone ever again.”

“Steal from a detective?” Jenny asked. “Don’t you think that’s a bit foolish?” Jenny almost laughed at herself.

“Who would suspect you of such a thing? You’re just a simple maid, remember. You have no connection to her.”

Jenny was silent. She had no intention of stealing from Vastra again. She knew firsthand what the Silurian was capable of to those who wronged her. She had received her one and only warning. If she did what Simon asked, it would mean her death.

“Not good enough?”

“Wut?” Jenny shook herself out of her trance.

“My offer,” he said. “Not good enough?”

“It’s not that,” Jenny said shaking her head. “I’ve started to make something out of my life. I’m off the streets and safe. It may not be the most glamorous life, but I’m clean, healthy, safe, and fed. I don’t know if I can go back to the life I had.”
“With what those pieces are worth, you’ll never work again. And you’ll never be on the streets again.” Simon pushed his case. “I don’t think you understand the amount of money you’re gonna make if you take this job. You can piss it all away helping orphans and widows if you want, that always was your style; which I never understood. But you can take just one of those pieces and leave London and never look back. Spend the rest of your life on a beach somewhere. Or in the Alps. Whatever suits your fancy.”

“Why haven’t you made this offer to one of your boys?” Jenny asked.

“Children!” Simon exclaimed. “They’re fine for petty crime, but this is above them. No. Only you will do for this job.”

Jenny thought about the money. So much money. And her year was going to be up soon. Then what? Would Vastra kick her out and send her on her way? Once she had repaid her debt what was in store for her. She hadn’t really given it much thought until now. Could she steal from Vastra one more time, take the artifacts from Simon and run away somewhere even the Silurian’s sensitive tongue couldn’t find her? Simon had given her more to think about than she was prepared for.

“Well?” Simon goaded her for an answer.

“I have to think about it,” Jenny said in a hushed tone. “It would mean running away somewhere and starting over. I’d have to say goodbye to London and all my friends. I couldn’t risk getting caught. I won’t get caught.”

“You’ll have enough to start over anywhere you want to go,” Simon smiled thinking he’d almost won Jenny over. “Just get my revenge and I’ll make you rich.”

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Jenny left the station and opted to walk home. She needed to think and clear her head. Simon’s offer was tempting, but could she actually do it? There was no love between her and Vastra. But still, she had developed so much pride in her work. She thought back to the house and the condition it was in when she first arrived. It was beginning to feel like her own home, in a way. She had poured so much of herself into it. And despite Vastra’s prejudice toward “apes” she had seen the Silurian soften a bit. She had seen her vulnerable and weak. It took almost a year, but she had seen a change, towards her at least.

Had it been a year already? The realization was setting in that she would very soon have her debt repaid. What would happen then? They had not discussed this but then again, they didn’t discuss anything. She couldn’t just go back to her old life on the streets wondering where her next meal would come from. Perhaps Vastra would recommend her to another household. But she didn’t relish the idea of starting over at a new home. And despite the name calling, the hissing, and stoic attitude of her Madam, where would she find another employer who gave her a room and complete freedom to set her own schedule? Vastra treated her less like a maid and more like a housemate at times.

Vastra arrived home that night to find Jenny, in her nightdress, in the sitting room in front of a dying fire. She was perched atop the settee with her feet tucked under her, a blank stare into the distance upon her face, and a cup of tea long cold on the side table. Her long brown hair was out of its usual tight bun and fell about her shoulders and onto her chest. For a moment Vastra regarded her and Jenny was completely unaware she was being observed she was so deep in thought. Vastra turned to leave, thinking herself rude for staring, when Jenny finally noticed the movement and
snapped back to reality.

“Ma’am,” Jenny quickly called to her.

Vastra stopped and turned to face her maid. “Yes, Jenny?”

“Do you have a moment?”

“A moment for what?”

“To talk?”

“Yes,” she said as she entered the sitting room and took a seat in the chair closest to the fire. “What would you like to talk about?”

“Are you pleased with my work, Ma’am?” Jenny asked in a low tone.

“Very,” Vastra answered. “I hardly know you are here, yet my home looks magnificent.”

“Am I close to paying off my debt?”

“I believe so,” Vastra said. “I suppose you’ll be relieved to be out from under this debt, out from under this roof?”

“That’s just it, Ma’am,” Jenny began. “I am very happy to have paid my debt. I would not be happy unless and until I have repaid what I owe you. But, Ma’am,” Jenny’s words hung in her throat. “I do not want to leave.”

“But you will have paid your debt,” Vastra was confused. She did not understand why Jenny would want to spend one minute more in the service of someone like her when she could be free to make her own way.

Jenny began to cry. She wasn’t sobbing uncontrollably, but a few tears tracked down her face and fell onto her cotton gown. “I have nowhere to go, Ma’am. No family. No home. I do not wish to go back to the life I had before this. I only stole because I had to. I did what I had to do to survive. Stealing and thieving was by far a better option to me than selling my body. I doubt I would still be alive if I had done that. By allowing me to pay my debt back to you, I have seen what it is like to have a roof over my head, to have food, to be warm and safe. That is more than I have ever had before.”

Vastra understood what Jenny was saying. She admired the girl for changing her stripes, as it were. She had become a better person. Someone willing to work for what she had, not take what wasn’t hers. “Perhaps,” Vastra said, “you could find a position with another household. I would be happy to write you a letter of recommendation.”

“Thank you, Ma’am. I appreciate it, I really do,” Jenny paused, “but if it’s all the same to you. If you are happy with my work, which you said you are, would you be willing to hire me on? I would work for cheap. I will continue to work for room and board and the weekly allowance you already give me. It wouldn’t cost you anything you aren’t already paying.”

“Would you be satisfied with that arrangement?” Vastra asked.

“Oh yes, Ma’am,” Jenny smiled. “I would be very happy with that. I can’t think about working for someone else. I know this house Ma’am and I know you. I know how to do things to your liking. And if I were to leave, Ma’am, who would fetch your meals and tend to your floors and all
the lovely things in your home? And who could you ‘ire who would keep your secret.” Jenny halted her words. It was not her intention to offend her Madam. She hoped she had not. “Forgive me Ma’am if I have spoken out of turn.”

“Think nothing of it,” Vastra smiled. “You are right. I do still need a maid. Like you, I too have become accustomed to a new standard since you have been keeping my home for me.” Vastra looked around her spotless sitting room. “My home did not looked this magnificent until you began taking care of it. You have earned my trust and you respect my boundaries. I dare say I could not ask for much more from a maid.”

“So you’ll keep me on?” Jenny asked, excited.

“I suppose I will, Jenny,” Vastra actually smiled. “I think I would like that very much.”

“Thank you, Ma’am,” Jenny beamed. “Thank you very much.” She wanted to hug Vastra, but as that was quite inappropriate. She settled instead to reach out and take Vastra’s hand in her own.

In those few seconds, time stopped for the Silurian. The house around her could have crumbled but she wouldn’t have noticed. All she knew was touch and warmth.

Then, as suddenly as Jenny had touched her, she pulled away.

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The next day Jenny returned to visit Simon and tell him she could not accept his offer.

“You’re turning down a small fortune,” Simon told her.

“I know,” Jenny said. “But don’t worry, your secrets are safe with me.”

“Of that I have no doubt,” he smiled. “I know I can trust you. You always were too honest to be a thief.”

Jenny smiled at Simon and they shared a laugh.

“Now that you know where I am, perhaps you’ll come visit me more often,” Simon said. “Doesn’t look like they have any plans of letting me go for quite some time.”

“Will you retire now?” asked Jenny. “Will you pass the torch like Eli did with you?”

“No need,” he said. “The boys are still carrying on without me out there. And as soon as I get out of here I’m packing up my stash and making my way south. Maybe Italy, somewhere on the Mediterranean. Either way, my days of burgling in London are well and truly done. If they ever let me out they’ll watch me like a hawk. So if one of the boys wants to take up the reigns, then more power to him.”

Jenny just smiled and thought of Simon on a beach. He didn’t belong there.

“My offer is still good until I get out of here,” he said. “All you have to do is say the word and the loot is yours for the taking.”

“Alright, Simon,” Jenny smiled. “I’ll let you know if I change my mind.”

Jenny left the station that day and never went back. She couldn’t afford to run into Vastra at the Yard and have to explain why she was there; and she’d never betray Simon. She thought about her mentor every day and wondered if he would seek out the great female detective once he was
The rest of the week went by normally. Vastra spent her time between her office and the streets of London and Jenny spent her days toiling away in her Madam’s home or out at the market. Saturday night came and Jenny had dressed to go out. She would meet up with her friends at the pub for a few hours and then have a relaxing Sunday, which was the day she normally took as her “day off” even though there were still chores to be done.

On her way out, she passed by the sitting room to find an unusual site. Vastra sat in front of the fire, on the settee, reading a book.

“Good evenin’ Ma’am,” Jenny said.

“Good evening, Jenny,” Vastra smiled. “On your way out to meet up with your friends?”

“Yes, Ma’am.” Jenny said shyly. “I don’t usually see you out here—you’re usually in your office or out catching criminals at this hour.”

“My case load is uncommonly light at the moment,” Vastra said, putting her book aside and giving Jenny her full attention. “I thought it would be a good time to brush up on my French.” Vastra held up the book she was reading, but Jenny couldn’t read the cover.

“You ever just do anything for pleasure, Ma’am?” Jenny asked. Perhaps overstepping her place.

“What do you mean, Jenny?” she asked, looking at her maid.

“Do you ever read for fun? Like a novel, a love story, or a tale of crime and adventure?”

“No,” Vastra admitted. “I find it best to make the most of the time I have. I have learned several languages since I have come to live on the surface. I can speak and read English, French, German, Russian, and Japanese. Soon I will learn Mandarin.”

“That’s very impressive, Ma’am,” Jenny was genuinely impressed. “I can barely speak English, and I know my accent must be a fright to someone as learned as you.”

“There is no reason you cannot learn too, Jenny,” Vastra said. “If you really want to, you can learn anything you set your mind to.”

“I don’t know, Ma’am,” she said. “I think you give me too much credit.”

“Nonsense,” Vastra scoffed. “The only thing preventing you from learning, is you.”

“Maybe, Ma’am,” Jenny smiled. “I guess I’ve never had a need to do better.”

“Perhaps one day you will,” Vastra said and picked her book up and continued reading.
Honest Work

Chapter 8: Honest Work

Monday morning Jenny rose before daylight, like normal, and headed toward the stairs to get a fire going in Vastra’s office and start breakfast. To her surprise Vastra’s bedroom door stood open, her bed was made, and her fire was all but smoldering coals.

On the ground floor, she went to Vastra’s office, knocked on the French doors, but received no response. She knocked again and called to Vastra as she opened the door, “Ma’am,” but saw the room was not occupied. “That’s odd,” she said in a whisper and went to the fireplace to start a fire for her madam. “Maybe she’s in the sitting room.”

She checked the next room, no Vastra, then headed to the kitchen to start breakfast. “She must be in the greenhouse or the basement,” she thought on her way down the entry hall. This was odd for her to be up and around before sunrise unless she had arranged with Jenny the day before to wake early and attend to her breakfast.

Entering the kitchen, she was immediately halted by the presence of not one, but two stacks of money on the small table, along with a note. One stack was the usual weekly grocery and cleaning stipend, the other, Jenny had no idea. She picked up the note and read:

“Jenny, you have repaid your debt to me and you have done so with dignity and honor. You have earned a true wage. Please accept this amount as your weekly pay on top of the room and board we have previously negotiated. I will be home at dusk and I would like you to join me in my study after supper. –Vastra”

Jenny beamed with happiness. Her first honestly earned money. “What should I buy? What does Madam want with me tonight in her study?” Jenny suddenly found herself happier than she had been in a long time.

As she made herself some breakfast she took a moment to think back on the past five and a half years. She had been on her own since the spring of her fourteenth year when her mother left her no other alternative than to make her way on the streets. After that, she lived as a street urchin and petty thief, in and out of all sorts of adventures with her best friend Emma until Emma left for Liverpool. On her sixteenth birthday, Simon took her under his wing and trained her in the fine art of burglary. Under his tutelage she became one of the most capable thieves Simon had ever trained. At age eighteen she struck out on her own only to be caught by the Great Detective on her very first major solo heist. She had worked for a full year to pay off the debt. Now, just days before her twentieth birthday (12 October) she had earned her first bit of money that was truly hers.

“This calls for a trip to the market,” Jenny said aloud then quickly got ready for her day.

With renewed vigor Jenny headed out to find a perfect birthday gift for herself. She settled on some sweets at the local confectionary and a small bottle of lavender scented soap for her hair. Along with the treats, she also decided that she would save a portion of her wages each week. She didn’t know what she was saving for, but it seemed like the smart, responsible thing to do. At the moment she didn’t need anything. Vastra had bought her plenty of clothes, her room was well furnished, and her food came out of the weekly grocery stipend. So this week, almost all of her pay would be saved.

Returning from market she got back into her routine. Mondays she tackled the dusting, restocked
all the firewood in the bins about the house, and caught up on laundry from the weekend. Vastra’s
weekends were typically very busy and she often dirtied a lot of clothes out on the job. But this
Monday the laundry load was light, so she took to deep cleaning the kitchen.

Monday was also one of the days the butcher’s boy came around. She was so happy that she could
finally start giving him food again. If it came from her own money, Vastra couldn’t protest. She
had picked up eggs, bread, cheese, jam, and a tin of tea. When Tommy arrived around three Jenny
had a whole plate waiting for him.

“Thank you Ma’am,” Tommy said between bites. “I thought you said you got in trouble.”

“I did,” Jenny smiled. “But I bought this with my money, not the Madam’s, so she can’t say boo
about it.”

Tommy wiped his mouth and pushed his chair back. “I gotta go. Ma’am. More deliveries.”

“You be careful out there,” Jenny yelled as Tommy ran off.

As she cleaned up Tommy’s plate she heard the front door open and close, shortly followed by the
sound of Vastra’s French doors to her office closing. “She’s home early. Must have new cases from
the Yard.”

By five o’clock all the chores had been done and Jenny plated up Vastra’s supper and took it to her.
She knocked on the office door. “One moment,” Vastra replied from and within a few seconds
opened the door to greet Jenny. “Thank you, Jenny,” she said reaching for the tray and not allowing
Jenny access to the room. “I will take it from here.”

Jenny wrinkled her brow at Vastra’s strange behavior, but went back to the kitchen to attend to her
own supper. “Strange,” Jenny thought to herself. “I wonder what she’s doing in there that she
doesn’t want me to see.”

Jenny brushed off any thought as to what may be going on with her Madam and set about plating
her own dinner. She had made her favorite cold weather meal, a stew with potatoes, turnips,
carrots, onions, and meat. She wasn’t the best cook, but she was just fine for her own taste buds
and that’s all she had to cook for. She washed supper down with a nice cuppa and sopped up the
gravy with fresh bread. She put a kettle on to boil and went to retrieve Vastra’s plate and glass so
she could attend to dishes. The tray lay in the entrance hall, plate and glass clean of all but a bit of
blood. “Hm,” she thought, “today is full of surprises.”

Taking the tray into the kitchen she cleaned up the mess from supper and placed the leftover stew
in the icebox. She went upstairs to start a fire in Vastra’s bedroom and returned downstairs to read
for a while in the sitting room. When she got to the bottom of the stairs Vastra called to her from
inside her study. The door was open and Jenny went to the doorway. “Yes, Ma’am?” she said,
noticing Vastra standing in front of her cherry wood desk.

“Please come in, Jenny.” Jenny obeyed and entered the room, but did not take a seat as she had not
been invited to sit down. “I have a gift for you,” Vastra said. She stepped aside, and on her desk,
behind where she had stood was an ornate, wooden box about a foot long, and half a foot wide and
deep. It was made of walnut; a beautiful dark chocolate brown with almost black grain patterns. A
rose was etched upon its lid with iridescent white mother of pearl petals set into it. A white rose.

“That is beautiful,” Jenny gasped. “Ma’am,” she stammered, “I cannot accept such a gift. It looks
so expensive.”
“It is impolite to refuse a gift, is it not?” Vastra asked.

“I mean no disrespect, Ma’am,” Jenny said, blushing. “I just don’t know what I have done to deserve such a wonderful thing as this.”

“I have my reasons, Jenny,” she said. “Now please, open it.”

“Is there more inside?” Jenny asked.

“Just open it, Jenny,” Vastra insisted.

Jenny approached the box. She touched it, carefully, gliding her fingertips along its top front edge. She placed a hand on either side of the lid and lifted. It was locked. “It seems to be locked, Ma’am.” She looked at Vastra.

“Open it.” Vastra repeated.

“But, Ma’am,” Jenny said, “the key.”

“You did not need a key all those times you broke into my home a year ago,” Vastra said very matter-of-factly.

“Ma’am,” Jenny backed away, “if this is some kind of joke, it isn’t funny.”

“Joke?” Vastra was genuinely confused. “No, Jenny. This is not a joke. Is it or is it not true that you managed to come into my locked home, not once, not twice, but multiple times without a key?”

“That’s true enough, Ma’am, but,” Jenny was visibly shaken. Was today too much to hope for? Had Vastra planned her revenge for a year? Had she baited her and given her hope just to watch her break and then throw her out onto the street?

“Jenny,” Vastra said again, forcefully. The tone jolted the maid from her stupor.

“Ma’am?”

“Jenny, how did you break into my home?” Vastra asked. Her tone was matter of fact. She was not interrogating Jenny; she was simply asking a question and she wanted an answer.

“I used lock pics,” Jenny admitted. She was ashamed.

“Lock pics,” Vastra repeated. “And where are these lock pics?”

“They’re in my room,” Jenny said, weakly.

“Please retrieve them, Jenny,” Vastra instructed.

“Yes, Ma’am.” Jenny did as she was told. The walk up the stairs, to her vanity, and back to the study was excruciating. What was Vastra playing at? Why was she doing this to her? What could she possibly hope to accomplish other than tearing this poor girl down?

Returning to the study, Jenny saw that Vastra now sat behind her desk.

Tools in hand, Jenny approached the box. She untied the leather pouch, laid it on Vastra’s desk, and unrolled it. Several picks and files and tools lay there. It had been over a year since Jenny had touched these, much less used them. She looked at the box, and back to the tools. She ran her
fingertips along the tools as if to select one by psychic power, the one that spoke to her. She selected a small tool with a crooked end, and another that was heavy and straight. Kneeling on one knee to put herself eye level with the box, she inserted the crooked tool, then the straight tool beneath it.

She worked the crooked tool while applying pressure with the straight tool. In mere seconds she heard the familiar “click” and the lock had been picked. This was an effortless task in the hands of a skilled master such as Jenny. Slowly, she stood, carefully placed her tools back in the pouch, rolled it up, and tied it closed.

“Open it.” Vastra instructed.

Jenny reached a trembling hand toward the box. She had no idea what to expect. She opened the lid and inside was a piece of paper. She looked at Vastra, and the woman simply nodded to her. She reached in the box and lifted the paper. On its surface it simply read, “You really should hire a maid.” She recognized the handwriting as her own. It was the same piece of paper she had left Vastra in the hallowed out book when she stole the money. The money she had just worked a year to repay.

“Ma’am,” she stuttered, “I- I-“

Vastra raised her hand and Jenny became quiet. “Please, Jenny,” she started, “take a seat.” She motioned to the chair across from her desk. “How did you know how to use those tools?” she asked.

“I learned,” Jenny said.

“How?”

“I had a mentor. He taught me.”

“Is that all he taught you?”

“No. He taught me how to be a burglar. How to watch and study a mark. He taught me that there was more money to be made… to be stolen,” she corrected herself, “from a well-studied burglary than there was in picking pockets.”

“And that is what you did with me.” Vastra said. It was more of a statement than a question.

“Yes, Ma’am,” Jenny admitted.

“But you did not acquire your prize the first night you were here,” Vastra said. Again, it was a statement, not a question.

“No, Ma’am,” Jenny dropped her head.

“But that was alright, was it not,” Vastra said.

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Because I could not break your safe, Ma’am,” Jenny admitted.

“That’s why you left the window open,” Vastra said.
“Yes,” Jenny said. “I thought that if I made it look like you had simply caught me in the act. Caught me before I could get into the safe that you would move your money to a different location. To a less secure location. But, I also had to assume that you wouldn’t think I would know that.”

“And so when you came back, again and again, you left no sign, no evidence that you had been here other than to manipulate the safe and make it obvious you had been there, but only there. The only way I knew, in fact, that you had been searching the whole house, was thanks to my incredible sense of smell. I knew you had been back, looking, but I did not think in a million years that you would find where I had hidden my money. I knew you had riffled through my desk here, but you left no trace, other than your scent.”

“That is all correct, Ma’am.” Jenny confessed. “I never learned how to break a combination safe. I had to make you think I would crack it sooner or later. I had to get you to move your money, and I did search. I searched until I found that all but perfect hiding place.”

“And how did you find it? Was it dumb luck?”

“No Ma’am,” Jenny said. “Not to be rude, and this seems ironic now, but there was a considerable amount of dust on your bookshelves. And it was the only book that had recently been moved. I could tell by the marks in the dust. And that book in particular had been moved between the second time I was here and the last. So you see, Ma’am, me being your maid to pay back the money I stole was quite fitting.”

The irony was not lost on Vastra and she couldn’t help but smile. She knew exactly what had tipped Jenny off a year ago and she had cursed herself for being so careless. “You are very smart, Jenny Flint.” Vastra’s compliment was sincere. “You figured out a way to trick your mark to move her valuables to a less secure location. Thereby sealing her own fate.”

“Ma’am, I’m truly…”

“Jenny,” Vastra cut her off. “You have paid your debt. You have apologized and I have accepted your repayment and your apology. I am trying to show you, that you are very intelligent and you are capable of learning. Thinking back to the conversation we had just two nights ago about you learning another language. Perhaps books and languages are not your forte, Jenny Flint. Perhaps your skills lie in other areas.”

Jenny thought about what Vastra was trying to tell her.

“You showed remarkable problem solving skills getting me to move that money, and then finding where I had hidden it, and you are quite frankly an artist with those tools. You would make me a fine assistant I believe.”

“Wut?” Jenny looked surprised to say the least, “your assistant? Are you planning on breaking into people’s houses and tricking them out of their money?”

“Not typically, no,” Vastra said. “But the reason I am not on the Scotland Yard payroll, proper, and the reason I get paid as well as I do is because I possess a skill set that the typical detective does not. And I am not bound to the code of behavior that the detectives of the Yard are bound by.” She paused for a moment. “I am not unethical, Jenny, but occasionally I must act in a manner which would be considered above the law. You humans have restricted your law enforcement with rules that limit their ability to concisely and succinctly apprehend criminals. I do not have these restrictions.”
Jenny smiled widely. “What would I do?”

“You would start by reading case files in the evening, after your work is done, and learning about that. You could not discuss what you read with anyone, especially not those you spend your Saturday nights with. And you could not tell Scotland Yard that you were assisting me.”

“That sounds wonderful, Ma’am,” Jenny beamed.

“Then it’s settled.” Vastra said. “We will start with just a few nights a week when I am home. You will join me in the evenings, after supper, and we will study case files together. You will tell me what you are able to gather from the files and I will check out any leads that we discover. You will not assist me in the field. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“Oh, before I forget.” Vastra retrieved a small key strung upon a silk ribbon from her desk drawer and held it out toward Jenny. “For the lock box.”

“Thank you, Ma’am.” Jenny retired to her room with her new lock box in her arms. The key on the silk ribbon was now around her neck. She deposited a portion of her weekly wage in the box. This would begin her savings.
Jenny begins to learn what it is that Vastra does all day locked in her office.

Tuesday awoke Tuesday morning with a new found vigor. Aside from being honestly employed as Vastra’s maid, she was awfully excited to learn how to be Vastra’s assistant, although she had no idea exactly what that would entail. She set about tending to breakfast and chores like normal all while humming and almost dancing about.

Tuesday rolled into Wednesday and finally it was Thursday night before Vastra invited her into her office. After dinner Jenny cleaned up the dishes and then met Vastra in the study with a tray of tea as requested.

“You will begin by studying files of cases I have already solved,” Vastra said as Jenny poured tea. “This will allow you to become familiar with case files and the types of information contained within them.”

Jenny sat across the desk from Vastra, eager to get started.

Vastra selected a thin folder from the stack and opened it. She began to walk Jenny through the anatomy of a case file. “Every case is different,” she began. “And as a result, every case file will be different, but they will all have basic information you can use. Some will be more helpful than others. There could be eye witness testimony, interviews with suspects, photographs of the crime scene or evidence, or notes taken by the officers at the Yard both on scene and after the fact. This is what I refer to as “primary information” because it is pure facts, not derived information.”

Jenny wasn’t sure what “derived information” was, but she was too excited to begin asking questions.

Vastra retrieved another, larger, folder and sat it on her desk. “That folder,” Vastra pointed to the smaller one she took out first, “is the one I received from the Yard when they assigned me to the case. This is my folder,” she motioned toward the larger folder she had just pulled out, “this is what I created with all the primary information from the original file.”

Jenny wasn’t sure she understood. “So you make your own evidence?”

“Not evidence, Jenny. I use that primary information from the original case file and derive things like maps, lists, timelines, and other useful tools that help me to solve the case.” She began to pull sheets of paper from the larger file folder. “This case, for example, had several eye witness testimonies, but no evidence to speak of. I used the officer’s notes and the eye witness accounts and created a map of all the crime scenes and a corresponding timeline of all the incidences and it began to paint a picture of the criminal’s pattern.”
Jenny looked at all the papers but was already feeling a little overwhelmed.

“The Yard only gives me very difficult cases. Sometimes I can only solve them because of my unique ability to detect the scent of the criminal. But even then, even if I do pick up a scent, unless I have something that helps me narrow down where I search it is of no use.” Vastra remembered her very first case and how that one rogue scent stood out to her.

“I want you to look through this original file and familiarize yourself with the primary information the Yard gave me. It is very important you do not alter anything in this file in any way. Do not even alter the order of the pages. You will need to make all of your notes on another piece of paper.”

Vastra went into her desk and pulled out a pad of paper, a new empty file folder, and a pencil and handed it all to Jenny.

“After you have studied the evidence from the original file, I want you to look at the notes I have taken in this file. It is also important that you do not alter the notes I have taken. All pages are in a very specific order. Make sure my files are returned exactly how you found them.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Jenny nodded, eager to get to work.

“You may use the dining room table as a work space,” Vastra said. “This is only to be done after you have completed your maid duties for the day. And please return the files to my office when you are not working on them. I will need to return that file to the Yard on Monday. After that I shall give you another case to look at. For now, just get familiar with how to process information.”

“Yes, Ma’am.” Jenny scooped up the folders and headed for the door.

“And, Jenny,” Vastra said just as Jenny was about to close the door. “I have every faith in you.”

Jenny was a model student and poured herself into her new task. She was very impressed with all the notes, maps, and lists Vastra had created from the meager evidence in the original folder. Before this, she had no idea what went into detective work, or what it was that Vastra did all day in her office with the doors and drapes shut; but she was gaining an appreciation now, for sure.

Each night after supper she eagerly retrieved three folders from Vastra: a file from the Yard, Vastra’s corresponding file, and now her own file. She would only have two to three nights at most to review the file from the Yard before Vastra had to return it. And whether it was for good or bad, Vastra’s case load was heavy at the moment. Jenny decided that the cold weather and impending winter must bring out the desperation in men. Vastra was always working on some unusual case or another. And now the Yard had even started giving her simpler cases just to get them solved quickly the crime rate was rising so.

The steady supply of cases gave Jenny something to do as October rolled into November and she remained awake on the cold nights Vastra patrolled the streets in search of clues and criminals. Like last winter, she would be prepared with hot water so that Vastra could soak in the tub to warm herself and avoid sickness or death from hypothermia. Jenny hated that the cold months brought a spike in cases; she worried about Vastra out in the elements.

By the end of November Vastra had already had two close calls with hypothermia as it was unusually cold and snow had begun to fall early. “Ma’am, you have to be more careful,” Jenny said as she assisted Vastra to the sitting room settee in front of the fire. Her arm around the Silurian’s waist and Vastra’s arm around her shoulders.

This year Vastra welcomed the assistance, unlike last winter when she protested and hissed at the
thought of accepting help from an ape. Jenny’s body heat felt warmer than the fire or the bath, though the Silurian knew that was a logical impossibility. Still, she couldn’t help but think all she needed to recover was some warm tea in front of the fire with Jenny beside her. But as quickly as the thought developed in her head she dismissed it as foolishness and waited while Jenny drew her bath.

Life for the two women had fallen once again into a routine and by mid-December Jenny had increased the firewood supply, upped the butcher order, and become proficient with the case files. She wasn’t as apt as Vastra, neither of them expected as much, but she did show increasing potential.

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Jenny was tidying up in the sitting room and making her way toward the kitchen when Vastra surprised her with a most unexpected request.

“Jenny,” Vastra called to her from inside her office.

“Yes, Ma’am?” Jenny opened the French doors and peered in.

“Yes, Ma’am?” Jenny opened the French doors and peered in.

“Please set two places at the table for tonight’s supper.”

This was the first time Vastra had told Jenny to set places at the table. Naturally, Jenny had to clarify a few things. “When you say ‘set two places at the table’ you mean the table in the dining room?”

“Yes, Jenny. To what other table would I be referring?”

“Right.” Jenny didn’t leave, but rather stayed in the doorway and looked as if she wanted to speak again, but didn’t.

“Yes? Jenny.” Vastra said, not looking up from her work, but acknowledging that Jenny was still there.

“Are you expecting company for supper, Ma’am?” Jenny asked. “Cause if you are I’ll need to go to market.”

“No, Jenny,” Vastra said, still not looking up from her files, “you and I will be dinning together tonight.”

Jenny smiled then quickly straightened her expression. “Right, Ma’am.” You could almost see the cogs turning in Jenny’s mind as she remained in the doorway.

“Is there something else, Jenny?” Vastra asked. This time she put the page down that she had been studying to look at the brunette standing in the doorway.

“Its jus’ that,” Jenny started, a little unsure, “would you like to sit at the head of the table, Ma’am?” And then before Vastra could answer, “And where should I sit? I’m afraid I don’t know the etiquette for this.”

Vastra was visibly exasperated, “Does it matter, Jenny? Are the ape protocols for dinning so strict that you cannot simply place two settings somewhere at the table and everything be in order?”

Jenny was a little taken aback at Vastra’s tone, but this was new territory for them and she didn’t want to assume anything. “Well, Ma’am,” she started, “it isn’t customary at all for the staff to dine
with the lady of the house, so I do not think there is a…” she tried to remember the word Vastra had used, “‘protocol’ for such a table arrangement.”

Vastra took a breath and focused to calm her tone. “I’m sure whatever you decide will be fine, Jenny. I believe we can safely say that this is no ordinary human household and as such we should not worry about binding ourselves to traditional customs and standards.” She assumed this would settle any remaining fears or apprehensions Jenny had about the event, yet Jenny still lingered in the doorway.

“Now, if you will please excuse yourself, I have work to do. I trust whatever decisions you make will be perfectly agreeable.” She resumed her study of the papers and notes and Jenny turned and headed towards the kitchen.

This was the first time the table had been used for dining since Vastra bought it shortly after moving in. Jenny had discovered, over the past year, that a lot of the furnishings Vastra owned were just for show and served no practical purpose for the Silurian. She rarely sat in the plush spoon back chairs or chaise in the sitting room unless she was warming up from a night out. She never used the fancy china in the cabinet. And all the grandfather clocks were just there, Vastra didn’t even appreciate them. Apparently, when Vastra decided to fit into Victorian London society, she had her home stocked with the best things she could afford in order to live up to certain class standards and expectations. This explained why, when Jenny moved in, the areas that would be seen by visitors were lush but the scullery was bare.

Ultimately, Jenny decided to place Vastra at the head of table on the end closest to the kitchen. She then set her place to Vastra’s left, making it easy for her to return to the kitchen if need be during the course of the meal.

Jenny set the table, plated the food, poured the beverages, and quickly ran upstairs to change from her maid uniform into a dress. On her way back down stairs she stopped by Vastra’s. “Supper’s ready Ma’am,” she said standing in the office door.

“Thank you, Jenny. I shall…” Vastra looked up and was taken aback at the sight of her maid. Jenny had let her hair down from its usual bun then pulled back the sides into a barrette. She was in a lovely dress Vastra hadn’t seen before and she seemed to glow with happiness. For a moment Vastra was speechless and she wondered what was happening. Then her voice returned and she was able to finish her sentence. “I shall be there in a moment.”

Vastra was well read on human customs and etiquette. And those of which she was forced to adhere to, like Victorian dress code, she had mastered. But others, which she never practiced in public, were less refined, like eating with utensils. However, Jenny was impressed with Vastra’s use of silverware and her table manners in general. She doubted this was how she ate her raw meat in the privacy of her study, but at the table with Jenny she was surprisingly lady like. Jenny on the other hand was a bit less lady like on top of being somewhat nervous.

They ate in silence until finally Vastra spoke up.

“Jenny,” Vastra said, almost startling poor nervous Jenny right out of her seat. “I have a new case. I would like for you to review it and see if you can offer any insight.”

“A new case? You mean one you haven’t solved yet?” Jenny asked, with a bit too much food in her mouth. She couldn’t contain her excitement. “Wut’s it about?”

Vastra cast her a sharp glance but stopped short of correcting her manners. “There have been several children reported missing over the last month. The Yard does not prioritize children, at least
not these children, so I have volunteered to take on this case for free.”

“Wut do you mean by ‘these children’?” Jenny asked.

“Poor, orphans, homeless,” Vastra listed as fact. “Children who are less fortunate. Children who do not have the luxury of having parents with money.”

Jenny had once been one of “those children” and she knew all too well the myriad of ill fortunes that befell the children of the street. “I would be happy to help, Ma’am. I hope I’m of some use.” Jenny was quiet and the mood had noticeably grown more somber. “Ma’am,” she said quietly, “why did you take this case for free?”

Vastra sat her knife and fork on her plate and blotted some blood from her reptilian lips, “Jenny, I did not think it was possible to hate humans more than I did the day I was awoken from hibernation to find my sisters slaughtered and myself in a stinking cesspool of what passes as civilization. Then, one day, one of the hairless apes broke into my home and robbed me blind after I had spent so many years trying to play nice and fit into their wretched society.”

Jenny had directed her gaze to her plate, but she was no longer sad, she was angry. Hadn’t they settled this?

“Then, Jenny, a most curious thing happened. I got to know that wretched hairless ape, and I saw that some humans are quite,” she searched for the word, “marvelous creatures.”

Jenny still looked hurt and angry and would not lift her eyes from her plate.

“Jenny,” Vastra said softly and reached out to touch her maid’s hand. When her scaled fingers made contact with Jenny’s warm skin, Jenny flinched, so Vastra pulled her hand back a few inches and rested it on the table. “Jenny, I’ve never asked about your childhood or your life on the streets. It’s not my business and I am sure it is nothing you care to share with me. But should you ever feel the need to talk to someone I am here.”

Jenny did not move or look up.

“I was so angry with you when you broke into my home. I vowed to take great joy in killing you and tasting your blood. I was blind with hate. And I cursed the Doctor for robbing me of that victory the night I found you. But the next day, when you showed up at my home, I could tell that you were simply doing what you had to do to survive. You were no criminal mastermind with a dark heart. You were a scared girl making her way the best she could or at least the best way she could and still maintain her dignity.” Vastra paused and pulled her hand back to her lap.

Jenny’s stare was still fixed to her plate.

“I have watched you, Jenny Flint. I have watched you this past year as you have worked and paid off your debt. I have watched you over the past weeks since I have released you of that debt and you have earned an honest wage. I’ve seen you give back. I’ve seen what you give to the homeless children in the streets. You even told me the day you came here that you had given most of the money away that you stole from me. You are a good person, Jenny. I would do well to be more like you. That’s why I took this case.”

Jenny finally looked up at Vastra. She didn’t look angry any more. She spoke very clearly, “When I finally found that stack of money in your office, I was about the ‘appest I ‘ad ever been. I couldn’t wait to spend it. I couldn’t wait to ‘elp others with it. I thought I’d never run out of money. But then, almost as fast as it took me to scoop it out of that hollowed out book and put it in my knapsack, it was gone. Then you found me; and I thought I was dead. And I would have deserved it, I suppose. But then you took me in and I was so grateful. I didn’t want any part of that life. I was
forced into it. And you’re right. I don’t want to talk about it, not with you, not with anybody. I never have. But I will tell you that my family turned their backs on me when I was fourteen and I have been on my own ever since.”

“And it took you, someone who isn’t even human, to see more in me than just a way to earn them money. And I am grateful. I thank you for all you’ve done for me. And I thank you for letting me help you with this case.” She paused for a moment, but Vastra could tell she had more to say, so she didn’t interrupt her. “If it’s all the same to you, Ma’am. I’ve worked off my debt; can we never speak of me robbing you ever again?”

Vastra smiled. “Never again.”

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“This case is not predicated on a single event, but rather is a collection of testimony given by citizens to the police about the notice that children are coming up missing.” Vastra began as she spread the papers across her desk. “There are no witnesses to abduction nor have any bodies been found. The children simply are not seen when expected or are generally noticed as missing.”

“Street kids come up missing all the time and no one cares,” Jenny said. “Why have these been noticed?”

“So far there have been over thirty children reported missing,” Vastra said, “all within a matter of a few weeks. About one per day. And my guess is there are even more missing that have not been reported. But given the transient nature of the victims, it is hard to pin down exactly how many are missing at a time.”

“So Scotland Yard is simply choosing to ignore all this?” Jenny asked. “No big surprise there. Street kids are throwaway. If they disappear then it’s kinda like ‘elping ‘em out. A lot of us, them I mean, don’t exactly obey the laws.” She let out a small giggle. “I can’t tell you ‘ow many times I gave a bobby the slip after nickin’ a bit of food.”

Vastra smiled as Jenny seemed to reminisce on some happier memories. “Can you think of why children on the street are taken? What motive someone would have to do this?”

“Sure,” Jenny said, “there’s lots o’ reasons. Kids got nicked all the time to work in all sorts of horrible jobs. Some people pay good money to do unmentionable things to children. That was the fear when I was on the street. But usually they go for the really young ones. How old are these kids what are coming up missing?”

“All ages, I’m afraid,” Vastra said. She pulled out a piece of paper where she had condensed notes from testimonies. She had made a list of all the children along with their gender, approximate age, and some sort of identifier if no name was given.

Jenny took the page and studied it carefully. “Well that don’t hardly narrow things down, does it?”

“No,” Vastra replied, “but it also helps to eliminate some things. If it were only boys or only girls that would tell us something. Or if it was only the very young or the very small in stature that too may tell us something else. But by all accounts, its boys and girls ranging in ages from five to sixteen.”

Jenny looked at all the work Vastra had already done. The list was quite extensive with personal information correlated to each victim. There was a map with areas marked with last known whereabouts of victims as well as locations the victims were reported to frequent. Jenny had begun
to understand what it was that Vastra did for all those hours in her study. There was more prep work than Jenny had ever imagined, and here was Vastra, doing all of this on this case for free.

“Ma’am,” she said quietly and reached across the desk and put her hand on Vastra’s, “thank you for doing this.”

Vastra regarded Jenny’s warm hand on hers. At first the words stuck in her throat, but the she was able to speak, “You are very welcome, Jenny.”

Jenny picked up the map that Vastra had made and studied it carefully. “I’m very familiar with this area, Ma’am. Maybe I could go down there tomorrow and look around. Maybe I could talk to a few people.”

“I’m not sure that is the best idea, Jenny,” Vastra said. “The deal was you would help me here, at home, and leave the field work to me. It can be quite dangerous out there.”

“Dangerous?” Jenny scoffed. “I lived on those streets for years, Ma’am. No need to tell me about ‘ow dangerous they are. Besides, I know a lot of people in that area. Maybe someone will talk to me.”

Vastra thought a moment before speaking. “Perhaps you are right, Jenny. You do know the area and you do already have a rapport with some of the locals.”

“I don’t know what a ‘re-pore’ is, Ma’am,” Jenny admitted, “but they’re more likely to talk to one of their own than some high society lady in a full dress, fancy hooded cape, and veil.” She looked at Vastra for approval. “No offense,” she quickly added.

“My dear,” Vastra said, “when you are right, you are right.” Jenny got visibly excited. “But,” Vastra quickly added, “only during the day, and only when I am close by.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

Vastra looked at the grandfather clock, it was almost ten p.m. “I am going to turn in for the evening. Don’t stay up too late. You’ll have a full day tomorrow.”

“Let me go refresh your fire in your room, Ma’am,” Jenny said.

“That is quite alright, Jenny,” Vastra put up a hand to stop her. “I can manage. Just be sure to get enough sleep tonight.”

“Good night, Ma’am.”

It was midnight and Jenny could barely keep her eyes open, yet she wanted to look over everything in the file again and again. Finally though, the need for sleep overtook the anxious detective and she reluctantly headed for bed. She stopped at Vastra’s door which was cracked open ever so slightly. She could hear the gentle sound of her madam’s slumbered breathing. Opening the door slowly, she tip-toed over to the hearth and placed two logs on the fire. Arriving in her own room, she stoked the fire and quickly fell into bed.

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Five a.m. came early and Jenny quickly dressed and headed down stairs to warm breakfast for Vastra and cook something for herself. As Jenny hummed and prepared food, Vastra entered the kitchen and took a seat at the small kitchen table.
“Mornin’ Ma’am,” Jenny said, surprised by Vastra’s new choice of morning seating. “Ev’ry thin’ a’right?”

“Quite,” Vastra said. “I thought we could have breakfast together.” Vastra smiled at Jenny.

“That sounds lovely, Ma’am,” Jenny smiled and brought plates of food followed by cups of tea and a cup of warm blood for Vastra.

“Will you have time to go to East End and speak with the witnesses today?” Vastra asked.

“Oh yes, Ma’am,” Jenny said excitedly. “Whenever you are ready, I can work my schedule ‘round.”

“I have case files to look through this morning; but, I’ll be ready to go shortly after you have your lunch.” Vastra cut through the beef liver and sipped at her glass of warmed blood.

“Very well, Ma’am,” Jenny smiled. “I’ll have most of me chores done by then and I’ll finish up the rest this evening after dinner if need be.”

The morning went quickly for Jenny as she rushed to get all the fireplaces cleaned and restocked, the floors swept, and the shelves dusted. She had a hurried lunch of bread, cheese, and tea; things she could eat while working. By noon bells she was dressed and ready to hit the streets with Vastra.

Jenny hailed a cab and the two ladies set out for the East End. Jenny was fidgety and she chewed at her bottom lip.

Vastra noticed that Jenny was uncomfortable, but she was not proficient with reading the subtle body language or facial expressions of humans. “What is the matter, Jenny?” Vastra asked point blank.

“Nothing.” Jenny stopped chewing on her lip and calmed herself. “I’m just excited. And I’m a bit nervous. But mostly I don’t want to disappoint you.”

“Why ever do you believe you would disappoint me?” Vastra asked, genuinely shocked.

“What if I’m not able to get any new information?” Jenny asks.

“Will you give your best effort?” Vastra asked.

“Yes, of course,” Jenny said, puzzled.

“Then I shall not be disappointed.”

Jenny smiled. She loved how logical Vastra was. She liked that as long as she did her best, she wouldn’t disappoint Vastra no matter what the outcome.

They arrived in East End and exited the cab. “I will be nearby, within sight of you at all times. I insist upon that,” Vastra stated. “I will not interfere. Do you know what questions you are going to ask?”

“I jus’ assumed I’d know what to ask when I started askin’,” Jenny responded.

“That is an odd plan.” Vastra said.

“Oi! I’ve never done this before. I’m just askin’ if they’ve seen anythin’ or heard anythin’ that’s
all. It really don’t seem that hard.”

“Very well. I will be nearby if needed.” Vastra reassured her.

Jenny spent three hours talking to some of her old connections and acquaintances about the missing children. She had taken the map with her along with a pad of paper and a pencil for taking notes. But after hours of asking questions and catching up with old friends it didn’t seem she was any closer to solving the case.

“What did you find out?” Vastra asked once they were safely in the cab and headed home.

“Not much else,” Jenny seemed deflated. “They were happy that someone was looking into it, although they doubted that I could really do anything about it. I didn’t tell them I was working with you. I don’t know why, it just seemed like the right choice.”

“Always trust your instincts,” Vastra said.

Jenny found the advice odd. Vastra was usually so logical and calculated. Trusting one’s gut seemed so emotional. None the less, she took the advice to heart. “They all said that they had noticed children missing. Some even reported to the patrolmen, but I don’t remember their testimony in the case file; and I read them all three times. One thing for sure, none of them think the Yard is doing anythin’ to help. Some guess they are behind it. But I find that hard to believe.”

“Yes,” Vastra was thinking and a little distracted. “I see no reason why the Yard would cover up these claims. They do not care, that is obvious, but I see no reason to suspect they are involved.”

They were silent the remainder of the ride home, each thinking about the case.

Arriving back, Vastra quickly went upstairs to change. She returned to the main floor in an outfit Jenny had seen her wear several times. The legs were large and resembled a cross between a skirt and pants. The shirt was white and wrapped around Vastra’s torso and was held in place by a tied belt. And like every other time when Vastra showed up downstairs dressed like this, she disappeared into the basement.

Jenny returned to the casefile and tried to make sense of it all one more time. She added the new eye witness testimonies to her file and added the new missing children to the list that Vastra had begun. The total was now at forty-three missing. And Jenny felt the number would only rise with more investigating.

“Jenny,” Vastra said for the fourth time. “Jenny, are you listening?”

“Wut?” Jenny stammered. “Sorry Ma’am. I was trying to find something. I think I may have a clue.”


“One of the women I talked to today mentioned how foggy it had been lately. Said when she heard a commotion and went to check it out she couldn’t really see anything for the fog. And I remember now that there was other eye witness accounts that also mentioned the fog.”

“Yes,” Vastra said. “But there’s almost always fog in that part of town these days. Nasty pollution from your primitive industries. Not like Silurian technology.”

“That may be, but the fact remains that it may well be a clue,” Jenny insisted.
“Perhaps,” Vastra said. “How do you suppose it fits in with the kidnappings?”

“I don’ know,” Jenny admitted. “Maybe just usin’ it as cover so it’s harder to be seen or identified.”

“That does make sense,” Vastra admitted. “Problem is, like I said, it is foggy more often than not the closer you get to the industrial parts of London. And that is where all of these kidnappings are being reported. This knowledge will do little to narrow down our search I am afraid.”

Jenny hung her head. She was so sure she had that she had discovered something significant. “I suppose yur right.”

“Now, I am simply famished,” Vastra said. “Please have the table set and supper prepared in half an hour.”

“Yes Ma’am,” Jenny said and packed the casefile up and returned it to Vastra’s office. She then prepared supper for them both and set the table in the dining room.

They ate in silence. Vastra seemed particularly ravenous at the table, more than once almost forgetting her manners and tearing into her meat with her bare hands.

“Why are you so hungry, Ma’am,” Jenny asked as Vastra began on her second helping of raw meat. “Wut is it that you do down there in that basement with that funny get-up you wear?” The basement and the green house were two areas Jenny was forbidden from entering. She had seen the inside of the greenhouse, but she had never set foot inside or laid eyes on the basement.

“The basement is where I practice with my katana and also hand to hand combat,” Vastra said, placing her knife and fork on her plate and dabbing a bit of blood from her lips.

“How do you practice fighting if there’s no one down there to fight with?” Jenny asked.

“There are ways. Techniques. It’s hard to explain.” Vastra was clearly not willing to talk about this with Jenny.

“I want to go back tomorrow and talk to some more people about the kidnappings,” Jenny said. “I think I’d like to see if more people noticed the fog.”

“Very well, Jenny,” Vastra agreed. “But I really am afraid that even if all the kidnappings are correlated to the presence of fog it will still help us very little in solving who is behind them, much less why.”

“Yes,” Jenny said, “but it’s a start.”

The next day the ladies headed out to the industrial park and the slums surrounding them. Jenny wasn’t as nervous today, but she was more determined. She wanted this case solved and she wanted the children found safe. But she knew the possibility of either was unlikely.

Jenny was interviewing the mother of a small boy who had come up missing. “He was a climbing boy,” the woman said. “Always going out to find work with whoever needed him that day. He knew all the chimney sweeps, he did, and he was on good terms with ‘em. They liked him ‘cause he wus small and could fit in the chimneys better. And he was quick.”

“On the day he come up missin’,” Jenny started, “wus it foggy?”

The woman chuckled. “Always foggy down here, Love.” She made a sweeping motion with her arm as if to show Jenny all of East End.
“I see.” Jenny was feeling defeated again about the connection with the fog. “Wus there anythin’ else you can remember about that day? Anythin’ out of the ordinary?”

“Other than my boy not coming home? No.” She started to weep. “Who would’ve taken ‘im?” she sobbed. “He’s such a good boy.”

“I don’t know, Ma’am,” Jenny tried to comfort the sobbing woman by rubbing her shoulder. “But I’m gonna do everythin’ I can to find out.”

“He’s so sick,” the woman spoke between sobs. “I’m scared he’s going to catch his death of cold unless he’s found.”

“Sick?” Jenny perked up. “What’s wrong with ‘im?”

“He’s got the cough,” the woman looked at Jenny. “You know the one. It’s terrible. He needs to be home by the fire keepin’ warm.”

“Yes ma’am,” Jenny said. “Jus’ stay brave.”

Jenny rushed to Vastra to share the new bit of information. “She said her son was sick, had a nasty cough. You don’t suppose he just up and died from it do you?”

Vastra thought for a moment. “That is certainly a possibility, although you would think if that were the case someone would have found his body. What else did she tell you?”

“She said he was a climbing boy. He took jobs from all the local chimney sweeps. He’s small and quick and all the sweeps know ‘im.”

“Did she say who he worked with the day he did not return home?” Vasta asked.

“No,” Jenny shook her head. “She said he knew all the sweeps and just went out to find out who needed ‘im that day and got work. You don’t suppose one of them took ‘im?”

“Again, it is certainly a possibility, but also unlikely.” Vastra was getting frustrated. “I can see why the Yard had no time for this.”

Jenny was instantly hurt. “Then why don’t you just drop it too, then. I’ll do this on my own.”

“Jenny, I,” Vastra reached out to Jenny, then pulled away. “Jenny, I am sorry. I did not mean that. I just meant this is a very difficult case.”

“I know what you meant,” Jenny said angrily. “This is a difficult case and it’s only poor street kids so what’s it matter.”

“Jenny.” Vastra tried to say something to comfort her maid, but in the end, Jenny was right. They were just street kids. And chances are most would die before ever reaching adulthood. But still, Vastra had taken the case and she would see it through. “Jenny, this case has as much of my attention as any other. I will find out what happened to the children. We will figure this out.”

Jenny spent a few more hours interviewing more of her old contacts. She ran into a few blokes from Simon’s gang, but she was very careful not to mention Vastra.

“Why you care about this then?” the boy from Simon’s gang asked.

“Oi! Why shouldn’t I? And you should too.” Jenny scolded the boy. “I was one of these kids once, and you still are. If you came up missin’ wouldn’t you want someone lookin’ for you?”
“I suppose,” he said. “But fat lot of luck anyone’s havin’. The Yard isn’t even looking, they don’t care. I looked for a boy I used to run with a bit. But they’re just nowhere to be found. I gave up after a few days. No one sees nothin’.”

“Wut boy?” Jenny asked. “Tell me about this boy. Was he sick?”

“Why’d you ask that?” he asked. “And no. Not sick, but he was lame.”

“Lame? How you mean?” Jenny asked.

“He ‘ad a bum leg. Said it’d been like that his whole life. He couldn’t do a lot of burglarin’ but we could scam anyone out of their coin with the act we set up.”

Jenny’s mind flooded of memories of her and Emma. Oh the scams they would carry on with.

“Oi, Jenny,” the boy woke her out of her trance.

“Right.” Jenny shook her head. “I’ll be around, askin’ ‘bout the missing kids. Spread the word and if anyone sees or knows anytin’ tell them to look for me.”

“Where can we find you?” the boy asked. “You don’t hang around here no more.”

“I’ll jus’ be around.”

With that Jenny walked away and was careful not to head straight to Vastra. She made eye contact with her employer and took a turn toward the market. In a few minutes a carriage pulled up alongside the brunette and she got inside.

“Anything new,” Vastra asked.

“No.” Jenny said, then quickly corrected herself. “Actually, yes. Maybe. I was talking with a bloke I used to run with. He said a friend of his came up missing and he looked for him for a few days and then gave up. Said this friend of his had a bum leg. Had it forever. Not much, but what if the kids being taken are all sick or injured in some way. Easy targets.”

“Yes, but even so, for what purpose?” Vastra was at a loss. “Until we can figure out why they were taken we will not be any closer to finding them I am afraid.”

“Seems like a circle,” Jenny said. “Can’t find them unless we know why, won’t know why unless we find them.”

“I am afraid that is how all cases start out, Jenny.” Vastra’s words offered little comfort. “We will try again tomorrow.”

The days stretched to weeks and still they were no closer to finding the missing children or figuring out who had taken them or why. There were a few other missing kids who also had illnesses or physical maladies, but as far as they could tell, this wasn’t consistent with all the known victims.

Vastra had to concentrate more of her time on her other cases; the ones Scotland Yard were paying her to solve. So Jenny had taken to questioning folks on her own. Vastra had not agreed to this, but also knew she could not stop Jenny.

Jenny was out again, speaking with whomever would answer questions. But as usual, information was slow coming and now she wondered if some people were just making up stories. She had made the mistake of offering a farthing to anyone with information and word was starting to
spread.

Suddenly, there was a commotion down the street. A large crowd had gathered and Jenny headed that way.

She got to the crowd and fought her way to the middle of the mob to see a dirty little boy standing bewildered and lost. “I can’t find my Mummy,” he said in a dazed voice.

The crowd began to chatter and their voices swelled. “That’s little Billy, the climbing boy,” one person said. “I thought he was dead,” another voice said. “No, just missing,” another chimed in.

Jenny knelt in front of the little boy. “’ello Billy,” she said softly, “my name’s Jenny. I know your mum, I can take you to her if you’d like.”

“Yes ma’am.”

Jenny picked up the boy and carried him on her front while he clung to her for security. She carried him away from the mumbling and murmuring of the crowd, through the maze of slums to his home. Knocking on the door, Jenny tried to prepare herself for what was about to happen.

The woman opened the door and immediately fell to her knees crying.

“Go to your mum then,” Jenny told the boy as she put him down. He did as he was told and went to his mother and wrapped his arms around her as she wept.

The woman came to her senses and scooped up the boy in her arms. “How did you find him?” She asked Jenny holding onto her son like she’d never let him go.

“I didn’t, Ma’am,” Jenny said. “He jus’ showed up.” Jenny hesitated but knew what she had to do. “Ma’am, if it’s alright with you, I should ask Billy some questions. See what he remembers.”

The woman hugged her boy tighter. “He’s been through enough. He’s home now. He just needs to warm up and have some food.”

Jenny looked at the small frame of the woman, her sunken cheeks, and thin hair. She knew these people didn’t have a lot of anything. That’s why boys Billy’s age worked in dangerous jobs just to bring home a few copper a week. “I’ll buy you food,” Jenny burst out. “I’ll go myself, right now. I’ll buy you food and some firewood and after you get Billy all cleaned up I’ll just ask him a few questions.” Jenny pleaded with her eyes. “Just a few questions, Ma’am. It could save the other children. And we can get whoever did this to the authorities.”

The woman began to cry. “A’right.” She agreed. “You go get some food and you can ask him just a few questions.”

“Yes ma’am.”

Jenny was back within half an hour. She had paid a boy to carry back a bundle of firewood for her while she carried two bags of food.

It was an hour later by the time Billy had been bathed and fed and his mother felt that he was fit to talk to Jenny. He was still dazed, but his color was returning and he was beginning to seem like he knew where he was.

Jenny sat beside the boy on the ratty old sofa that she was sure doubled as their bed. “Billy,” Jenny started, “do you know where you’ve been?”
Billy just slowly shook his head no.

“Do you remember anything about where you were?”

Again, the boy simply shook his head no.

“Do you remember anyone being with you?”

Still he only slowly shook his head no.

Jenny sighed and smiled at the boy. He had been through a lot, that’s for sure. She had to rethink her questions. These were too general leaving way too much open to the boy. She decided to narrow her questions to single topics and see if she could get anywhere.

“Billy,” she began again. “What did it smell like, where you were?”

For the first time Billy made eye contact with Jenny. “Sweet,” he whispered. Then he diverted his eyes once again.

Jenny looked at the boy’s mom who was beginning to weep again. “Sweet,” Jenny repeated. “Like a bakery? Or a confectionary?” she asked.

Billy didn’t answer or return his gaze to look at her. He coughed and Jenny could hear the rattling in his lungs.

She thought of another question. “Billy,” Jenny said softly. “Was it hot or cold where you were?”

“Cold,” Billy said without looking up.

“Very good, Billy,” Jenny encouraged the boy. “Was it light or dark?”

Billy looked up at Jenny. “It was bright. Very bright.” He held his gaze this time. He was beginning to look less disoriented, but still not completely well.

“Good,” Jenny smiled. “And were there other boys there? Girls? Were there other children?”

Billy just stared. “It was so bright,” he finally mumbled.

“I think that’s enough,” Billy’s mom finally said. “He don’t know nothin’. Look at ‘im, he’s barely able to speak.”

Billy hung his head again and just sat quietly.

Jenny stood up; her welcome now worn out. “Thank you for letting me speak with him,” Jenny said as she walked to the door.

“Thank you for the food,” Billy’s mother said. “I hope the other children make it home safely. I really do. But now I have to take care of my Billy.”

“I understand,” Jenny smiled. “May I check on him tomorrow?”

“I suppose that’d be alright,” she said. “Maybe you could bring some more food?”

“Of course.” Jenny smiled and let herself out. She couldn’t wait to tell Vastra about this. It was truly a turning point in the investigation.
Arriving home, Jenny couldn’t contain her excitement and burst into Vastra’s office.

“Jenny!” Vastra protested the sudden interruption of her work.

“Sorry, Ma’am,” Jenny said with a smile on her face. “But one of the missing children has been found. Billy, the climbing boy. We spoke with his mother weeks ago. He was the one with the cough.”


“He just wandered up,” Jenny explained. “He wandered up, confused and disoriented, and I took him to his mum.”

“Were you able to speak to the boy?” Vastra asked, now giving Jenny her undivided attention.

“Yes,” Jenny smiled. “After I agreed to buy them food and firewood his mum allowed me to ask him a few questions.”

“What did you ask? And what did he answer?” Vastra had now closed up the file she had been working on and focused fully on Jenny.

“First I just asked if he knew where he had been taken, but he just shook his head no. Then I asked if he could tell me anything about where he had been. Again, he wasn’t able to answer. I asked if there were any other children there with him, and again he didn’t say anything.” Jenny was retelling the events to Vastra as best she could without taking too much time.

“Then I decided I had to be more specific. So I asked him what it smelled like where he was.”

Vastra looked at Jenny with a puzzled look on her face. “Why did you ask him that?”

“He smelled strange,” Jenny said. “Not like chimney soot, like I’d expect. And not like someone who hadn’t bathed in weeks. But something different. I couldn’t really make it out. There was just something there besides what you would expect a missing boy to smell like.”

“Well,” Vastra prompted Jenny, “what did he say?”

“Sweet,” Jenny told Vastra. “He said it smelled sweet. I asked if it was like a bakery or a confectionary, but he didn’t respond.”

“What then?” Vastra asked.

“Then I asked him if it was hot or cold where he was. I figured if he was being held in a bakery it might be hot, what with the ovens. But he said it was cold.”

“Well it is January,” Vastra said. “It is very cold outside.”

“Yes, but I don’t think he was out in the cold,” Jenny said.

“Why is that?”

“He also said it was very bright. When I asked if there were other children there, he just said it was so bright. Maybe he couldn’t see.”

“This is very odd,” Vastra finally said. “I should go where he showed up and see if I can follow his scent trail back. What did you say he smelled like?”
“Here,” Jenny said taking off her cape and handing it to Vastra. “I carried him to his mum. His scent should still be fresh on there.”

Vastra pulled the cape to her face for examination. She took in a large draw of air and let it fill her mouth and surround her tongue. The scent of Jenny was overwhelming and made Vastra’s head spin momentarily. She had to refocus and do this correctly.

Laying the cape on her desk, Vastra leaned in and snaked out her long Silurian tongue to take in all the scents on the wool. She could still smell Jenny, of course, but she was beginning to differentiate other scents as well. She concentrated to pull them apart so she could focus on one at a time.

Jenny watched in amazement. She had seen Vastra’s tongue only one other time before now. And it was over a year ago in that alley with Vastra’s hand around her throat and her back pressed up against a brick wall. She knew Vastra relied on scent to solve tough cases, but she had never seen the Silurian in action. She had also not been fully aware that it was her tongue that gave her that superior sense of smell. Humans smelled with their nose after all.

After several minutes Vastra straightened up and took in a breath of fresh air. “I think I have it.” She said very matter-of-factly and picked up the cape to hand to Jenny.

Jenny stood still, not reaching for the cape at first, then coming to her senses. “Sorry,” she apologized. “When would you like to go back to where he showed up?”

“Right away while I still have the scent fresh on my tongue.” Vastra paused and noticed the time. “But until its dark I’m afraid I won’t be able to search like I need to. Perhaps we can have an early supper and head out at dusk.”

“You’re going to let me search with you?” Jenny asked, almost gleeful.

“Certainly not,” Vastra corrected her. “I do, however, need you to show me exactly where he showed up.”

“Right,” Jenny said, deflated. “I’ll have supper ready early then.” She bundled the cape in her arms as she turned to leave.

“Jenny,” Vastra said, catching her before leaving the office. “You did very well today. Asking those questions was quite brilliant.”

Jenny smiled wide and turned to face Vastra. “Thank you ma’am. I hope we can figure this all out.”

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The two women walked back to where the crowd had gathered earlier. Everyone was gone now of course.

“Here’s where he was standing when I saw ‘im,” Jenny said. “Then I picked ‘im up and carried ‘im to his mum.”

Vastra looked around and noticed the alley nearby. “He could have come from that direction and no one would have seen him until he was in the middle of the street. That is likely what happened.”

They walked into the alley and Vastra put Jenny’s glove to her mouth and breathed in the scent. It wasn’t as strong as the scent on her cape, but a glove was portable. She then lifted her veil and
snaked her tongue out looking for the faint scent of the boy. She tried again and again, walking further and further down the alley with each attempt.

“Anythin’?” Jenny interrupted.

Vastra sighed and turned to look at Jenny. In her intense concentration, she had almost forgotten she was there. “No.” Vastra said. “There are too many other, stronger scents. This area is an assault on my senses. They are rendered almost useless.”

“Sorry, Ma’am,” Jenny shrugged her shoulders. “Slums and industry. They both make unpleasant smells.”

“Yes, they do,” Vastra said with a tinge of hope in her voice. “But this boy said it smelled sweet where he was. That is not a smell neither the slums nor industry typically make. Perhaps if I can just locate the source of the smell. Surely it will stick out amongst the foul odors around here.”

“Surely,” Jenny smiled.

“It is time for you to take a cab back home, Jenny,” Vastra said pulling her veil back over her face. “I will spend a few hours looking and then I will undoubtedly come home cold and in need of a warm soak.”

“Yes ma’am.” Jenny didn’t want to leave. She wanted to help Vastra look for the children. But she knew she would be no help to her on the streets and with the cold January night closing in Vastra needed her to prepare things at home.

The intense scents of the sickness and human waste of the slums coupled with the industrial scents and heavy smoke from factories running night and day rendered Vastra’s most relied upon tool useless. Still, the Silurian was now on the hunt. She had a scent and she wouldn’t rest until she found where it had come from. For hours she searched the maze of slums hiding from shadow to shadow but nothing seemed to pique her senses. Same in the industrial section. Too many foul odors to find one sweet scent.

She hadn’t even noticed the snow, not until she realized how quiet it was. That’s the thing about snow, it calms and quietens a loud harsh city like London. “It’s a shame,” Vastra thought, “if only it was not so cold I could really enjoy this peace.”

Taking a moment, Vastra closed her eyes to surround herself with the quiet. She had finally resolved to head back home, when she heard a faint, low, hum. It was almost inaudible. In fact it may have very well be inaudible to humans. But her sharpened and sensitive Silurian ears had picked it up. Trading one sense for another, Vastra tucked Jenny’s glove deep into her coat pocket and took off her cape hood and veil to expose her ears.

The instant chill of the night air on her crests made Vastra shiver, almost violently. It was abrupt and rude, but necessary. She turned her head this way and that trying to zero in on the source of the hum. Taking careful steps and staying well within the dark cover of nearby shadows she made her way closer to the source of the noise.

To be continued…

Chapter End Notes
Comments appreciated.
Chapter 10: Detective Flint Part II

Jenny paced back and forth in the kitchen. “Where is she?”

Jenny had left Vastra in that alley just after five p.m.; it was now a quarter to midnight. “She should have been back hours ago.” Jenny checked for the twentieth time out the scullery door and into the back yard to see if she had just arrived. But again, no Vastra.

The clocks chime midnight.

“Where is she!” Jenny slammed her hands flat down on the table and stormed up to look out back again.

The temperature had plummeted and snow had been falling for hours. Seven hours in these temperatures are enough to slow a Silurian’s heart and breathing to a dangerous level. If Vastra had gotten too cold she would have most likely collapsed. After that she would either lay there unconscious and freeze to death or she would be discovered. Either way, she would surely be dead before dawn if Jenny didn’t go after her right now.

As Jenny scrambled to gather her warm clothing there was a knock at the door. Good news is never delivered at midnight.

“W’o is it?” Jenny yelled.

“Hansom cab,” a voice croaked back. “I ‘ave a passenger. She’s out cold.”

Jenny threw the door open at once. A man stood there with a limp, lifeless looking Vastra in his arms.

“Bring her in at once,” Jenny ordered, showing the man to the sitting room. “There, put her on the sofa.”

The man laid Vastra down on the settee as Jenny hurried to build up the fire. “She was full up to the knocker when I found her. She barely got out the address.” The driver just stood there as if expecting something. “Right, and said she’d pay me double if I got her here quick.”

Jenny looked at the driver with suspicion.

“She passed out as soon as I sat her in the carriage,” he said, “but I got her here quick.”

“Yes,” Jenny said. “Hold on.” She left and came right back with payment. “Here, triple pay and some extra for not speaking a word of this to anyone. You understand?”

“Sure thing, Miss,” he smiled and showed himself out.

“Oh God, Vastra,” Jenny’s heart was racing, but she was able to calm herself enough to do what needed to be done. First things first, she removed Vastra’s cape hood and veil away from her face. Laying her head on Vastra’s chest, she could hear a faint heartbeat about every five to ten seconds. The rise and fall of her chest was infrequent and her breath was shallow. She needed to heat her up, and fast.

Carefully, she lowered Vastra down from the settee onto the floor closer to the fire. She removed
her cape and made a pillow with it under Vastra’s head. She then went to the kitchen for supplies. Grabbing a kettle of water from the stove along with a large bowl and a stack of linen towels she returned to the sitting room.

Jenny filled the bowl with the hot water, and soaked the cloth. The water felt as though it would burn her hands as she wrung the excess from the cloth, but then became more tolerable. She laid the hot cloth on Vastra’s head making sure to carefully cover one of her crests. She worked quickly to cover all of Vastra’s head and neck. She then removed Vastra’s gloves and covered her hands. She then repeated the process with her shoes and feet. This was the best way Jenny thought of to warm her Madam. She needed to get Vastra into a tub of hot water, but even if she could manage to get her unconscious and uncooperative body up a flight of stairs, she doubted she’d have enough strength to lift her up and into the tub. Besides, it would take an hour to heat enough water and haul it up to the tub. She had to do something now.

After she laid the last towel on Vastra’s foot, she restarted the process at her crest reheating the towels with hot water and gently replacing them. By the time she made it back around to Vastra’s feet, an idea hit her. She jumped up and headed to the scullery and returned in short order with the copper wash basin she used for laundry and her own baths. “This’ll have to be good enough.”

The combined heat of the fire and the towels eventually raised Vastra’s core temperature enough for her to regain consciousness. She hadn’t opened her eyes, but she was trying to speak. No words were forthcoming.

“It’s alright, Ma’am,” Jenny cooed as she reheated towels and delicately replaced them on Vastra’s scales for the twelfth time. “You’re home. I’m warmin’ you up.”

Jenny’s voice calmed Vastra and she was out again for another hour. Her breathing and heart rate slowly increased as Jenny now applied hot towels to her legs beneath her skirt. She contemplated removing Vastra’s dress to apply more towels directly to her skin, but opted instead to just layer the wet cloth atop her bodice and sleeves. It would be messy, but it would allow Vastra to maintain her dignity and become warm.

The clock chimed twice and Vastra shifted beneath the towels. Jenny put her hand on her shoulder and spoke sweetly to her Madam. “That’s good. You’re warmin’ up now.”

“Jenny,” Vastra finally spoke softly and opened her eyes.

“I’m right here, Ma’am.” Jenny cooed. “Just lay still and warm up and I’ll start filling your tub. As soon as you can move a bit we’ll get you in for a proper soak.”

Vastra closed her eyes again and Jenny took off to the kitchen to boil more water. She changed out Vastra’s towels while waiting for more water to boil then she’d return to the kitchen to retrieve pot after pot for the copper tub now situated in the sitting room close to where Vastra lay. It took an hour to fill the tub and then allow the water to cool enough for Vastra to get in. But it was all just in time as Vastra finally started to come around just after the clock struck 3 a.m.

“Do you think you can walk, Ma’am?” Jenny asked a barely conscious Vastra.

“I do not know,” Vastra said.

“Let’s see if we can get you up on the settee,” Jenny suggested.

“Yes, let us start with that,” Vastra smiled.

Jenny positioned herself behind Vastra and helped her sit up in the floor. This simple task was
enough to tire out the cold Silurian, but she managed to sit up and scoot a little closer to the settee. From there, Jenny helped her up and onto the sofa where it took several minutes for the Silurian to regain herself.

Jenny looked at her employer worried about whether or not she’d be able to get her over into the tub. “I brought the wash tub in here, Ma’am,” Jenny offered. “It’s not what you’re used to, but it’ll have to do for now. I can’t get you up those stairs.”

Summoning up every ounce of her Silurian strength, Vastra nodded to Jenny. “Shall we then?”

Jenny helped Vastra stand and take the two steps to the tub. “The water’s hot, but not hot enough to burn you. It should warm you up enough to get you able to go upstairs and to bed.”

Vastra was shaky and had to steady herself on Jenny. She stopped and looked at the brunette, “My dress.”

“Don’t worry ‘bout that Ma’am,” Jenny smiled. “Jus’ be easier to wash.”

Carefully Vastra picked her leg up and dipped a toe into the water. The difference in temperature between her skin and the bath made it feel like she would be boiled alive. But Jenny said it wasn’t too hot, so she stepped down fully inside the tub. It was excruciating, but the Silurian didn’t as much as grimace.

Jenny helped her to ease down into the tub and sit. She wasn’t able to immerse as much of her body as she could have in her claw foot tub upstairs, but this was much more effective than the towels had been and the only feasible option.

“I’m going to go upstairs and get you a dry towel and your night dress. When you get done you can remove your wet dress right in the tub and put on your night dress. Then I can help you upstairs to bed.”

“That sounds lovely, Jenny dear,” Vastra said in a haze.

Jenny rushed up stairs to get Vastra’s things and ready her room. She returned to the sitting room and began to pile up the wet towels that now lay strewn about.

As Jenny was tidying up Vastra spoke. “What happened, Jenny?”

“Ma’am?” Jenny was confused.

“What happened to me?” Vastra asked.

“You don’t remember?” Jenny put the linen down and came over to Vastra, kneeling beside the tub.

“No,” she said. “I remember searching for something in the snow. Then I woke up here, with you.”

Jenny smiled. “Don’t you worry, Ma’am.” She placed her hand on Vastra’s shoulder. “We’ll sort it all out when you’re feeling stronger.”

After a long soak Vastra regained enough strength to stand, but she still needed Jenny to steady herself as she shed her dress for her night clothes. Jenny politely turned her back, and closed her eyes just to be sure she gave Vastra the privacy she needed to change; Victorian modesty and all.

The short trip to the stairs was unsteady and Vastra leaned heavily on Jenny for support. But in true
Silurian fashion she showed no signs of pain. Instead she focused on absorbing the heat pouring off of Jenny’s body.

“We’ll just take these one at a time, Ma’am,” Jenny said as they stood at the foot of the stairs.

“May as well get started.” Vastra picked her foot up and laid it atop the first step. She took a quick pause and lifted her second foot up to the same step. They proceeded like this for several steps before Jenny insisted they take a break.

“You better rest a spell now, Ma’am,” Jenny said.

“You worry too much, Jenny,” Vastra said, but was grateful for the rest and leaned fully into Jenny’s warm body.

Jenny insisted on two more of these breaks before they reached the top of the stairs. Then it was only a few more feet to Vastra’s room. A fire already blazed in the hearth and Jenny had brought in as many wool blankets as she could find in the house.

“Just a few more steps, Ma’am,” Jenny said as they rounded the foot of the bed.

Jenny breathed a sigh of relief when Vastra was finally tucked in. “Do you think it would help if you had some liver?” Jenny asked. “Or some warm blood? Or I could have some hot tea to you in just a few minutes.”

“Thank you, Jenny,” Vastra closed her eyes. “I shall eat after I get some sleep.”

“Very well, Ma’am,” Jenny said. “I’m goin’ to clean up a bit downstairs, then I’ll be back to check on you and tend to your fire. If you need me before then you just yell and I’ll come runnin’. ” Her words went unheard as Vastra had already slipped into sleep.

By the time Jenny picked up all the wet towels, removed all the water from the tub and dumped it down the sink, and hung the towels and Vastra’s dress up to dry it was close to five a.m. Normally, Jenny’s day would just be beginning. This time yesterday she was starting to tend to all the fires.

Jenny made her way upstairs to check on her Madam, whom she found still fast asleep. Her breathing was still slower than normal, but it was steady and strong. Jenny put more logs on the fire and then approached her sleeping employer. Delicately and a bit apprehensively, she laid a hand upon one of Vastra’s crests. A gesture she would never do if Vastra were awake, but oddly something she had found herself wanting to do more and more as of late. Her scales were cooler to the touch than normal. At least as far as Jenny could remember from the few times their skin had touched.

As Jenny mindlessly caressed Vastra’s crests, the Silurian let out a low almost growl from her throat and snuggled further down into the bed. The sound and motion startled Jenny and she withdrew her hand as if it had been stung.

The clock struck five a.m. Vastra needed nothing now but sleep, as did Jenny.

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The clock struck nine and Jenny sat bolt up in bed. Her feet hit the floor and she went immediately to Vastra’s room to check on her.

The fire was lower than Jenny had intended for it to get so she quickly threw on more fuel. She approached Vastra’s bed and she Silurian was breathing more normally, though still somewhat
slower and more shallow. Jenny gently touched Vastra’s cheek. She was warmer than she was when she left her at five this morning, but still a bit cooler than normal she thought.

Satisfied that Vastra was on the mend, Jenny went to the kitchen to cook herself some breakfast. After several trips up and down the stairs to check on her madam, Vastra finally began to stir.

“G’mornin’, Ma’am,” Jenny smiled and sat her breakfast tray on the table beside the bed. “Are you feeling better?”

“What time is it?” Vastra asked looking up at the window as sunlight poured in.

“It’s about to strike noon, Ma’am,” Jenny said. “I have your breakfast already warm. Though I suppose its lunch at this hour.”

“Why have you let me sleep until noon, Jenny?” Vastra was annoyed and didn’t understand why she was being brought breakfast in bed. She attempted to sit up, but had some difficulty. Jenny rushed to her side and helped her sit up against the headboard.

“Let you?” Jenny asked, confused. “Ma’am, you only went to bed at four this mornin’. Don’t you remember last night?”

Vastra rubbed her aching hand. “Was that last night?” Vastra asked, still confused about everything.

“Yes, Ma’am,” Jenny said. She noticed Vastra rubbing her hand, but didn’t say anything. “You went out last night to the alley where that boy showed up and I came back here. At midnight a driver delivered you to the front door. I spent the better part of the night warmin’ you up on the sitting room floor then into the tub and finally to bed.” The clocks chimed twelve in unison. “Now you’ve ‘ad a bit of rest but you haven’t eaten since yesterday’s early supper. Please, eat your liver and drink your blood.”

Vastra looked to Jenny as if she wanted to say more, but all that came out was, “Thank you, Jenny.”

“You’re welcome, Ma’am,” Jenny smiled and placed the tray on the bed over Vastra’s lap. She then, to Vastra’s protest, placed a towel across Vastra’s chest to protect her night dress from any spilled blood. “I put this little bell on your bedside table. Just give it a ring when you need anythin’. I have chores and later I want you to tell me what you remember from last night.”

“I am afraid I do not remember much as of now,” Vastra admitted. She rubbed her hands again. “My hands and feet hurt very badly,” she said bluntly.

Jenny was surprised as the Silurian had shown no sign of pain or discomfort other than a slight rub to her hand. “You were very cold when you arrived home at midnight,” Jenny told her. “I’m afraid the snow may have bitten your hands and feet. May take a few days to get the use back again. Used to ‘appen all the time livin’ on the street. Your hands and feet are always the first to freeze. Sometimes they only get a nip, other times the cold bites ‘em right off.”

“I am familiar with frostbite, Jenny,” Vastra snaps.

“Sorry, Ma’am,” Jenny turns to leave. “Will there be anything else while I’m here, Ma’am.”

“No, Jenny. Thank you for breakfast. I shall ring when I am done. I do not believe I will be up for much walking today.”
Vastra’s bell rung and within seconds Jenny was ascending the stairs with a full tea service. Along with the tea, there was a pad of paper and a pencil on the tray.

“There ya go, Ma’am,” Jenny said as she handed Vastra a cup of hot tea.

Vastra did not reach for it. “I’m afraid I cannot hold the cup steady enough just yet, Jenny.”

Jenny then noticed that the tray was still on the bed over Vastra’s lap and that Vastra had not moved from the position she had left her in. She then noticed that the towel she had placed over Vastra’s chest to protect her night dress from spillage was covered in blood. It was obvious Vastra had struggled to eat her breakfast.

“Sorry, Ma’am,” Jenny apologized and put the cup back on the tray. “Would you like me to...”

“No.” Vastra quickly cut her off before she could finish her sentence.

“Very well.” Jenny removed the breakfast try from the bed and placed it beside the door. Moving a chair beside the bed and taking a seat, Jenny readied her paper and pencil. “Are you ready to talk about last night? What do you remember?”

“Not much, Jenny,” Vastra was frustrated, but it was truly not about Jenny it was the fact that she had let herself get so cold, lost consciousness, and possibly suffered frostbite.

Jenny readied her pencil and paper for notes. “Do you remember being at the spot where the child showed up?”

“Yes,” Vastra said. “I remember being there with you. Then you left for home and I proceeded down the alley.”

“Good,” Jenny smiled. “That’s good, Ma’am. What ‘appened then, after you went down the alley, which way did you turn?”

Even in her diminished state, Vastra could see the good detective work Jenny was doing. She wasn’t asking questions like “did you turn right?” or “did you turn left?” which could sway her memory but instead asking general questions making Vastra recall what happened in her own words.

“I turned left out of the alley.” Vastra had closed her eyes and was picturing the alley in her mind. Then the maze of slums. “Slowly I went from shadow to shadow through the slums. Too many turns to recall.”

“That’s good, Ma’am.” Jenny encouraged. “Did you find anything in the slums?”

“No.” Vastra recalled. “I left the slums and continued on.”

“You are at the edge of the slums. Where did you go next?”

“To the industrial part of town,” Vastra still sat with her eyes closed.

“What were you near?” Jenny asked.

Vastra shut her eyes tighter as if the effort would make her remember.

Jenny noticed her struggling. “Were any of the factories running?”
Vastra perked up. She remembered the smoke billowing out of the chimneys and the smell of sulfur. “I am near the match factory. I can smell the sulfur.”

“I know right where you are,” Jenny said softly. “I used to sneak around outside that factory and find matches that had been dropped so I could sell them in town.”

“Clever girl,” Vastra smiled but still kept her eyes closed. “The smell was too strong. It stung my tongue and I had to move away.”

“Which way did you go from the match factory?” Jenny asked.

“I followed the river. Downstream. I do not know how long I walked. I stopped.”

“Why did you stop?” Jenny asked.

“I do not know,” Vastra answered. Again she shut her eyes tight as if that would help her remember.

Jenny could see she was struggling, so she offered some prompts. “Did you smell something?” Jenny probed.

“No,” Vastra answered.

“Did you see something?”

“No.”

“Did you hear something?”

Vastra tilted her head, and with a slight inflection said, “No.”

Jenny was running out of senses. If she hadn’t smelled, seen, or heard anything all that was left was taste and touch.

“That was just it,” Vastra finally said. “I heard nothing. It had gotten quiet. That is when I noticed the snow.”

“It started snowing around seven o’clock,” Jenny said.

“And it had been falling for some time by the time I noticed.” Vastra now opened her eyes and looked at Jenny. She was speaking more like herself. “I was so focused on trying to pick up the child’s scent, I had not noticed the snow until I noticed how quiet it was. Snow dampens sound. And as I stood there, taking in the peace and quiet so often lost on London streets, I heard a hum.”

“A hum?” Jenny asked. “Like someone was humming? Humming a song?”

“No. It was a low hum. Like a machine. Possibly out of human hearing range.”

“You mean too quiet for a human to hear but you have those sensitive Silurian ears?”

“No, I mean too low of a frequency.” Vastra stopped suddenly. She did not have time to teach Jenny about the physics of sound waves and the biological receptors needed to detect them. “It does not matter right now. It was a low humming sound.”

“What did you do after you heard it?” Jenny asked.
“I tried to find it. I walked and looked and listened. I walked in circles trying to zero in on the hum, but no matter how hard I tried, I could not locate it.”

“Then what happened? What made you stop looking?”

“I – I do not know.” Vastra never stuttered. “I do not remember. The next thing I remember is waking up on the sitting room floor.”

“You don’t remember hailing a hansom cab?” Jenny asked.

“No.” Vastra said. “And where I was, there were no cabs. I had to have walked out to a main street. But I do not remember.”

“It’s alright, Ma’am,” Jenny assured her. “You probably felt yourself getting cold and knew you had to get home. You were able to get to a street and hail a cab. That’s all that matters.”

“I should not let myself get that cold. Blasted primitive ape technology,” Vastra spat. “If I had my Silurian thermal suit I could stay on the hunt all night and never slow down.”

“I’m sorry you don’ have your fancy suit, Ma’am,” Jenny said. “But this is what you got so you may as well work with it.”

“You do know I was doing this sort of work before you ever came along,” Vastra barked.

“Then I guess it’s a miracle you always made it home, ‘cause I’ve saved your hide plenty of times since I’ve been here.”

“I am sorry, Jenny,” Vastra said. “I am frustrated. I need to get word to the Yard that I will need a few days to recover. I do not believe I have the dexterity to pen a note and I certainly lack the strength to deliver the letter.”

“Don’t worry, Ma’am,” Jenny said. “I’ll be ‘appy to write a note and deliver it to the Yard. I need to get out anyway. I told Billy’s mom that I would bring her some more food today for answering my questions. I have to keep me word.”

“Very well, Jenny,” Vastra said. “Before you leave, could you please bring me a stack of books? If I have to be confined to the bed unable to work I may as well read.”

“Certainly, Ma’am,” Jenny smiled. “I’ll make sure everythin’ is in order before I leave.”

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Jenny knocked on Billy’s door and greeted his mother with a smile and two more bags of groceries. There was also a bundle of firewood at her feet.

“Jenny, love, bless your heart,” she said as she welcomed Jenny into their home.

“Hello, Ma’am,” Jenny said. “How’s Billy?”

“See for yourself,” she said and pointed at Billy who was playing with a balled up piece of newspaper and a couple of spent matchsticks.

Jenny went to the boy and sat on the floor to be at his level. “’ello Billy. Remember me? From yesterday.”

Billy nodded and continued to bat the ball of paper around with the matchsticks.
“Do you remember I asked you some questions?”

Billy nodded again.

“Can I ask you some more questions?”

“Alrigh’, Miss,” Billy said but continued playing with his “toys.”

“Do you remember anything about where you were?” Jenny asked.

“No, Ma’am,” he said looking up from his paper.

“What about the day you disappeared?” Jenny asked. “Do you remember anything about being taken?”

“No, Ma’am,” Billy said. “I wus jus’ walkin’ home and then showed up in the street. That’s all I remember.”

“You’re a brave boy, Billy.” Jenny smiled and stood to speak to Billy’s mum. “He seems fine now, but if anything changes, if he remembers anythin’ please find me and let me know. I’ll be ‘round.”

“A’right, Love,” Billy’s mum hugs Jenny tight. “Thank you so much for getting my Billy back to me.”

“Oh I didn’t do anythin’, Ma’am,” Jenny smiled. “I jus ‘appened to be near. That’s all.”

Jenny was back on the street interviewing some of the witnesses and some of her old contacts. Unfortunately, no one had seen or heard anything new or useful. The day was getting on and she needed to get back to Vastra. “Poor thing,” Jenny thought. “Cooped up in that bed all day. I bet she’s ‘bout to go stark ravin’ mad.”

Jenny decided to go to the market and grab some potatoes, carrots, turnips, and onions for a stew, her favorite winter meal. She is looking over loaves of bread when a familiar voice called her name.

“Jenny?” the female voice said.

Jenny turned around to see Frankie.

“A little late to be shopping isn’t it?” Frankie smiled. “And isn’t your market day Saturday?”

“Hello Frankie,” Jenny smiled and hugged her friend.

Frankie held on a little too tightly for a little too long.

Jenny pulled away, careful not to be rude. “I decided I wanted stew.”

“I haven’t seen you in a while. That madam of yours keeping you under lock and key?” Frankie is clearly jealous.

“It’s winter, so my time is occupied.” Jenny smiled. “You know this.”

“All too well.”

Jenny blushed.
“I have shows four nights a week, most weeks,” Frankie said finally allowing Jenny some respite. “You should really try to make one soon. I think you’ll like my new act.”

“I would love that, truly,” Jenny said. “But I’m afraid right now is just not a good time.”

“I understand.” Frankie had never met Vastra, but she resented her for monopolizing Jenny’s time. Jenny picked a loaf of bread and paid for her items. “Will you walk with me for a bit?”

“Of course,” Frankie smiled.

“Have you heard about the missing children?” Jenny asked.


“Scotland Yard can’t be bothered to look for a bunch of missing street kids, so I have decided to take up the case.”

Frankie laughed. “You have? And what do you know about police work?”

Jenny stopped in her tracks. “Oi! A lot more than you think.” She was frustrated and really needed to get home to Vastra. She took a breath and calmed her emotions. “Can you keep a secret?”

“A secret? This sounds scandalous.”

“Not really,” Jenny said, “just something I’d rather not get around.”

“Sure,” Frankie smiled, “I can keep your secret.”

Jenny took in a deep breath. “Have you ever heard that a female detective works for Scotland Yard?”

“A female detective? No.” She eyed Jenny with suspicion. “Wait. Are you a detective?” Frankie was excited and a little too loud.


“Your madam is a detective?” Frankie said in hushed tones.

“Yes,” Jenny smiled. “She is not publically on their roster, but they pay her to solve really tough cases. She’s very smart and is skilled in apprehending criminals.”

“That explains a lot,” Frankie said. “She sounds a little unbelievable. Certainly not a proper Victorian lady.”

“Well aren’t you the pot calling the kettle black,” Jenny smiled at the entertainer; she had seen her shows.

“You got me there,” Frankie smiled back at Jenny. “How exactly is she ‘skilled in apprehending criminals’?”

“She is trained in swords and hand to hand combat, among other things,” Jenny told her. “She has…” Jenny searched for the right words, “tracking skills.”

“Like a hunter?” Frankie asked.
Jenny paused. “Yes, like a hunter.” She knew Vastra’s skills were more like a predator than a human hunter, but she couldn’t tell Frankie that.

“Swords and combat? Where’s she from that she received such training? Surely she didn’t train here in London.”

“You’re right about that,” Jenny said, “she ain’t from London. Honestly I am not sure exactly where she’s from. I’ve never asked. Even if I did, I’m not good with maps.” This was Jenny’s best attempt at playing dumb.


Jenny was not prepared for questions and needed to change the conversation. She was beginning to regret bringing it up. “No, she is not Japanese. I really have to get back. Madam had a rough night and she is still recovering. I need to go prepare her supper.”

Frankie looked at the vegetables and bread. She of course had no idea that none of that was for Vastra. “Better get going then. It was good to see you. Please try to catch a show soon. You know where to find me.”

“I do.” Jenny smiled. “And I will. Please keep my secret.”

“I will. But I do want to talk to you more about it. Sounds fascinating.” Frankie kissed Jenny on the cheek. Just a peck, but enough to make Jenny uncomfortable.

“See you soon.” Jenny walked away to hail a cab. She wasn’t entirely sure why she decided to share this secret with Frankie; but it did feel good to talk to someone about it. Her life revolved so much around caring for Vastra that she forgot she needed some human interaction.

Arriving home she quickly dropped the groceries on the counter, pulled Vastra’s liver and blood from the icebox, and hurried up stairs. To her surprise, Vastra was sitting in the chair looking out the window. “You’re up,” Jenny said, smiling.

“I am not an invalid, I can walk five feet.”

“And how long did that take you without my help?” Jenny stood with her hands on her hips.

Vastra quickly changed the subject. “Did you find out anything new?”

“No. Billy still didn’t remember anything, but he looked well. I think the food and firewood I gave them did them both good.” Jenny paused. “I will go back out tomorrow and revisit my contacts and see if there is any new information. I will also revisit some of the families who lost a child and see if they have returned. Like Billy did.”

“That is an excellent idea,” Vastra said. “But be prepared for their reaction when their child has not returned. They will be upset. I find that you apes begin to bellow and cry at any opportunity. Especially your females.”

Jenny shook her head. “Well this ape is going to start YOUR supper.” She turned on her heel and began to leave.

“Wait,” Vastra said, “will you help me downstairs so that I may lounge in the sitting room until
supper. I am tired of this room.”

Jenny let out an exasperated sigh. “Alright. But let me get a fire going down there before we start down the stairs. That could take a while and I don’t want you getting cold. Would you like me to take your books back down?”

“Do not bother,” Vastra said, exasperated. “I lack the dexterity to turn the pages. It is more frustrating than useful.”

Jenny then noticed the books that had been thrown across the room. “Yes, ma’am,” Jenny smiled. “I’ll be right back for you.”

For the first night ever Vastra and Jenny ate supper in the sitting room. Jenny had pulverized Vastra’s liver and blood and placed it in a bowl. She assumed if the Silurian couldn’t turn a page, she wouldn’t be able to use utensils either. This way she could just turn the bowl up and drink her supper.

After she had washed the dishes Jenny read aloud to Vastra from “The Female Detective” by Andrew Forrester. One of many fiction books Jenny was slowly adding to Vastra’s library of medical journals, historical tomes, and encyclopedias.

*****

The next morning Jenny was back on schedule her feet hitting the floor at 5 a.m. She went immediately to Vastra’s room and built the fire anew. Then to the kitchen to begin breakfast. While water heated for tea she cleaned cold ashes out the fireplace and started a fire in the sitting room in case Vastra wanted to come back down for the day. After a meager breakfast she sat about getting a day’s worth of chores done before lunch.

Just after lunch she was back out to gather more information. She visited witnesses, and like Vastra warned, there were lots of tears. She visited some of her contacts, but mostly they were looking for handouts. After two hours of striking out, she finally caught another break.

“Jenny,” the male voice said. “Oi, Jenny.”

She turned to see the boy from Simon’s gang that she had talked to just a few days ago.

“It’s me, Lewis,” he said.

“’ello Lewis,” Jenny smiled.

“Remember my friend I told you about? Albert?” Lewis asked.

“The lame one?”

“Yeah. ‘im. Well, ’e came back.”

“When?” Jenny was excited.

“Last night,” Lewis said. “’e jus’ wandered up.”

“Can you take me to ‘im?” Jenny was excited. “I need to talk to ‘im right away.”

“We can look,” Lewis said. “Not sure where ‘e is though.”

“Well let’s get crackin’,”
After an hour or so of searching all of Albert’s usual hideouts and hangouts the two finally caught up with him. He was huddled asleep in an abandoned building in the maze of slums.

“’e’s sleepin’,” Lewis whispered.

“Well I must speak to ‘im,” Jenny said. “If I’m goin’ to find out what’s ‘appened to all these kids, I ‘ave to know if ‘e remembers anythin’.”

Lewis nodded. “Oi, Albert.” He went over to shake his friend awake. “Albert, wake up. Someone’s ‘ere to talk to you.”

“Bloody ‘ell,” Albert sat bolt up. “Don’t come sneaking in ’ere while I’m tryin’ to sleep. I almost clocked ya.”

“No matter,” Lewis smiled. “You ‘it like a girl.”

“Hey!” Jenny and Albert said in unison.

Lewis laughed. “This is Jenny. She used to be like us. Even worked for Simon before he got nibbed. Now she’s lookin’ into why kids are goin’ missin’. She wants to talk to you.”

Albert sat up a little more to get a good look at Jenny. “Sorry ma’am. I don’ remember anythin’. I just sorta came to standing in an alley. Don’ know ‘ow I got there.”

“Can you show me where?” Jenny asked.

“I suppose,” he said. “But I don’ know what good it’ll do ya.”

“I just want to know,” Jenny smiled. “And this may be a funny question, but do you remember what it smelled like? Where you were?”

Albert got a queer look on his face. “’ow you know know about that?”

“There was another boy who came back,” Jenny said. “He said there was a particular smell. Can you tell me what you remember?”

“It smelled sweet.” Albert’s eyes glazed over as he talked. “It was cold and there was a smell of something sweet all around. But I didn’t see anythin’.”

“Was it dark?”

“No. Not dark at all. If anythin’ it was light. Bright. But I don’ remember anythin’ else.”

“That’s alright, love,” Jenny smiled. “Whenever you’re ready you can take me to where you came to.”

*****

Back home Jenny prepared supper and heated water for tea as Vastra patiently waited in the sitting room. Finally, she entered with a tray for Vastra and shortly returned with a tray of her own. Vastra’s tray contained a bowl with finely cut liver so that she could manage to feed herself without utensils. Her hands still weren’t cooperating fully.

“Really, Jenny? Supper in here again?” Vastra protested, “I can make my way to the dining room. We do not have to eat in here like common peasants.”
“Your understandin’ of how peasants eat is way off, you know that?” Jenny laughed.

“You know what I meant.”

“You eat in your office all the time. What’s the difference?”

“I eat in there when I am working and when I am alone. When you and I dine together I prefer a certain amount of formality.”

“Well I think with me taking care of you, cuttin’ up your meat, gettin’ you up and down those stairs and all, we’ve moved past the need to be formal with one another at supper,” Jenny stated as she took a bite of her stew.

Vastra detested “being taken care of.” The fact that she was dependent on anyone, let alone an ape put her squarely in a foul mood. And is most often the case, she took it out on Jenny. “Very well, but remember you are still my maid.”

Jenny rolled her eyes. “Yes Ma’am,” she said sarcastically. “How could I forget?”

Vastra still didn’t recognize sarcasm, along with most human body language and facial expressions, so Jenny’s attitude went right by her and the two ate in quiet peace.

After supper Jenny shared her new knowledge with her Madam.

“There was another boy who came back,” Jenny started. “It was all just like little Billy. Albert don’t remember being taken and don’t remember coming back. Just sorta ‘woke up’ in an alley.”

“We shall investigate the alley tomorrow,” Vastra started planning. “I should be well enough to take a cab there and if need be I shall have the aid of a cane to remain mobile.” She paused just enough to collect her thoughts and continued to plan their next day. “We should also begin a list of all things these boys have in common and their differences. We will need to mark a map and see if there is anything we ascertain from the two ...”

Jenny stood up and left the room mid-sentence. She returned in less than one minute with a folder which she handed to Vastra.

“Let me save you the plannin’,” Jenny said.

Vastra opened the folder and looked at everything Jenny had already compiled. The map used to mark Billy’s location now included Albert’s. There was a very comprehensive list of similarities as well as differences between the two boys. A crude map of the alley with key information such as time of day and even which way Albert was facing when he first gained consciousness was in the folder. And, as standard procedure, the complete account of eye witness testimony, including Lewis and Albert. But the coup de grace was the inclusion of a handkerchief Jenny had leant to Albert so that Vastra could get his scent in case he couldn’t be located again. Jenny had thought of everything.

“Not bad work for your maid, ay Ma’am?” Jenny asked, sarcastically. Of course the tone once again went right over the Silurian’s crests.

“Jenny,” Vastra was impressed to say the least. “You’ve already done all that I would have asked. This is complete. When did you have time to do all of this?”

Jenny blushed the faintest pink. “I drew the alley while we was there and took down the witness testimony as we went along. Then I started the list on the cab ride home. Of course I reprinted it
while waiting on supper to heat up. The map only took a second.”

“All that’s left is for me to see if I can get a scent in the alley.”

“You can go to that alley after you can climb those stairs in less than a minute.” Jenny pointed to the flight of stairs in the entry hall.

Vastra tried to interrupt.

“Oi! And that means without me helpin’ ya. In case that weren’t clear.”

Vastra knew when she was beat. Without Jenny’s help she couldn’t make it up and down the stairs, much less out to a cab and then along an alley. She would have to wait a few more days to regain mobility and for the pain to subside in her feet and legs.

*****

The following day proceeded as the one before. Jenny rose early, started the fires, took care of her own breakfast, warmed Vastra’s breakfast, helped Vastra to the sitting room, and completed all the day’s chores before noon. After a quick lunch of bread and tea she set out once again to see if she could find any more children who had returned.

Much to her surprise she did locate another child. This time it was a girl. She was small and frail and much like Billy, she worked odd jobs around town for whoever would hire her; mostly cleaning is small spaces. The girl had actually been home for a few days, placing her arrival before Billy’s. But her mother had kept her under lock and key fearing the worst and only now had dared speak about it. But, also as with Billy, two full bags of groceries and a bundle of firewood were all her mum needed to agree to let Jenny speak to her.

“Don’ know what they wanted with my Sarah,” Mrs. Fletcher said. “She don’ remember a thing. Says no one ‘urt ‘er. Says no one laid a ‘and on ‘er. But then says she don’ remember. How can she know if she don’ remember?” Mrs. Fletcher began to tear up again.

“Mrs. Fletcher,” Jenny reached out to hold the woman’s trembling hand. “There have been two other children I have found who ‘ave come back. They don’t remember anything either, but neither of them look to be any worse for wear. It don’t look like any ‘arm came to them while they were away.”

The woman pleaded with her eyes for Jenny to just make it all better.

“May I speak with Sarah?” Jenny asked.

“Certainly, Miss,” Mrs. Fletcher said.

Jenny interviewed Sarah and carefully wrote down everything she said. She also started a list of similarities and differences between her and the boys. Both Sarah and her mother refused to return to where Sarah had “woken up”, but they gave Jenny enough detail to find the alley and investigate on her own.

After two hours of investigating and finalizing her maps and notes, Jenny rushed home in time for supper. She went immediately to the sitting room, but no Vastra.

“Ma’am.” She called from the entry hall.
“In here.” Vastra answered from her office.

Jenny went in to find Vastra sitting at her desk reading case files, still in her night dress. “I’m sorry, Ma’am,” Jenny apologized. “If I had known you wanted to work in here I would have prepared the room and helped you get dressed before I left.”

“Quite alright, Jenny.” Vastra smiled. It was obvious she was in a better mood. “I have finally gained enough dexterity in my fingers and hands to handle paperwork and look through some of these case files.”

“That’s good, Ma’am,” Jenny smiled. She took a seat in one of the chairs opposite Vastra’s desk and handed her the updated file. “Here’s the latest on the missing children. One more come up, a little girl, Sarah Fletcher. She actually showed up before Billy, but her mom kept her locked up tight. Everything’s there, eye witness testimony, sketch of the alley, marked map, and a list of similarities and differences from the boys. Even got you a handkerchief with ‘er scent.”

Vastra looked at the list of similarities and differences. The most obvious difference was the fact that Sarah was female and the other two children were male. But a more interesting difference that Jenny noted was that Sarah did not appear to have any physical malady or ailment. She was poor and certainly malnourished, but she had no obvious illness.

“This is very good work, Jenny,” Vastra said as she looked through the folder. “None of this would have been possible without you taking the initiative to speak with the locals. They do not trust the police and I dare say they would not have trusted me. You have done very well in gathering information.”

“Thank you, Ma’am,” Jenny blushed at the compliments.

“Have you formulated any theories about the children? Why they are coming back?” Vastra asked.

“After meeting Albert I thought maybe they were being released because they were ill or had some sort of physical deformity. If they are being taken for work, or worse, their captors would surely want healthy children.”

“But why would they have taken Albert in the first place? Surely within a matter of seconds they could tell he was lame and incapable of hard work or, like you said, worse.”

“I thought about that. And that never made sense. Then there’s Sarah. She wasn’t sick or lame. She seemed to be fine other than the typical issues that poor children have. So now I don’t have a clue why they’re being released. But one thing’s obvious.”

“What is that?”

“They are being released. They aren’t escaping.”

Vastra agreed wholeheartedly with Jenny’s assessment. “What about why they are being taken in the first place? Do you have any theories about that?” Vastra asked.

“Nothin’ more than the usual reasons children are taken, Ma’am. And ain’t none of ‘em good. But like I said, those who would take them for work or worse would want them healthy. If they were to work in a home they’d want them attractive, cute. If it was manual labor they’d want mostly boys, and older ones. So I’m still at a loss.” Jenny looked deflated.

“Common flesh peddlers and slavers would grab whomever they could and if later on they found that they did not meet their requirements would simply kill them on the spot or boot them out.”
“Since all the children have no memory of being taken, held, or released, perhaps I should focus less on the children who are returning, and more on figuring out what that scent is and what type of drug could affect children in this manner.” Jenny looked to Vastra for support.

“I agree.” Vastra was more and more impressed with Jenny’s detective skills.

“I will ask around at some pharmacies about what sorts of things would keep a child sedated for days without killing them and that also smells sweet. I’m going back out tomorrow to take Sarah and Mrs. Fletcher another bag of food and some firewood. I shall hit the pharmacies then.”

“I should be well enough to accompany you tomorrow. I can now get up the stairs without your aid.” Vastra smiled at Jenny. “And I shall join you for supper in the dining room tonight, without my meat cut for me, please.”

Jenny couldn’t help but smile at the news and the request for a proper dinner. “I’m afraid your day out will have to wait, Ma’am. It looks an awful lot like another round of snow is on its way. The old timers were talking about it, and they’re rarely wrong about the weather.”

“Well that is certainly disappointing,” Vastra sighed.

“I’m sorry, Ma’am,” Jenny said. “Maybe they’ll be wrong this time. We’ll wait and see, ay?”

“Of course.” Vastra smiled, but she was clearly disappointed and longed to get out. But she knew better than to risk exposure so soon after her recent scare.

*****

Jenny’s feet hit the floor at five a.m. Her morning proceeded as usual, only today she didn’t have to help Vastra get down the stairs. Just as predicted, snow began to fall mid-morning restricting the Silurian to a day indoors reviewing casefiles. And again, Jenny did a day’s worth of chores before noon, ate a quick lunch, and was in the slums investigating by one p.m.

News was slow today. Children played in the streets throwing snowballs and making snow angels. Informants were holed up in pubs trying to stay warm and had no new information. And the first two pharmacies she tried to gather information at only looked at her suspiciously and demanded to know why she wanted to keep a child unconscious for days at a time. One druggist threatened to call for a bobbie and report her for child abuse.

Feeling defeated after striking out all afternoon Jenny decided that she would spend her last hour before heading home investigating the area where Vastra heard the humming noise. Maybe with the quiet of the snowfall she would be able to hear it as well. She went back to the alley where they found Billy and made her way toward the match factory. There was no way of knowing if she was following the exact path that Vastra took, but that wasn’t really important at the moment.

She found herself at the match factory and imagined how toxic it must smell to Vastra and her sensitive tongue. She looked around to make sure no one was watching and then she stuck her tongue out. Obviously that didn’t help her smell anything and she quickly returned her tongue into her mouth and shook her head at her foolishness.

“But from here she followed the Thames down river,” Jenny said to herself. “That doesn’t help narrow down her path much.” She wrapped her heavy wool cape around her and set out to find this mysterious hum.

Half an hour into her walk Jenny was stopped dead in her tracks. A little girl was wandering aimlessly through the snow. She appeared to be dazed; not really focusing on anything, just
walking. Jenny quickly approached her.

“‘ello,” Jenny said kneeling down to the girl’s level. “Hi, Love. What’s your name?” Jenny put her hand on the girl’s shoulder, but she was still dazed and unresponsive. “You’re freezing.” Jenny scooped the girl up and held her to her beneath her cape. She then wrapped her cape tight around them and held her close to warm her up.

She saw the trail of foot prints leading from wherever the girl had been held. Snow was slowly drifting down, and Jenny knew in less than an hour any sign of tracks would be buried. But the little girl was freezing and there was no one around she could trust to care for her. Jenny was left with a horrible decision: take the freezing girl back to the slums to get help and get her warm; or follow the girl’s tracks back to where she had come from and possibly find the rest of the children.
Detective Flint Part III

Chapter 11: Detective Flint Part III

Vastra nervously stacked and restacked the files on her desk again, for the hundredth time. “Where is she?”

Jenny had left to investigate at noon; it was now almost eight p.m. “She should have been back hours ago.” Vastra straightened her desk again, looked at the clock, and listened intently for the sound of an opening door. But again, no Jenny.

The clocks chimed eight.

“Where is she!” Vastra slammed her fists down on the desk. A decision she immediately regretted and let out a visceral growl. She wasn’t as recovered as she had let Jenny believe. In fact, she was only about sixty percent. Her hands, arms, feet, and legs still ached to an excruciating level. And any fine motor skill she had in her hands was a testament to sheer Silurian willpower.

Snow had been falling all day, and it was not like Jenny to be late. Vastra feared the worst. What if she had gotten attacked and was lying in an alley bleeding or freezing to death? What if she had asked the wrong person the wrong question?

Vastra limped to the dining room and regarded the snow covered garden. She cursed her cold blooded body and the apes’ lack of proper technology to keep her warm in these conditions. She felt utterly helpless and useless, a life worse than death for a Silurian.

That’s it! She could no longer sit idly by. She must go search for Jenny.

As she sat in the entry hall attempting to lace her boots, she heard the familiar sound of the scullery door open and close, closely followed by a welcomed voice.

“Sorry. So sorry I’m late, Ma’am. But you’ll never believe…” Jenny called out as she quickly walked through the kitchen and dining room and into the front entry hall. She stopped when she saw Vastra lacing up her boots. “Where do you think you’re goin’?”

“You are late.” Vastra said in such a dry tone that Jenny wasn’t sure if she was only concerned that her supper had not been served.

“Sorry, Ma’am, but I’ll have you know I found the children.” Jenny was shaking. “And it ain’t nothing human what took ‘em!”

“What?” Vastra looked at Jenny completely confused. “You are freezing. Get into my office, it is warmest in there.”

Jenny didn’t protest and went straight into the office and in front of the fire.

Vastra struggled to unlace her boots but managed to do a good enough job to get them off her feet. She hobbled into the study to see Jenny sitting on the hearth soaking up as much warmth as she could; but still shaking from the cold.

“Now what is this you are prattling on about?” Vastra asked. “Not human?”

“I’m tellin’ ya, Ma’am,” Jenny said, still shivering. “I saw ‘em with my own eyes.”
“Exactly what did you see, Jenny?”

“I don’t know what they were; but they weren’t human. They were dressed funny and they had skin that was the color of a stormy sky.”

“Grey? Was their skin grey?” Vastra asked.

“Yes,” Jenny clarified.

“That could be any number of alien species,” Vastra said matter-of-factly.

“Alien?”

“Yes, Jenny, alien. Extraterrestrial.” Vastra could tell Jenny was still confused. “From another planet, Jenny.”

“Don’t be silly, Ma’am,” Jenny laughed nervously. “That’s impossible.”

Vastra cocked her head to the side. “Is it really so hard to believe that there is intelligent life beyond this planet? Until very recently you thought humans were the only intelligent species on this planet, yet here we are.”

“But you ain’t from another planet,” Jenny clarified.

“No,” Vastra smiled, “but I am certainly not human either.”

Jenny smiled nervously at the Silurian. “I know where the kids are. I didn’t actually see them, but I’m certain I saw where they are being kept.”

Vastra walked to her desk and retrieved a pad of paper and a pencil. Her limp and obvious difficulty in holding the pencil was not lost on Jenny. “Tell me where you were and everything you saw and I shall make notes.”

“I didn’t have any luck with the pharmacies in town, so I decided to search for the sound you had heard in the industrial district. I tried to retrace your path from the match factory and I found a small girl wandering, dazed in the snow. Her tracks were clear and I knew if I didn’t trace them back to where she had come from they’d very soon be lost forever. So I scooped her up and headed east. Her tracks led me to an abandoned warehouse, or so I thought it was abandoned. The windows were boarded up tight and the doors were locked. But I saw an openin’ near the top on the back side. I was able to scale the wall and get a look inside.”

“And what did you see?” Vastra asked while still struggling to write notes.

“There were lots of machines. Some with lights, strange knobs, and dials. There were three,” Jenny struggled for the right word, “creatures walkin’ about like they were checkin’ things and workin’.”

“Did you see the children?” Vastra asked still taking notes.

“Not exactly,” Jenny said. “But there was a room and when one of them opened the door I could tell it was very bright in there. And a smoke billowed out like a chimney. I’m guessing it smells sweet, but I couldn’t tell from where I was.”

“Most likely a hibernation chamber of some sort,” Vastra said mindlessly.

“A what?” Jenny asked.
“A hibernation chamber,” Vastra said, putting her pencil down. “Why did I not think of this before? It makes perfect sense now.”

“I don’t know what that is,” Jenny confessed, still shivering.

“Do you know what hibernation is?” Vastra asked.

Jenny just shook her head “no”.

“There are several animals who go into a deep sleep, hibernation, to survive the cold. The animal’s body slows down. Its heart and breathing only do as much as it needs to survive and they live off of fat stored in their body.”

Jenny listened intently.

“Some reptiles hibernate to survive the winter. We Silurians had no need for hibernation during the height of our civilization. The days were warm year round and we reproduced and expanded our empire like wild fire. But as climates changed we saw a need for hibernation, so we created chambers where we could control it. With the proper combination of cold temperatures to slow our heart and breathing and a chemical solution to keep us nourished and hydrated, we could stay in hibernation almost indefinitely.

“My guess is that “smoke” as you call it is really a water vapor and the bright light is there to mimic sunlight to keep some sort of nutritional algae or similar nutrient alive for the children to use as an absorbable food source. Of course the cold temperatures keep them sedated and slows their metabolism. If they were released from that room and simply put out on the street there is no wonder they would have no memory of such treatment.”

Jenny’s eyes were huge and her shivering had all but stopped. It was as if she were too terrified to move.

Vastra wasn’t adept in human body language, but even she could tell Jenny was terrified. “What is it Jenny?”

“I can’t imagine being held like that against my will. If I ever knew I had been held like that I would wonder what all they did to me while I was out and couldn’t defend myself.” Jenny sat solemnly and thought about the children and the possibilities of such control over them.

“We have no reason to believe the children have been harmed thus far,” Vastra assured her. “Did you tell the Yard of your discovery?”

“No. I just got the girl home,” Jenny said. “She was starting to come to by the time I left he warehouse and made it back to the slums. I didn’t tell the bobby who helped me. I didn’t think he would believe me.”

“That’s just as well. This sort of thing could cause a panic. I can handle it myself.”

“Youself?” Jenny said, standing up to glare at Vastra. “You can barely manage to walk and hold a pencil. What are you goin’ to do?”

“I will do whatever I have to do, Jenny,” she countered. “I cannot let you risk your life to rescue those children. We do not know what they want with them or how well armed they are.”

“I will risk whatever I have to save those children,” Jenny informed her Madam. “If we take a few days to prepare a plan and let you heal there is no reason to think we can’t handle this
ourselves.”

“The arrangement was that you would help me by researching,” Vastra stood to face Jenny. “I never agreed to letting you enter into combat.” Her tone was getting harsh and her demeanor insistent.

“I never said I would enter combat, Ma’am,” Jenny said. “I said I would help.”

“And how will you help?”

“I don’t know! I can cause a distraction. I can pick the locks. There are lots of ways I can help without havin’ to fight,” Jenny said. “Don’t forget, Ma’am, my job used to be getting into places I wasn’t supposed to get into.”

Vastra wasn’t convinced. “I am not concerned with getting in, Jenny. That part is easy. What if they overpower me and get to you? Jenny they could put you in that chamber.”

Jenny stepped toward Vastra. She was inches from the Silurian. “I don’t think you’ll let that happen.”

Let us go over it again,” Vastra insisted. “You will unlock the door on the ground level and we will assure that it will open. Then you will scale the wall to the opening you found and make sure there are only three or fewer individuals in the warehouse. Or at least no more that you can see. Once you confirm that, you will drop the iron rod causing a diversion. This should draw them to that end of the warehouse and away from the door. I will then stealthily make my entrance and evaluate from the inside.”

“What if the diversion causes them to come out the door right on top of you?” Jenny asked.

“It does not seem logical that they would investigate outside if the noise came from within,” Vastra surmised. “You just need to make sure they do not see you up there.”

“That, I can promise you,” Jenny smiled. “What about you, with your sword? Can you manage a fight?”

“I have practiced several hours a day for the last three days. There is nothing more I can do to prepare. My strength has returned and my motor skills are at ninety percent. I will be up for a fight,” Vastra assured her. “You must promise me you will stay outside. I will need you to run fetch the police if things go wrong. Above all we must rescue the children or else all of this is for naught.”

“Don’t worry, Ma’am,” Jenny smiled. “Saving the children will be my primary concern.”

Vastra smiled at Jenny.

“So all we do now is wait for it to get dark?” Jenny asked.

“Yes. I have arranged for a cab. We will depart at ten p.m.”

Vastra had donned her combat uniform. She wore the skirt-like pants that Jenny had seen her in when she practiced her sword in the basement, only this set was black. Her top was a heavy black
shirt that was wrapped around her torso and held in place with the aid of a hardened black leather vest. A wide leather strap crossed her body from right shoulder to left hip. It was attached to the vest, or so it seemed. Her katana was held within this strap and laid upon her back, the handle available above her right shoulder. A smaller sword, her tanto, was held in the front of the strap across her chest. Black leather gloves covered her hands and instead of her usual lace up boots, she wore thick, soft sole leather booties. All of this she covered with a heavy wool hooded cape.

Jenny too had dressed prepared for the events of the evening. She was in dark brown trousers, not a skirt, which offered her more freedom of movement. She had a dark blue button down shirt and a black vest on her torso and men’s work boots on her feet. She wore leather gloves, and also donned a heavy wool cape.

Each woman looked the other up and down as they met just before departure.

“Where are your picks?” Vastra asked.

“Here,” Jenny patted her vest. “There’s a pocket on the inside.”

“And the iron rod?”

“Here,” Jenny retrieved three small iron rods from her trouser pocket. “I thought three would make more noise.”

Vastra looked at the rods as if she wanted to say something, but decided against it. “Good.” Vastra still wasn’t happy that Jenny was coming along, but the plan necessitated a second person. And as long as Jenny remained out of the warehouse and ran the moment things went sour, no harm should come to her. “Are you sure you want to…”

“Yes.” Jenny didn’t let her finish her sentence. “I have to see these children saved. I have to do whatever I can to help with that.”

“We should go over the plan again,” Vastra said.

“No,” Jenny insisted. “We’ve been over it a hundred times. We both know what to do.”

“You are not to deviate from the plan,” Vastra asserted. “You are the safety measure to ensure the children’s rescue if something should happen to me.”

“I understand my part,” Jenny said.

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The night was clear and cold, but at least there wasn’t snow. The moon, a waxing crescent, had already set, offering no light. As the two women made their way toward the warehouse Vastra’s soft soled boots made no noise on the cobblestone streets.

“I need to get me some of them boots,” Jenny smiled. “I only thought I was quiet.”

Vastra didn’t respond. She was all business and entirely in the moment. She scanned the area for anyone that might interfere with the plan. She was again wondering if Jenny was ready for this.

“Not much further now,” Jenny said.

Vastra still didn’t answer, but rather slipped over to a shadow and stopped.

Jenny followed. “What is it, Ma’am?” Jenny asked, concerned.
“It is not too late for you to turn back,” Vastra looked at Jenny offering her one last “out.” “You could simply go fetch someone from the Yard.”

“We’ve already discussed this,” Jenny said. “I’m fine, Ma’am. I’ll do my part.”

“Very well,” Vastra said. “Lead the way. And keep the talking to a minimum.”

As they approached the warehouse Jenny stopped about a stone’s throw away. “There,” she pointed to a building with boarded up windows.

Vastra regarded the building and thought to herself. “I do not remember passing this building the night I was looking for the hum. And I do not hear the hum now.” She shook it off and decided the hum had nothing to do with this case.

“Follow close behind,” Vastra whispered. “When we get to the door I’ll listen for movement, then you can pick the lock.

Jenny smiled at Vastra. This was certainly not her first time at this sort of thing.

Vastra shed her cloak in the shadow and unsheathed her katana.

Jenny followed suite and pulled her lock picks from her vest pocket.

They approached the door and knelt. Vastra pressed her ear to the door and used her sensitive Silurian hearing to attempt to detect movement. Hearing nothing to cause her alarm, she nodded to Jenny.

Jenny made quick and quiet work of the lock. Vastra was both pleased and impressed at her skills.

Vastra motioned with her head for Jenny to move away from the door, then, as quietly as possible she turned the knob and delicately attempted to open the door. It moved without resistance. She didn’t open it enough to look in, only enough to know that she could. A door barred from the inside would throw the entire plan off and possibly result in their capture.

Vastra pointed to Jenny, then up to the top of the warehouse. Without hesitation Jenny disappeared around the building. Moments later, Vastra heard the “clink” and “clank” of the iron rods making their way down from the high opening.

Seizing the opportunity, Vastra quickly opened the door and slid inside. Taking a few seconds to evaluate her surroundings, she ducked behind a large cabinet then peeked out for another look. Three figures were searching the warehouse investigating the noise. They convened and appeared to be discussing what the source of the noise could be. One moved away from the group out of Vastra’s line of sight then returned with something in its hand.

“That is one of the iron rods,” Vastra said to herself. She had had concerns about Jenny bringing more than one. Sure three would make more noise, but one small rod out of place could be nothing; three meant something was up. But for now, they had only found the one.

The group studied the rod and looked around the warehouse. Vastra was able to get a good look at them as they searched.

They had sickly grey skin, were hairless, and had non-human proportions. They were taller and thinner than most humans by several inches and pounds. But otherwise had somewhat similar features: eyes, ears, nose, and mouth.
Their bodies were completely covered by iridescent clothing, including their hands and feet. Only their heads were exposed. Their ears were small and Vastra wondered how sensitive their hearing was. Their eyes were dark and seemed to lack adjustable pupils. Perhaps they were sensitive to light? If so, she could use this. Their mouths were almost lipless, with only the thinnest hint of extra flesh. Their noses were flatter and narrower than humans. Almost as if they were either just evolving the sense of smell or evolving away their nose altogether.

They found the other rods, and finally looked up to the opening where Jenny had been, and probably still was. They pointed and spoke more in a language Vastra neither understood nor recognized. They began to disperse. Two were heading toward the door she had just entered, and one remaining staring at the high opening.

Vastra’s heart rate increased and she gripped her katana tight. She steadied herself and looked back and forth from the opening where Jenny was to the two approaching aliens.

The moment was upon her. She had to make a decision. She would not let them leave. She would not let them get to Jenny.

In a flash Vastra left her hiding spot and placed herself between the two advancing aliens and the door. She had a wide stance and held her katana in a defensive position. “Halt!” she yelled.

The two aliens froze. Their faces unable to make expressions that Vastra could read. The third alien began to speak. The other two simply remained still.

“Hands up,” Vastra demanded. “Get on your knees.”

They just looked at her. The third continued to speak.

Perhaps they did not understand English. They were not being hostile but they were not obeying Vastra’s demands either.

The third alien spoke louder. Was it trying to convey orders to its comrades or did it believe if it spoke louder Vastra would somehow understand it? It began to move. Slowly. It was making its way toward a control panel to Vastra’s right on the other end of the room.

The two in front of her remained still, never taking their eyes off Vastra.

As the third alien approached the control panel, the door behind Vastra burst open. She was flanked. She stepped slightly to the side so that she could see how many were behind her, yet keep an eye on the ones in front.

It was Jenny!

“Get out!” Vastra yelled at Jenny.

“No time to argue, Ma’am,” Jenny replied. She held a board in her hands as a weapon.

The third alien picked up a device.

“Jenny, get out now,” Vastra yelled and moved to place herself solidly between Jenny and the aliens.

The alien pointed the device toward Vastra.

“Jenny get down!” Vastra yelled and stood firm.

Vastra stood for a moment and cocked her head to the side. “Is that a translator?” She yelled to the alien.

It processed her words and replied. “This. Is. A. Translator.” The voice was artificial and slow. The alien was moving its lips, but not in time with the words produced by the device.

Then, Vastra heard it. It was the low hum she had heard so many nights ago. Suddenly the alien with the device began to change, to shift into a more human form. Its body did anyway, but not its head. She assumed it had something to do with the iridescent clothing. It looked like a tall thin male figure complete with suit and tie.

“It is a chameleon device.” Vastra said to herself. “That is why I could not pinpoint it. It was moving.”

“Who are you?” Vastra demanded. “Why are you taking these children?” She was not about to lower her katana.


“Necessary for what?” Vastra asked.

“Allow. Me. To. Don. Helmet.” The words were slow to manifest into English.

Vastra considered the request. “Very well.”

The alien put the device back on the console. It then moved to a cabinet and retrieved a helmet. Donning the helmet, it sealed with the suit and transformed the alien’s head into a generic male appearance complete with balding scalp and large ears.

“That should be better,” the alien spoke. “My suit is complete. I can communicate with you now. Please lower your weapon.”

“Not a chance,” Vastra said. “Tell your friends to get on their knees and place their hands on their heads.”

“We are scientists,” the human-like alien said. “We are not warriors. We do not have weapons and are not skilled in combat.”

“Good to know,” Vastra said. “Now tell them to get on their knees with their hands on their heads.”

The alien spoke and the two got immediately on their knees and placed their hands on their heads.

“What have you done with the children?” Vastra asked.

“They’re in there,” Jenny pointed to a room in front of Vastra and to her left.

“They are in suspended animation,” the alien said. “They are unharmed and safe.”

“You can’ just kidnap children,” Jenny chided.

The alien regarded Jenny. “Our research says they are unwanted. They are vermin.”

Jenny stepped toward the alien.
Vastra stepped to the side, cutting her off. “Jenny, please.” Vastra pleaded.

“They aren’t vermin!” Jenny yelled. “They are children. They have families and they are missed. You… creatures took them. Took them away from their homes.”

The alien wrinkled its human brow. “Or research indicates they are unwanted.”

“I don’t give a bloody ‘ell about your ‘research’!” Jenny was fighting mad.

“Jenny please,” Vastra said. “Let me handle this.”

Jenny was silent.

“What are you doing to the children?” Vastra asked. “What is their purpose?”

“To study,” the alien said. “We are looking at human DNA.”

“What’s that?” Jenny yelled.

The alien looked at Jenny. “You are not advanced enough to understand, human.”

“Well I understand,” Vastra said. “In case you have not noticed, I am not human.”

“No. You are not. Your DNA would be fascinating.”

“If you make so much as one step toward me you will all perish,” Vastra said. “That goes for her too.” Vastra tilted her head toward Jenny.

“We do not need her DNA,” the alien said. “We have found the human genome to be quite simple. These specimen should do nicely.”

“You will release the children,” Vastra demanded. “Or else I will eliminate all three of you.”

“This is a scientific mission. Hostile actions will not be tolerated against us. Attack us and our fleet will send a squadron of soldiers to deal with you and your Jenny.” The alien threatened.

“You had better send more than a squadron,” Vastra threatened back.

The Silurian and the alien stared each other down.

“You do not need the children if all you want is their DNA,” Vastra finally said. “All you need is a sample.”

“We have other uses for the specimen.”

“I cannot allow you to take these children,” Vastra said.

“My orders are to return with them for processing,” the alien countered.

“Then it seems we are at a stalemate,” Vastra said.

The aliens on the floor began to speak to one another. Vastra wasn’t sure if they could understand any of what was being said or not. But she could not understand them. Perhaps they understood their comrade’s side of the conversation.

“My associates have suggested an arrangement,” the alien said. “We will collect samples from the specimen we have now. We will collect samples from you as well. We have never encountered
your species in our travels. Your DNA is likely superior to that of the human. Then we shall release the specimen into your custody.”

“Vastra, you can’t let them,” Jenny started to speak but Vastra cut her off.

“You may take hair and cheek swab samples from the children, nothing invasive. Then you will release them, unharmed, to my associate. She will escort them away. Then, I shall give you a sample of my blood. Afterwards you shall leave and not return. You may not take any more humans. That is the only deal.”

The three aliens conferred. “That is acceptable. I shall need my associates to assist me.”

“You can have one assistant,” Vastra said. “The other is collateral.”

The aliens conferred and one of the ones on the floor stood and joined the one in the human “skin.”

“Be quick about it,” Vastra said.

They opened the door to the hibernation chamber and a sweet vapor poured out into the warehouse along with bright light.

“Do you think we can trust them?” Jenny asked.

“I do not know,” Vastra admitted. “But honestly Jenny, we have no choice. When they release the children you must leave with them and get them to safety.”

“I won’t leave you here with them,” Jenny said.

“It is the deal I struck, Jenny. We must honor it and trust they will honor their end. If they attempt to apprehend me, I shall fight back. Do not fret, Love, I have faced worse.”

Vastra’s reassurance did nothing to quell Jenny’s fears.

Soon the aliens were leaving the hibernation chamber with vials and bags that were then placed into what Vastra assumed was a refrigeration unit.

Then, one by one, the children were brought out and amassed in a small area. Each child was dazed, wide eyed, and unblinking. They were like the others that Jenny had seen and she assumed they would have no memory of any of this.

“Your Jenny is free to take the specimen and leave,” the human-like alien said.

“I won’t leave you here,” Jenny said to Vastra.

“Jenny, you must,” Vastra was getting concerned that Jenny would undo the entire deal. “This is the only way to secure the safety of the children and get them home. You said the children were your primary concern.”

“But what about you?” she looked at Vastra with hurt and anguish in her eyes.

Vastra understood her expression. She placed the palm of her hand upon Jenny’s cheek. “I will be fine,” she said. “I will be right behind you. Just get them out of here before they wake up. This is something they should not have to face.”

Jenny nodded. And against every part of her desire she dropped the board she was holding and went to the children. She began herding them like sheep toward and through the door.
As she led the children away she looked back at the warehouse. The door had closed. Had she just made a grave mistake? It was no use to second guess now. She had to get the children to safety.

Moving with the children was slow and frustrating. It was six long blocks before Jenny found a bobby. “Officer,” she yelled. “Please. I have the children.”

The officer ran up to Jenny and the small horde of children. “What is it then, Miss?”

“These are the missing children,” she said. “I found them. In an abandoned warehouse. I have to get back there.”

“Wait,” the officer grabbed Jenny’s arm. “You can’t leave me here with all these kids.”

“I have to get back, she’s still there. I have to,” she was struggling to get away from the man’s grip.

“Calm down, Miss.” The officer began to blow his alert whistle to signal other officers. Soon three more uniforms were on the scene. Jenny was pleading to get back to the warehouse.

“Maybe we should make sure there aren’t any more,” one officer said noticing how frantic Jenny was.

“Right now our priority is getting these kids home,” another officer said.

“Smoke!” another officer yelled.

They all turned toward the direction Jenny had come from. There was a pillar of smoke rising into the cold night.

“Oi!” an officer yelled. “Call for the fire brigade!”

“Get the kids out of here,” the first officer ordered.

In all the confusion Jenny took the opportunity to run. She ran back toward the warehouse as fast as she could manage. The closer she got, the more apparent it was: the warehouse where she had just abandoned Vastra was ablaze.

“Vastra!” Jenny yelled at the top of her lungs as she ran closer.

The whole place was engulfed. Fueled, it seemed, by some unknown accelerant.

Jenny stopped in her tracks. “Oh God!” Jenny said. “She’s in there.”

A cool hand brushed Jenny’s chin as a cape was being placed over her shoulders.

“I am fine, Jenny.” A familiar voice said.

Jenny turned and before she could control herself she wrapped her arms around Vastra. “I was so scared.”

“Everything is fine,” Vastra said. “I had to destroy the technology.”

Jenny pulled away embarrassed. “I’m sorry, Ma’am.”

“Where are the children?” Vastra asked, simply ignoring Jenny’s apology.

“They are with the officers. I ran back when I saw the smoke.”
“This fire will destroy everything. It is fueled by the oxygen used in the hibernation chamber. You should get back to the children and I shall inform Detective Chief Inspector Lang we have found them.”

“Alright, Ma’am.”

“We will tell them we heard the children screaming from inside the burning building and that is how we found them. We cannot tell them of the aliens and what really happened. Do you understand?” Vastra was very clear with her demands. “Jenny, we must both tell the same story. This is of utmost importance.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Jenny said finally agreeing. “I will tell them we heard them from inside the burning warehouse.”

“This is a necessary lie, Jenny. You understand the consequences if this technology had fallen into the wrong hands.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“Go to the children. You will be more of an asset to them when they come to than the officers.”

Jenny and Vastra parted ways. Jenny headed toward the children while Vastra made her way to Scotland Yard.

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It was nearly three a. m. before both Vastra and Jenny finally made it home. All of the children had either been returned to their homes or set up in a shelter and given a warm bed for the night.

Jenny made tea and she and Vastra sat in front of the fire in the sitting room.

“What happened after I left?” Jenny finally asked.

“I fulfilled my promise and gave them a blood sample,” Vastra said. She had not volunteered any information on the subject.

“How did the fire start?” Jenny said. “You set it on purpose.”

“Yes.” Vastra said as she sipped her tea. “I told them the technology could not fall into human hands.”

“And they simply agreed to let you destroy all their things?” Jenny asked.

“Not at first,” Vastra said. “But they soon saw it my way.”

“Did you kill them?” Jenny asked point blank.

Vastra looked at Jenny. “Do you believe me capable of murder?”

Jenny thought about how to answer. “I believe you are capable of a lot of things for the right reasons.”

Vastra simply looked at Jenny.

“To protect me.”
“You were already safe. Out of the warehouse. Away from danger.”

“They could come back,” Jenny said.

“They told us if I harmed them they would send soldiers,” Vastra reminded Jenny.

“So what did you do with them?”

“I allowed them to put on their human disguises and leave,” Vastra said. “They have hailed their fleet to send a rescue transport. They will be leaving Earth shortly.”

“And you trust them?”

“I held up my end of the agreement, I can only hope they do the same,” Vastra said. “If I had to guess, I would say that if they do come back to Earth, it will not be here. Perhaps somewhere more remote where they can operate without interference.”

“I just hope I never see an alien again!” Jenny said.

Vastra laughed. She had been in the TARDIS with the Doctor. She knew of the vastness of space and the diversity of life among the stars. She also knew that chances were, there were already aliens among them.

“You did well, Jenny.” Vastra finally said. “With the case. You are the reason those children are home safe tonight and not a science experiment for those creatures. Your detective skills are impressive. And you stepped up when I was out of commission. I am proud of you.”

Jenny blushed. “Thank you, Ma’am. I just did what you taught me.”

Vastra smiled. “I must see to my swords now. They should be cared for and returned to the basement. Are you going to bed?”

“No,” Jenny said. “I’m too wound up. I can’t sleep. I’m goin’ to look through the case notes once more. See if I can find something I missed. Something that would have led me to the children sooner.”

“Very well,” Vastra said. “But I doubt you will find anything.”

Vastra left the sitting room and went to the basement. Carefully she unsheathed the long blade and cleaned it, although it appeared to have nothing on it. She returned it to its scabbard and then placed it onto the display rack where they are stored. She then removed the smaller blade, the tanto. It too looked clean, but as with the katana, she cleaned it thoroughly and returned it to its scabbard and onto the rack.

Ascending the stairs, she turned out the lamps in the kitchen and dining room and made her way toward the sitting room.

“Don’t stay up too late. We have to...” Vastra stopped mid-sentence as she stepped into the doorway of the room. Jenny was fast asleep on the settee covered with notes from the case file.

Vastra smiled, carefully removed the papers, and lifted Jenny from the sofa. She carried her upstairs and gently laid her in bed. Making sure she stayed warm, she covered her with a quilt and put more logs on the fire. She then approached her sleeping maid. Delicately, she laid a hand upon Jenny’s head and stroked her hair down its length letting the strands slip through her fingers as she did so. A gesture she would never do if Jenny were awake, but oddly something she had found
herself wanting to do more and more as of late. Her hair was soft and loose curls wrapped around her fingers.

As Vastra mindlessly held Jenny’s hair letting it fall from her fingers, the human let out a low moan and snuggled further down into the bed. The sound and motion startled Vastra and she withdrew her hand as if it had been stung.
Chapter 12: A lizard, a Maid, and a Thief Part I

Monday Mid-Afternoon

“No, I specifically remember telling you to get it when you went into my office for my gloves,” Vastra assured Jenny as they re-entered the front door that they had exited not fifteen minutes earlier. “And I do not care how many times you say otherwise.” Vastra continued to chastise Jenny as the brunette made her way across the entryway toward the office.

Jenny turned to face Vastra to argue back when all of a sudden, and all at once, Jenny saw Vastra’s body stiffen and felt a hand reach from behind and cover her mouth just as the chill of metal brushed across her throat. Her eyes widened and pleaded to Vastra for help.

“Jenny,” the word stuck in Vastra’s throat unable to reach her lips. Her eyes began to darken and swirl like storm clouds, but neither Jenny nor the man who seized her could see them behind her veil.

The man had materialized from Vastra’s office. His motions were fluid; seizing Jenny in one swoop simultaneously placing a hand over her mouth and a knife to her throat before she could react. He smiled when Vastra froze, seemingly helpless to move or even speak. He tightened his grip on Jenny and she let out an audible whimper.

“Harm her and you will be dead before your body hits the floor,” Vastra vowed.

“Empty threat,” he said. “I don’t see a pistol.”

Jenny struggled and tried to speak. Her eyes again pleaded with Vastra.

Then, Vastra did the unthinkable. “I do not need a weapon.” She lifted her veil, removing hat and all, to reveal her full Silurian self to the man. “I AM a weapon.” She snaked her tongue three feet toward him as a warning and quickly retracted it back into her mouth then let out a menacing hiss. “And you reek of fear, ape!”

The man stiffened and his grip on Jenny tightened.

Jenny tried once more to speak but his hand was clamped too tightly on her mouth.

“I know your scent, ape!” Vastra hissed.

“What are you?” the man demanded.

“The thing that kills you if you harm Jenny,” Vastra threatened again.

“Jenny?” the man said, seeming confused. “He loosened his hand from Jenny’s mouth enough for her to finally speak.

“Simon, don’t...” Jenny warned.

But before she could finish her sentence Vastra’s tongue lashed out and struck Simon in the neck.
His body fell to the floor, limp. The knife skidded across the hardwood entryway.

“Simon!” Jenny yelled and fell to her knees to check on her once mentor.

“How do you know this ape?” Vastra demanded.

“What did you do to him?” Jenny pleaded. “Simon. Simon!” She frantically checked to see if he was still alive.

“He will live,” Vastra said, disgusted. She made her way to Simon and, completely ignoring the frantic Jenny, bent down and heaved him up and over her shoulder.

“Where are you taking him?” Jenny asked, following Vastra through the dining room and into the kitchen.

“To the basement,” Vastra said.

“What do you going to do to him?”

“Tie him up and interrogate him; but first I have some questions for you.” Stopping at the basement door Vastra turned toward Jenny. “You will wait here.”

Jenny paced nervously back and forth across the kitchen for what seemed to her like half an hour or more, though in reality it was only five minutes. Finally Vastra returned. “What did you...”

“Not here,” Vastra snapped. “Come to my office.”

The two women were barely in Vastra’s office with the door closed behind them before Jenny spoke again. “What did you do to him?” Jenny demanded Vastra tell her.

Vastra made her way across the room and behind her desk where she just stood. “I dosed him with enough venom to knock him out, but not enough to kill him. He will be out for a while and when he regains consciousness I will interrogate him.”

Jenny paced back and forth with Vastra’s desk separating them. She started to speak but Vastra quickly cut her off.

“You will explain to me how you know this ape,” Vastra demanded.

Jenny straightened herself up and stopped pacing. She was not about to appear weak in this moment. She would own her past and suffer whatever judgement Vastra had for her. “He was my mentor,” Jenny began. “I met him in a pub on my sixteenth birthday and I trained with him for two years. He was the one who taught me how to use the lock picks; how to be a burglar. I struck out on my own right before I burglarized you,” she paused, “while you were investigatin’ him.”

“So you used the fact that I was investigating him to plan your access into my home?”

“No,” Jenny started, “well, yes. But I didn’t know you were investigatin’ him. I just knew you were out, I didn’t know what case. ‘ow could I?”

Vastra studied Jenny. She wanted to believe her and not use her tongue as a lie detector, as she would later with Simon. “So that was all a coincidence?”

“I swear it,” Jenny pleaded. “I heard a rumor about a lady detective. Heard she was paid very handsomely by Scotland Yard and figured I’d have a go at her safe. That’s all. I had already left out on my own. I had no idea that was him until...” Jenny trailed off, refusing to finish her thought.
“Until what?” Vastra demanded.

Jenny immediately regretted her last few words. “Until I went to visit him in jail.” She hung her head. She had never wanted Vastra to know all of this.

Vastra straightened up and pulled herself taller. Were they playing her? Had she and Simon been in collusion, plotting to rob her and leave London? So many thoughts swirled in her head. “When did you visit him?” she finally asked.

Jenny moved closer to the desk that separated the two women. “It was right before I finished paying my debt to you. I was in the market and one of his boys approached me.” Jenny saw a look of confusion wash across Vastra’s face. “He runs a gang of boys; I was the only girl he had ever trained. He trains them to be petty thieves and burglars and then he gets a cut of their loot.”

“Go on,” Vastra insisted.

“One of his boys told me that Simon had gotten pinched and that he had been asking for me. They tried to find me, but since I was in your debt I hadn’t been ‘round my usual hang outs. They eventually gave up. But when I found out about Simon I went to visit him.” Jenny paused.

“And?” Vastra wanted Jenny to volunteer the information. She didn’t want to have to probe for it.

“And he told me that he had heard the guards talking about some female detective. Someone the Yard brought in for special, really difficult cases. He reckoned she was the one who finally pinched him. Accordin’ to his own ego, only the best could have bested him.” Jenny was obviously leaving out the more inflammatory details of the conversation. No need to rile Vastra any more than she already was.

“Why had he asked for you? What did he want?” Vastra asked.

“He wanted to offer me a job,” Jenny said. It was all she could do to keep her head up and divulge this information to Vastra. The shame of everything, her life as a thief, her burglary of Vastra’s home, all of it was flooding back. But she held her head up and continued without being prompted. “He offered me the job of finding this female detective and robbing her of all she was worth.”

“Ha!” Vastra laughed before she could stop herself. “Did you inform him of how well that worked out for you the first time you tried it?”

“No,” Jenny said. “I didn’t tell him about that.”

“What did you tell him, Jenny?”

“I told him it would be foolish to think anyone could steal from such a detective. That whoever was responsible for pinching him shouldn’t be trifled with. And I told him I wouldn’t do what he was askin’ and it would be wise for him to just drop it.”

“I see. And what did he say to that?” Vastra asked. She was finding all of this information very insightful. She didn’t realize Jenny had it in her to keep such secrets.

“He wasn’t happy that I turned him down. But he dropped it.”

“What else?”

“That’s all. I never went back to see him. I didn’t want you to know and I couldn’t risk seein’ you at the Yard. I had no reason to be there.”
“Why did you keep this from me?” Vastra asked.

“I’m not proud of my past. I’ve told you that,” Jenny took a breath. “I didn’t see the point in tellin’ you because he said he wouldn’t ask anyone but me to do the job. Said his boys couldn’t ‘ave ‘andled it. I never thought he’d try it himself. Besides, I don’t know why he’s even out.”

“That is something I intend to find out.” Vastra paused, took a breath, and readied her next question. “Why did you not tell him you were my maid?”

Jenny shifted. “I don’t know. I didn’t want him to think less of me. I knew he wouldn’t understand. I didn’t want to disappoint him.”

“But your loyalty is with me now?” Vastra’s voice raised slightly.

“Yes.” Jenny’s voice pleaded for Vastra to understand that she had changed. That life with Simon is over, not just for now, but for good.

“Then you’ll have no objections to how I handle this criminal.” It was a statement, not a question.

“What are you goin’ to do to ‘im?”

“You remember what your fate would have been if the Doctor had not been there that night to stop me.” Again, it was a statement, not a question.

“You can’t kill ‘im,” Jenny begged. “He may be a thief, but he’s a good man.”

“He was here to rob me at the very least,” Vastra said. “And he has seen my face. He knows I am not human.”

“And whose fault is that?”

“He had a knife to your throat. I thought he was going to kill you.”

“I didn’t realize you cared that much for me.” And with that Jenny stopped the argument dead in its tracks.

“I care, Jenny,” she said in a hushed tone.

“You don’t always act like it,” Jenny said, lowering her volume to match Vastra’s.

There was a pause as both women dared not look at one another.

“Please don’t kill him,” Jenny finally said. “If you let me talk to him I can convince him to keep your secret.”

“I will not make any promises,” Vastra said. “His fate is in his own hands now.”

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Simon was beginning to regain consciousness. He was trying to get a handle on his surroundings; but visibility was poor in the low light which only amplified the fact that his vision was still somewhat blurry from the venom. He was restrained to a chair and sitting in a near-empty basement. All he could make out was a single shelf with three swords on a rack and a chair (to which he was currently tied).

“If I could just get to those,” he thought to himself and began to rock the chair back and forth in an
attempt to move toward the swords. He wasn’t able to move and instead turned the chair over onto its side smacking his head against the floor.

“Not your finest hour,” Vastra said. She was no longer in a dress fit for London society, she was in a uniform that resembled a keikogi and hakama, but also looked all together foreign.

He strained to look up at her from the floor as she walked around him. A small pool of blood began to form beneath his head.

With little effort, she grabbed the chair and lifted him upright again. “You are the scum I put behind bars two years ago for the art heist. I do believe you have not served your full sentence, thief.”

“Let me talk to Jenny,” Simon demanded. He was still groggy from the venom.

“You are in no position to be making demands,” Vastra said. She was intrigued that Jenny was his first thought upon awakening. She could use that.

“Let me talk to Jenny or I swear to God when I get out of here I’ll tell everyone who and what you are.”

“Again, Mr. Higby, you are in no position to be making demands or threats. Since I know you have not served your full sentence I can only assume you somehow escaped. If you or your body is never seen again Scotland Yard will just assume you have left the country.” She lowered her face to within inches of his. “I could kill you right now and no one would care or be the wiser.”

“Jenny would care. Besides, if you wanted to kill me you would have already,” Simon shot back. “You want something. Or you need something from me.”

“You are alive simply because I have not killed you,” Vastra said. “I suggest you keep that in mind and answer my questions. If you do not, then you are of no use to me and I will kill you.”

“Is this how you pinched me? You capture one of my associates and torture them and threaten them until they rolled over?” Simon spoke with so much contempt in his voice. “Did you do this to Jenny? Is that why she works for you?”

“Jenny is of no concern to you,” Vastra was losing patience with Simon.

“If you’ve hurt Jenny so help me I’ll...”

“You will what?” Vastra chided. “Let us not forget which one of us is tied to a chair. Besides, what do you care about Jenny? Is she not just someone you used? Someone you trained to do your dirty work so if she got caught you were still free to train more unsuspecting children?”

“I care more than you ever could,” Simon jabbed. “What are you, anyway? Are you even capable of feelings?”

“I am capable of a good many things, Mr. Higby,” Vastra assured him. “Are any of the pieces you stole still in London?”

“I’m not answering your questions. Let me talk to Jenny.”

“Answer my questions and I will let you speak to her,” Vastra said.

“I don’t trust you.”
“That is not my concern,” Vastra said and continued her questioning. “There are pieces that you stole that are unaccounted for. Are any of them still in London?”

“No.” Simon said through gritted teeth.

Vastra snaked out her tongue and tasted the air. Simon’s stench permeated her basement, which she resented him for; but she could detect the lies in his pheromones. “Yes, there are. I can tell when you are lying, Mr. Higby. If you want to speak to Jenny you will need to start telling me the truth.”

Simon didn’t speak. He just seethed with hate and stared at Vastra.

“There are pieces here in London,” Vastra said. “That is fact. How many?”

“I’m thirsty. It’s hard to remember things when I’m thirsty.”

Vastra was reaching her limit with this insolent ape; but she needed to know about these pieces that remained at large. “Tell me how many pieces remain in London Mr. Higby. Otherwise I will just start counting until I know I have hit the right number. If you tell me without me having to do that I will have Jenny bring you some water.”

Simon believed her. He didn’t know how she knew, but he believed that she could tell when he was lying. His best option at this point was to see Jenny and hope she would help him escape. “Three.”

Vastra tasted the air and found no dishonesty with his statement. She turned on her heel and headed back upstairs.

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“I’m going down there,” Jenny said and stormed past Vastra toward the basement door.

Vastra instinctively grabbed Jenny’s arm and forcefully wrenched her around.

Jenny looked to her arm and then into Vastra’s eyes.

Vastra immediately regretted her action and released Jenny. “Forgive me.”

“You can’t do this, Vastra,” Jenny said.

Vastra was momentarily taken aback at the use of her name. “He is thirsty. I told him you would bring him water.”

Jenny went to the tap and filled a pitcher and grabbed a glass. She was more than happy to oblige.

“Jenny,” Vastra’s tone was soft. “He has information I need. There are things he stole that are unaccounted for and I believe are still in London. They are items of great import and historical significance. The Yard hopes to return them to their rightful owner. He has told me that three pieces are still in London. I need to know their whereabouts.”

“And you want me to get it out of him?” Jenny asked, hands on her hips.

“No,” Vastra said. “I am simply telling you so you will understand.”

“Understand what?” Jenny asked. “Are you trying to justify torturing this man for information? Torturing Simon for information.”
“No one is torturing anyone,” Vastra said.

“He’s tied up. In your basement. You knocked him out with poison.” Jenny laid out her case.

“He broke into my home. He put a knife to your throat, Jenny. He is lucky I did not kill him on the spot,” Vastra said.

“I am well aware of what you do to people who break into your home, Vastra.” Jenny used her name again. “If your friend had not been there the night you found me I know what my fate would have been. But you listened to him and you spared me and if I am not mistaken you do not regret that decision.”

Jenny let that soak in.

“And now, I am asking you to spare Simon’s life. If for no other reason than to do it for me. Do it because I am askin’ you to, just as your friend asked for me.”

“He is a wanted criminal, Jenny. He has escaped jail and is at large. He has seen my face and he has already threatened to expose me if I do not let him go. And I cannot do that. So what would you have me do?”

“I don’t know,” Jenny said quietly. “Let me talk to him. I’ll make him see reason. Even if you won’t.”

With that Jenny stormed past Vastra with the pitcher and the glass and disappeared into the basement.

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“You’ve gotten yourself in a real fine fix, ‘aven’t ya, Simon?” Jenny said standing in front of the groggy, bound rogue.

“Jenny,” he slurred.

“Here, drink this,” she held a glass of water in front of him.

He leaned over and drank the water as if it was the first he had had in days. “What did that thing do to me?” He asked.

“Her name is Madam Vastra”

“What is she?” he asked, with contempt.

“Why did you come here, Simon?” Jenny asked, avoiding the question. She wetted her handkerchief and tried to clean the blood from his head. “Why didn’t you just leave town?”

“I told you I wanted her to pay for putting me behind bars.”

“And I told you to leave well enough alone. Didn’ I?”

“How long have you worked for her?” Simon asked. “You do work for her, right? Are you her informant? Jenny Flint you better not have rolled over on me. You disappeared right about the time I got pinched.” Simon’s senses and memory were coming back.

“I do work for her,” Jenny said.
Simon lowered his head. “God, Jenny, why?”

“I work for her because she pinched me after I broke in here and robbed her blind,” Jenny confessed. “I stole everything she had. Spent it. Gave it away. Otherwise lost it, and then she caught me.”

“What did she do? Blackmail you into becoming her informant?”

“No,” Jenny smiled. “She was going to kill me. In a filthy alley. She caught me, put her hand around my throat, and was well on her way to striking me dead right on the spot.”

“Why didn’t she?”

“There was a man with her. Her friend. I don’t know ‘im but he pleaded with her to spare me and let me work off my debt. So I became her maid. I worked off my debt and stayed on as her maid. It was nice having a roof and hot meals and a warm bed. Better than living on the streets. I never want to go back to that life Simon.”

“What are you suggesting, Jenny?” Simon asked. “I become her butler?”

“No hardly,” Jenny said. “You’re a wanted man. And you haven’t stolen from her, so you don’t have a debt to repay.”

“Then what?”

“I don’t know,” Jenny said.

Jenny gave him more water and he drank again like it was all he’d had for days.

“I have to go now,” Jenny said. “I suggest you just do whatever she says. Tell her whatever she wants to know.”

“That’s it? You just come down here to tell me to do as she says? Tell me to turn over, be her dog, and maybe I’ll get to live?”

“I’m saying that after you put a knife to my throat, you’re lucky you’re still alive. Madam doesn’t take kindly to people threatening her maid.”

“Madam,” Simon scoffed. “Get out of here Jenny. I don’t even know you anymore.”

Jenny left the basement and expected to see Vastra in the kitchen, but she wasn’t there. Entering the dining room she saw Vastra sitting at the table.

“I’m going to bed.” Jenny said. “You’ll have to make your own supper tonight.”

“Jenny,” Vastra said.

“Good night.”

With that, Jenny left the dining room and headed upstairs.

Vastra returned to the basement.

Simon was trying once again to reach the swords on the shelf.

Without hesitation, Vastra whipped out her tongue and struck Simon in the neck. He fell to the
ground unconscious and Vastra went back upstairs to her office.

Tuesday Morning

Five a.m. the next morning Jenny’s feet hit the floor, just like any other day. Only today she would change her routine. Instead of tending to Vastra’s fire and breakfast, she first tended to Simon. He was still tied to the chair. His head was down and his whole body was slumped over.

She had warmed water and brought down towels to properly clean his wounds. As she delicately washed his face and neck he began to come to.

His body jerked awake. He looked around wide-eyed and bewildered trying to figure out where he was.

“Shhhh,” Jenny softly cooed. “You’re alright.”

“Where am I?” he asked.

“You’re still in Madam Vastra’s basement,” she said softly. “I’m getting you cleaned up and then I’m going to bring you down some breakfast.”

“Untie me, Jenny,” he pleaded. “Just untie me and let me go. I’ll leave town and I won’t tell anyone. I swear.”

“I can’t do that, Simon,” she said, standing up. “I’ll be back with some breakfast.”

“Jenny, wait,” he yelled. “Jenny.”

When Jenny reached the kitchen Vastra was sitting at the small table. Jenny knew that her sensitive Silurian hearing had caught every word.

“You can’t leave him tied up like that forever,” she said. “You need to let him go.” Jenny began to gather eggs and bread and cheese for Simon’s breakfast.

“That is one option,” Vastra said.

“And what’s the other option?” Jenny asked. “Kill him?”

“That is another,” Vastra said. “But there is a third. I could turn him back in to the Yard.”

“He’s already said he would tell them you aren’t human. You won’t risk that.” Jenny was flat with Vastra as she continued to prepare Simon’s breakfast.

“I suppose you are right,” Vastra said. “But how am I to trust him if I simply let him go? He could blackmail me indefinitely. I need to ensure he will not do that.”

“He may be a thief,” Jenny said. “But if he gives you his word he’s good for it.”

“I am afraid I will need more than his word and your endorsement,” Vastra said. “I will need absolute assurance.”

Jenny wondered if she really knew Vastra as well as she thought she did. She plated Simon’s breakfast and looked at the Silurian. “Are you going to untie him so he can eat?”

“No.” Vastra said bluntly.
With an exasperated sigh Jenny left the kitchen and disappeared into the scullery.

Half an hour later Jenny returned to the kitchen with an empty plate and pitcher. Vastra was still at the table.

“I’m not making you another meal until you untie him and stop treating him like an animal,” Jenny said.

“I managed fine before you were here,” Vastra said. “I’ll manage now.”

“I’m getting ready and I’m going out,” Jenny said. “I can’t stand to look at you right now. And I won’t sit by while you get your “absolute assurance” from him either.”

Vastra offered no excuses or apologies. In fact, she said nothing.

Jenny stormed out and within minutes could be heard leaving through the front door.

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Just past six p.m. Vastra heard the front door open and close and the sound of Jenny’s footsteps enter the kitchen then disappear into the basement.

Within seconds, Jenny stormed into Vastra’s office. “Where’s Simon?”

Vastra looked up from her case file. “I have no idea.”

“Don’t play dumb with me, Vastra,” Jenny said. “I don’t know what you did to him, but there’s blood all over that basement.”

“He and I came to an accord,” she said.

“What the ‘ell does that mean?” Jenny was livid.

“It means I no longer have to worry about him exposing me and he is now free.”

“So you just let him go?”

“No, I did not “just” let him go,” Vastra said. “I told you, we came to an accord.”

“What? Did you beat him until he begged for his life? Begged you to stop, anything just to get you to leave him be?”

“No.” Vastra was not volunteering information.

“Did you kill him, Vastra?” Jenny asked point blank.

“What do you think?” Vastra just looked at Jenny.

“I think if you did, you are indeed a monster.” Jenny spun on her heel and left the office.

Vastra heard her footfalls up the stairs and into her room. Letting out a sigh, she got up to try to smooth things over with her maid.

The knock startled Jenny. “Go away.” She said like an insolent child.

“Jenny, please,” Vastra said through the door. “May I come in?”
“It’s your house,” Jenny shot back.

Vastra opened the door and saw Jenny. Her hair was down, out of its usual bun and falling about her shoulders. If it had been possible for Vastra to blush she would have turned bright pink as she was instantly taken back to that January night she let her fingers run through Jenny’s thick mane.

“What do you want?” Jenny’s voice pulled Vastra back to reality.

“Perhaps there is nothing I can say to make you believe me, even if I recounted to you all that transpired today while you were out. But Simon and I did come to an agreement and I do believe my secret is safe. And he is now free, save for the fact he should not be seen in London again.”

“Why is the basement covered in blood?” Jenny asked.

“Negotiations,” was all Vastra would divulge.

“Why won’t you tell me what happened?” Jenny asked. “What am I to think?”

“Think whatever you shall, Jenny,” Vastra said. “I cannot divulge what transpired between Simon and me. All I can do is assure you that last I saw he was alive.”

“I want to believe you, Vastra, I do,” Jenny said. “But why didn’t I get the chance to say goodbye? Why would he just leave without saying goodbye?”

Vastra could see the pain in Jenny’s eyes and hear it in her voice. She couldn’t tell Jenny the truth, no matter how much she wanted to stop her from hurting.

“Just get out,” Jenny finally said. “I’m tired. I just want to sleep.”

Wednesday Mid-Morning

The next morning proceeded as usual with Jenny donning her maid uniform and performing her morning duties. She went out of her way to see as little of Vastra as possible, still not forgiving her for holding Simon hostage. Still not forgiving Simon for leaving without a goodbye.

The brass knocker struck the plate and the “clank” reverberated throughout the house. As Vastra readied herself in her office, Jenny answered the door.

“Good afternoon,” Jenny greeted the man, “how may I help you?”

“I’m DCI Lang with Scotland Yard. Is Madam Vastra in?”

“Certainly sir,” Jenny smiled. “Come in. May I take your hat and coat?”

“Thank you.”

As Jenny hung DCI Lang’s things by the door she couldn’t help but think that the reason for his house call was to discuss Simon’s escape. Vastra was the Detective who solved the case after all, and they had gone to great lengths to keep that fact secret lest Scotland Yard take a serious shot to the ego.

“Right this way, sir.”

Stopping at Vastra’s office door Jenny politely knocked. A gesture the two women had outgrown some time ago when alone; but necessary when guests were in the house.
“Come in,” Vastra called from inside.

Jenny opened the French doors and escorted him inside. “DCI Lang to see you, Ma’am,” Jenny announced.

“Thank you Jenny.” Vastra stood behind her desk, now in full veil and gloves. “Please Detective Chief Inspector Lang, have a seat,” Vastra said motioning to one of the chairs opposite her desk. “Jenny has just prepared tea. Would you care for a cup?”

“Why yes, thank you.” He smiled at Jenny.

Jenny went to the tea service and began to prepare a cup.

“To what do I owe the pleasure of your company,” Vastra asked.

Lang looked toward Jenny, then back to Vastra. “Perhaps I should wait until we are alone,” he said.

“That is not necessary,” Vastra said. “Jenny is quite used to keeping confidences.”

Lang wasn’t comfortable divulging case information in front of the staff, but proceeded with Vastra’s permission. “The art thief you apprehended a couple of years ago, Simon Higby, escaped from prison two days ago.”

Vastra tried to look shocked, but thanks to her veil her complete lack of surprise was hidden. “Is that so,” she managed to say once she realized she should, in fact, say something.

Jenny had just finished pouring Lang’s tea and was about to ask if he took sugar or cream when he finished his announcement.

“He was found dead this morning. He was bound and severely beaten.” He said bluntly.

Jenny dropped the lid to the sugar bowl onto the tray and both detectives turned to look at her.

“Sorry,” she said and ran out of the office clearly flustered.

“I knew I shouldn’t have said that in front of her.”

Vastra looked at Lang and cocked her head to the side.

“Sweet young girl like that,” he said. “She shouldn’t hear about all the gore we face in this line of work.”

“What exactly was the cause of death?” Vastra asked.

“Unknown,” Lang said. “The doc is taking a look at him later today. But he looked like he’d been tied up for a while and roughed up quite a bit. Several contusions to the head and several cuts to his body. Whoever tortured him knew what they were doing.”

“Any leads?” Vastra asked.

“Not yet,” he said. “My theory is that whoever hired him for that heist in the first place wants the rest of the pieces they paid for. Probably even helped him escape just to beat it out of him. But, if you ask me, one less criminal to worry about.”

With that DCI Lang stood and Vastra followed suite.
“Sorry to come by your home,” he said. “But I thought you’d want to know.”

“Yes, thank you,” Vastra said. “If you discover anything, please notify me.”

“I will.”

“I will see you out,” she said coming out from behind the desk.

As soon as the front door closed Vastra made her way through the house looking for Jenny. She shed her veil and gloves on the dining room table as she walked through and into the kitchen.

“What did you do?” Jenny screamed at her as soon as the kitchen door opened. “What did you do to him? Why?” Tears were streaming down Jenny’s face.

“Jenny. I did not kill him.”

“He said he would keep your secret,” Jenny cried.

“Jenny, I...” Vastra pleaded.

“I can’t be here,” Jenny said and she stormed past Vastra.

After a moment to collect her thoughts, Vastra gave chase up the stairs and down the hall to Jenny’s room.

Jenny was packing clothes into a bag.

“What are you doing?” Vastra asked.

“What does it look like I’m doing?” Jenny said. “I’m leaving.”

“Where will you go?”

“To a friend’s.” Jenny said as she pushed past Vastra.

Vastra made to grab her, but thought better of it.

Jenny descended the stairs and slammed the door on her way out.

Chapter End Notes

I'm really appreciating all the comments. They are always welcomed and encouraged.
A Lizard, a Maid, and a Thief Part II

Chapter Summary

The author recommends you re-read Chapter 12: A Lizard, a Maid, and a Thief Part I before reading Part II. This chapter is not purely linear, so pay attention to the section headings that will keep you on track.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 13: A Lizard, a Maid, and a Thief, Part II

**Flashback to Tuesday (yesterday) Morning**

“I’m not making you another meal until you untie him and stop treating him like an animal,” Jenny said.

“I managed fine before you were here,” Vastra said. “I’ll manage now.”

“I’m getting ready and I’m going out,” Jenny said. “I can’t stand to look at you right now. And I won’t sit by while you get your “absolute assurance” from him either.”

Vastra offered no excuses or apologies. In fact, she said nothing.

Jenny stormed out and within minutes could be heard leaving through the front door.

Vastra ate a breakfast of cold liver and blood and realized just how much better her breakfasts had become since Jenny had come to live with her. “Time to deal with this ape,” she said to herself.

Simon didn’t look much better even after Jenny had cleaned him up and fed him breakfast. The venom from Vastra’s tongue had run its course, but over twelve hours of being tied to a chair and left to stew took a lot out of a man.

“Jenny is very upset with me,” Vastra said as she slowly paced in front of Simon. “She has left for the day whilst I deal with you. She even shirked her duties this morning and made breakfast for you instead of me.”

“Maybe she likes me more,” he smiled.

“Perhaps,” Vastra said. “Or perhaps she just feels sorry for you.”

“I’ll take all the sympathy I can get right about now,” Simon said. “Don’t suppose I’ll be getting any from you, now will I?”

“I am afraid not,” Vastra said. “You do understand my predicament; do you not, Mr. Higby?”

“Looks like I’m the one in the predicament here, not you,” he spat back.
“I would say we are both in very different predicaments,” Vastra said. “I am not unreasonable, Mr. Higby. I simply need absolute assurance that you will keep my confidence. I will not turn you back to Scotland Yard, as I am sure you would divulge my secret identity instantly. And how could I blame you? After all it is because of me you were in that awful place. And Jenny has expressly forbidden me to kill you outright. And while I do not make it a habit of bending to the will of my maid, she seems to see redeeming qualities in you and has convinced me not to kill you.”

She paused and let Simon think on what she had just said.

“So, here we are. I am willing to let you walk out of here a free man, all you have to do is convince me I can trust you.”

“And how do you suppose I do that?” Simon asked.

“Let us start by me untying you, and you not attempting to escape,” Vastra looked at Simon. “Is that fair?”

What choice did he have? “Fair,” Simon nodded.

Vastra moved behind Simon. Starting with his ankles she untied the complicated knots with ease. Then she began on his wrists. “Remember, do not attempt to escape. We must begin to build trust.” Vastra wasn’t worried about him escaping. One flick of her toxic tongue and she would have him back on the ground and unconscious in an instant.

For several minutes Simon stretched in the chair and flicked his hands trying to get the circulation back in his fingers and arms. He tapped his feet on the ground and stretched his legs out and back in. Standing up he bent to touch his toes and then reached to the ceiling. He cracked his neck and popped his back and even ran in place a bit.

He rubbed his wrists and Vastra imagined he must have felt a bit like she had felt after her brush with frostbite back in January. Watching him closely, she noticed the subtle glance toward her swords. She decided it was best to block him from the blades; so she slowly and casually made her way between them.

His patience and direction paid off and as Vastra stepped between him and the shelf, he bull rushed her and landed his shoulder squarely into her midsection. His bulk was enough to compensate for his lost strength, and he was able to push her backwards into the shelf. Scrambling to reach past her and grab a sword he toppled the rack with all three blades to the ground. Diving to retrieve a sword, he came up with the katana, the longest of the three blades. He threw the scabbard to the ground and readied himself for the fight.

Vastra smiled as Simon clumsily held the sword more like a club than the delicate instrument it was. “So you want to dance?” She hissed.

“I reckon if I just kill you, my predicament is solved. Wouldn’t you agree?” Simon smiled. “And you’ve already said you won’t kill me, so what do I have to lose?”

Vastra reached down and picked up the wakizashi, the mid-length sword. “A hand, an ear,” she said. “There are so many parts you could lose and still be alive.” She unsheathed the blade and held it delicately, expertly in her hand. She retained the scabbard in her off hand.

Simon let out a yell and rushed toward Vastra, swinging wildly with the katana. With little effort Vastra simply stepped aside to avoid the incoming charge and ran the blade of her wakizashi across his arm. He yelped and grabbed his bicep. Blood ran between his fingers and down his arm.
Vastra flicked her blade splattering a stream of blood onto the wall and floor. “Are you ready to talk or shall we continue this pointless exercise?” she goaded Simon.

Another charging attack by Simon yielded the same result.

“You cannot beat me,” Vastra said. “You know that.”

“It’s crossed my mind,” Simon said, now attempting to stop the bleeding on his other arm. “But again, what choice do I have?”

Thinking he may have a better chance at overpowering Vastra with his fists, rather than a weapon she was clearly more adept with, Simon tossed the katana into the corner.

Vastra cringed at the clanking sound it made as it skidded across the floor and she calmly sheathed her wakizashi. Picking up the rack and returning it to the shelf she asked, “How are you going to earn my trust, Simon?”

Simon bull rushed her again. She stepped aside and used his own momentum against him and threw him into the wall causing his head to burst open and bleed. He promptly passed out from the blow.

Vastra sighed at the frailty of humans. She picked up the katana and the tanto and returned them to the rack and left Simon unconscious and bleeding on her basement floor.

When Simon came to there was a plate with cheese and bread, and a bottle of whiskey sitting on the floor beside him. Holding his head, he sat up and groaned. He looked around and saw no one. He thought about making a run for it, but knew better. Within minutes Vastra made her way down to the basement.

“Is Jenny back?” he asked as he bit into the bread and washed it down with a pull from the whiskey bottle.

“Why do you ask?”

“Because I don’t think you’re compassionate enough to bring me food or smart enough to know I wanted whiskey,” he said.

“Contrary to how you perceive my exterior, Mr. Higby, I am not a monster,” Vastra said. “I told you we need to establish trust. I would hope that by me not killing you when you attacked, I would win your trust. But then I remembered that you apes are a peculiar lot, so I thought food and whiskey might convince you.”

“I only trust that you are tending to your own self interests,” Simon said as he finished the last of the bread and cheese.

“Well that is at least something,” Vastra said. “And I trust that you have figured out that you cannot best me with sword nor fist. Nor can you escape without me felling you with my venom.”

“Looks like we’re trusting each other already,” Simon said taking another pull of whiskey.

Vastra looked at the whiskey bottle. Simon had drank several large pulls and she figured it was just about enough to do what she needed done. In a flash, she flicked out her tongue and struck Simon in the neck.

Instead of passing out, he grabbed the spot and yelped. “Bloody hell!” The room began to spin and
his vision blurred. “What did you …” He dropped the bottle and whiskey spilled onto the floor.

Vastra grabbed him underneath his arms and dragged him to the edge of the basement. He attempted to flail in protest, but it was as though all of his strength had left him. She leaned him against the wall and took a seat in a chair in front of him.

She gave the venom a few moments to work then proceeded with her questioning. “What is your name?”

“Simon Higby,” he responded in a slow slur. “What did you do?”

“I have figured out that with the right dose of alcohol and venom, I can get you apes to tell me the truth. Or at least, you have a really hard time not telling the truth. We were not going to get very far at the rate we were going, and Jenny is right about one thing, I cannot leave you tied up in my basement forever.” She paused to take a breath. “So, Mr. Higby, you know my secret. Now please, tell me yours.”

Simon laughed. “Jenny doesn’t love you, ya know.”

“Interesting,” Vastra thought to herself. “Again, Jenny was the first thing he mentioned.”

Simon continued to laugh.

“But she loves you?” Vastra asked.

“No.” Simon slowly stopped laughing. “I hoped, at one time. But it was obvious she didn’t when she visited me in jail.”

“Was it not obvious before that?” Vastra asked.

“I held out hope. Until then.”

“But you love her?” Vastra continued the questioning.

“Yes,” Simon said. “What’s not to love?”

“She said that she was the first female you took in and trained for your gang of thieves,” Vastra said.

“Yes. I could tell she was special that first night at the bar.” Simon smiled. His speech was slow. “You must have seen something in her too to spare her life after she robbed you blind.”

Vastra scoffed. “I promised a friend I would spare her.”

“That may be why you spared her in that alley,” Simon coughed. “But since then.” He trailed off. The alcohol and venom was making him sleepy.

“You still have not given me a reason not to kill you, Mr. Higby.”

“I’ll keep your bloody secret,” Simon finally said. “If you let me go, I’ll keep your secret.”

“Why?” Vastra asked.

“Because Jenny asked me to. Because if I tell your secret you’ll be sent away. And Jenny will be back on the streets. And I can’t be the reason for that,” he finally said.
“So you will keep my secret out of your love for Jenny?” Vastra asked.

“Yes.” Simon said. “I’ll keep your secret and you can never tell Jenny that I love her. I’ll have to leave. I’m a wanted man, by both sides of the law, and she’ll be in danger if she comes for me. If you tell her, I fear she will try to find me. Make sure she doesn’t. Let her think I’m dead for all I care.”

“And the missing pieces,” Vastra asks. “What about those?”

“I’ll tell you where they are. I can’t sell them,” Simon said. “If I sell them to anyone other than who hired me I’m a dead man. And if I sell them to who hired me, I’m still a dead man. I failed to comply with the conditions of my contract. I got caught.”

“I shall see them returned to their rightful owners,” Vastra said. “I also need to know who hired you.”

“Sorry,” Simon said. “I can’t help you with that. I don’t ask for names. I just do the job as instructed and collect my pay.”

“Surely you have some idea,” Vastra insisted.

“I don’t,” Simon said again. “Besides, I only meet with middle men. And middle men are very good at remaining anonymous. Otherwise they don’t stay alive long.”

Vastra conceded. “Now, to get you out of London. We shall get you to the docks and I shall pay your passage out of Britain. You know you can never come back?”

“I know,” Simon hung his head.

Friday Morning

Jenny had been gone for two days, ever since DCI Lang had shown up on Wednesday with news of Simon’s death. She obviously blamed Vastra; and Vastra couldn’t blame her, she hadn’t given her a reason not to. She would tell Jenny the truth, the full story, as soon as she returned home. She owed her that, she saw that now. In the meantime, she poured herself into investigating Simon’s murder.

Vastra had no leads and no good place to start looking. She had returned to the docks, where she had left Simon waiting on a ship to take him out of Britain, but it had only served to waste her time. His trail was cold and she couldn’t find his scent in all the foul odors of the wharf.

Although DCI Lang had written Simon’s death off as a positive for all of London, she had gone to him to ask to take up the case. To her surprise, the Yard had already closed the case given they had no leads, no clues from the autopsy, and nowhere to begin. She told him she felt an obligation to look into his death given that she had been the one to investigate the heists. But she didn’t dare divulge his connection to Jenny or the fact that she had held him captive in her basement for several days prior to his death.

Simon’s file didn’t offer any clues as to where to begin a search. He had no known associates other than his gang of boys, and most of them were unnamed. If only Jenny were here, she could provide some insight as to the people he had done business with in the past. But Vastra had no idea how to
find her or even where to begin looking. She knew there was a friend she spent some Saturday nights out on the town with, but she had never bothered to learn this friend’s name or where they spent their evenings.

The scullery door opened and closed. The sound pulled Vastra away from her research. “Jenny?” she called.

“Ma’am,” a voice that Vastra did not recognize replied from the kitchen.

Vastra grabbed her veil and gloves and quickly donned them while leaving her office.

“Ma’am. Ma’am?” the voice continued from the kitchen. It was now more urgent.

Opening the door Vastra saw a small boy pacing between the icebox and the table. “Who are you? And why are you in my home?”


“Jenny?” Vastra said. “Help Jenny how?”

“I saw ‘er, with some men. They were takin’ her into a place. She was fightin’ them. She didn’t want to go.”

“Where were they taking her?” Vastra demanded.

“A place on Barrel Street, near the wharf,” the boy said. “Miss Jenny told me one time that you worked for Scotland Yard. Please, you ‘ave to ‘elp.”

“How many men were there, Tommy?”

“Three, I think.” He squinted his eyes trying to remember. “Yeah, three. They pulled ‘er out of a carriage and one ‘ad ‘er ‘eaved right over ‘is shoulder carrying ‘er inside. She was yellin’ and ‘ittin’ ‘im, but it weren’t doin’ no good. They were just laughin’.”

“Was it a cab?” Vastra asked.

“No, weren’t no cab. One of them men was drivin’ and just stopped it in the alley. They got out and took her in.”

“What did they take her into? Was it a warehouse? A factory?”

“A pub,” Tommy said then he furrowed his brow. “Only it weren’t no pub. I don’t know wut it was. ‘ad a blue fish on the sign though.”

Vastra looked at the boy strangely. “Did they see you, Tommy?”

“No, Ma’am,” he shook his head.

“And how long ago did this happen?”

“Less than ‘alf an ‘our ago,” he said. “I came runnin’ as fast as I could. Please, you ‘ave to ‘elp Jenny. She’s the nicest person I ever met. Please Ma’am.”

“You have done well, Tommy,” Vastra said. “Now run along and go about your route. I will see to getting Jenny back safely.”
As soon as Tommy left, Vastra began to prepare. It was daylight, so she couldn’t be too conspicuous. She put on a full black skirt, a long-sleeved high-necked shirt, and her hardened leather vest. She hid her katana and her wakizashi at her waist under a heavy cape and donned her veil beneath the hood. She wore her soft soled boots for silence, they would hardly be noticed beneath the full skirt. She put her leather gloves on just before leaving the house and headed for the wharf to a pub that wasn’t a pub on Barrel Street.

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The smell of opium permeated the air around the den. Was this where they had taken Jenny? Vastra noticed the blue fish on the sign. “The Flying Marlin,” Vastra read. There was still a carriage in the alley, so chances were Jenny was still in there.

Stepping inside, a few limp bodies of opium addicts were strewn about the floor of the entry room. They looked as though they had slept there overnight and some were beginning to stir. Vastra stepped over them, paying them little more attention. Ahead and to her right, she heard laughter and commotion coming from behind a closed door marked “private.” That was her target. Jenny was brought here against her will, and Vastra intended to take her home right now, regardless of who or what stood in her way.

The knob turned in Vastra’s left hand. It wasn’t locked. Her right hand firmly gripped her katana hidden just beneath her cape. The door opened into an empty hallway. More doors led from the right and left down the hallway, and a set of stairs were at the end.

Vastra paused at each closed door to listen for Jenny and search for a taste of her scent; but the opium enveloped her tongue impeded her sense of smell. Sounds of sex and raucous commotion emanated from some of the rooms. Others were eerily silent. But there was no sign of Jenny.

She crept up the stairs, step by step, gripping the sheathed katana tighter and tighter at her waist. Had Jenny been kidnapped into prostitution? So many vile thoughts filled Vastra’s mind until finally she was at the top of the stairs. Rounding the landing on the second floor a large man stood guard outside a closed door.

“Who are you?” he said in a deep voice. His accent wasn’t British. Russian? Maybe, but Vastra was not adept at accents. Languages yes, but not accents. It didn’t matter.

“Where is Jenny?” Vastra asked plainly.

“Who are you?” the goon repeated, this time pulling a large knife as if to intimidate Vastra.

“Is she in there?” Vastra asked, advancing on the man.

“I won’t ask again,” the goon said. “Who are…”

He wasn’t allowed to finish his question. Vastra had gotten a faint hint of Jenny’s scent on her tongue. She was in that room and Vastra could not imagine any good reason for it. With the flick of her wrist she had unsheathed her katana and cut the man’s throat from ear to ear.

He dropped the knife, clutched his throat, and fell to his knees as he watched Vastra walk past him to the door.

The metallic tinge of blood assaulted Vastra’s tongue. She heard boisterous laughter and loud talking coming from the room. Without hesitation, she flung open the door and stepped inside, her katana raised and her body in a defensive stance. The goon’s blood dripped down her blade as he could be heard taking his last wet gasps of breath in the hallway.
Three men sat around a table across the room. They had been playing cards and drinking from the looks of it. A fourth man, a large goon, was to the right, seated at a small bar. A fifth man, to Vastra’s left quickly advanced on her, knife already drawn speaking in a language Vastra did not understand.

Fluidly and with little effort Vastra stepped aside, unarmed the goon, and threw him into the wall behind her before running him through with her katana. The whole time she searched the room for Jenny. Finally, she spotted a tortoise shell hair comb laying on the table. She could see long strands of dark hair tangled within its teeth.

“Who is this veiled woman who kills my men, unprovoked?” A man at the table asked in a similar accent as the man in the hallway.

“Where is Jenny?” Vastra asked.

The man laughed. “There is no Jenny here. You have wasted your time. And you have killed my men, so now you will die.” He calmly lit a hand rolled cigarette then looked at the man at the bar and nodded toward Vastra.

The man to Vastra’s right got off the bar stool and cracked his knuckles. He flashed a mostly toothless smile as he slowly approached the armed intruder.

She much preferred the ones who charged her. They were easy to sidestep and use their own momentum against them. Just ask the goon who laid slumped dead in the floor behind her.

“Do not make me kill another one of your men,” Vastra said. “Tell me where Jenny is and I will be on my way.”

“It is too late for that,” the man at the table said and then took a long drag off his cigarette. “You have killed my men and you must pay. As for this Jenny, she belongs to me now.”

“She belongs to no one,” Vastra said. “Least of all, you.”

The man from the bar continued to slowly advance across the room toward Vastra, staring at her as if he was sizing her up.

“Her employer owes me a great deal,” Kostya said, “and since he is now unable to repay me, she will repay his debt.”

“I am her employer,” Vastra said. “She is not responsible for anyone’s debt.”

The man at the table laughed again. “YOU are her employer? How many people does this little girl work for? First Simon, now you? What are you?” he looked at Vastra. “A veiled assassin in a petticoat?” The man threw back his head in laughter.

The goon to Vastra’s right finally got within her katana’s reach. Before he could react, Vastra simply lunged toward him and thrust the blade through his neck, a third of its length protruded behind him. She was in no mood to show mercy. She removed the sword and the man thudded to the floor and quickly bled out.

“I have come for Jenny and I will kill every man here if necessary to get her back.” Vastra made no efforts to look at anyone other than the man who had been speaking. “Where is Jenny?”

The three men at the table made no effort to get up. It was obvious the one in the middle was in charge.
“Please,” the man in the middle said, still seemingly unfazed by the assassin in his den, “we have gotten off on the wrong foot I think. I am Kostya. Please, have a seat.” He motioned to a chair across the table as he took another drag from his cigarette.

Vastra looked to the seat and back to him. “No thank you. Where is Jenny?”

“Ah,” the man exasperated. “I am a business man. You sit and we will talk business. Jenny is now my property. If you want her, you will need to make an offer.”

“Jenny is not your property. You do not own her. I will not ask again, where is Jenny?”

The man and both associates retrieved revolvers from beneath the table and pointed them at Vastra.

“I must insist that you sit,” the man said and nodded to the chair. “Sheath your sword and join us. We will talk business. You wish to buy Jenny, she has a price. You also owe me for three men. They too have a price. I hope you can pay.”

Reluctantly, Vastra took a seat across the table from the three men. Her back was to the door, forcing her to split her attention between watching the men she could see and listening for anyone who might come up behind her.

Normally she would use her keen sense of smell to alert her of anyone coming in behind her; but right now she was overwhelmed with Jenny’s scent from the hair that remained in the tortoise shell comb on the table.

“Good,” Kostya said snapping Vastra back to the conversation. “Now we can talk business like civilized people.” Kostya put his firearm away, but the other two men kept theirs close at hand.

Vastra could have easily killed all three men then and there, even if it meant taking at least one bullet, which she was more than prepared to do. But she couldn’t kill them until she knew where Jenny was; and if they had harmed Jenny, her venomous tongue would be far too easy a death.

“You said Jenny has a price,” Vastra cut right to the point, “what is it?”

Kostya clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth. “Tut tut tut. Right to the business then? I don’t even know your name. Or your face. How about we start there. I am at a disadvantage, you see. You know me, but I do not know you.”

“You do not need to know me,” Vastra snapped beneath her veil. “What is your price for Jenny?”

“If you wish to remain anonymous,” Kostya said, “that will cost you.”

Vastra was realizing how he may have gotten his name.

“But before we talk about the girl, you must first pay for my three men. You have murdered them in cold blood.” Kostya took another drag from his cigarette.

“They came at me,” Vastra said.

“You broke into my place of business. You walk around with that sword. You break into my private office and threaten me and my men demanding my property,” Kostya said. “I believe it is you who is in the fault here.”

“You kidnapped Jenny,” Vastra hissed back.

“I do not see any proof of that,” Kostya laughed. “I do not see this Jenny you keep speaking of. Am
I making it clear for you? One word from me and you are going to jail for murder, murder times three. And your Jenny, will be mine with no one to rescue her.”

Vastra seethed beneath her veil. It took every ounce of willpower not to kill Kostya where he sat, followed with everyone in the den. But still, she had no idea where Jenny was or what they may be doing to her as she sat there bickering with the man.

“Fine,” Vastra conceded. “What is your price for your men and for Jenny?”

“Good,” Kostya sat back and threw his hand in the air. “First you will pay for my men. When that debt is settled then we will discuss the price for this Jenny.”

“No,” Vastra demanded. “I want to know she is alive and that no harm has come to her, or else I kill you and your men, one by one until someone tells me where she is.”

Kostya laughed and smoke billowed from his mouth. “My men do not talk. And they are not afraid to die. You are either very brave or very stupid to talk to me like this. But, like I said, everything has a price. For my men, you will kill three pests who have become a thorn in my side. For your anonymity and for proof of Jenny’s safety, you will kill another.”

Kostya took a long final drag off his cigarette and dropped it on the floor putting it out with his shoe. “After you do this, we will discuss a price for Jenny. She seems very important to you. Maybe her price keeps going up.” Kostya laughed again.

Vastra sat motionless across the table. Her veil hid her eyes from the men. They were a storm of dark gray swirling “clouds.” White “lightning” had begun to flicker across her iris.

“I joke, of course. I already know what she will cost.” Kostya wrote a name on a playing card and slid it across the table. “Come back here tonight after midnight. If you have proof you have killed this man, I will let you see that Jenny is safe. If you do not, then you must take my word the girl is safe. And you will not see or hear from her until after you have bought her.”

Vastra reached a gloved hand to the card and pulled it toward her without looking at it.

“You will find him at the Drake on Sweep Street.”

-----

Jenny was waking up. She was groggy and disoriented and the smell of something horrid was overwhelming her. She rolled onto all fours retching and heaving and coughing uncontrollably.

“You’ll get used to it,” a voice said.

Jenny jumped and sat up against the wall. She squinted to try to figure out the identity of whomever was speaking to her.

A young man sat on the floor across the room in the corner. His right eye was swollen shut and he was covered in bruises and scrapes and broken skin.

“George? Is that you?” Jenny asked as she tried to cover her mouth and nose to ease the stench.

“Yeah, it’s me,” the young man said through a busted lip. He was Simon’s right hand man and the self-appointed leader of Simon’s gang while Simon was in jail. Jenny had known him so many years ago, but hadn’t seen him since she had left.
“Where are we?” Jenny gaged.

“At a stockyard on the wharf. No hogs in here right now, but when the next haul comes in, be ready. It gets loud and smells even worse.”

“Oh God!” Jenny exclaimed. “I don’t think I can stand it any worse.”

George sat and looked sheepishly from the corner.

“Why are we here?” Jenny asked. “These men grabbed me and stuffed me in a carriage and threatened me all the way to some opium den. They took me inside to some man who insisted I tell him where Simon had hidden the last pieces from his art heist and I don’t think he liked my answer. Then I woke up here.” She looked to George for answers. “Why are we here, George?”

George began to sob. “I’m sorry Jenny. It’s my fault. They dosed me with drugs and beat me and tortured me until I gave them a name. I had to give them a name.”

Jenny was still confused, but tried to piece together what George was telling her.

“I’m so sorry, Jenny.” George continued to sob. “They found out Simon had escaped and they grabbed me thinking I would know where to find him. But he never came to see me. I didn’t even know he was out. Then they found him on the wharf. Just dumb luck apparently. He had already been beat up pretty bad, so when they started in on him, he didn’t last long. With him dead they refocused on me. Said Simon was on his way out of London without the goods, so he must of told someone where they were. Said they would let me live if I gave them a name. I didn’t know who knew. I just thought maybe you knew since Simon had asked for you after he went to jail.”

Jenny was at a loss for words. She had no idea where anything was. She only knew that Simon had been held captive in the basement of her Madam’s house for days, then he was found dead. She had blamed Vastra. She had left home to get some space and think about things; and now she was here in a small windowless room that stunk of animal waste and blood and death. She couldn’t tell them where anything was and if they came for her again, she’d most likely die, along with George.

To make matters worse, Vastra probably did know. If Simon told anyone, he told her. In fact, Jenny was now starting to think that was the only reason Vastra would have let him go. If he agreed to turn over the missing pieces. And if they were able to trace Simon’s last days to Vastra, she too would be a target for these murderers. She had to escape. She had to warn Vastra.

“We have to get out of here,” Jenny said. “I don’t know anything and I’ll be damned if I just sit here and wait for them to come to kill me.”

Midnight Friday

Just after midnight on Friday Vastra opened the door of the opium den on Barrel Street to a very different scene from that morning. The building was electric with people high on opium and looking to get lucky. Although in this place you didn’t need luck, just money.

A covey of goons met Vastra at the door. She showed them two items and they escorted her through the building. As she passed the doors that lined the bottom floor hallway she could hear the sounds of prostitution and knew she would need to take out Kostya for good after she safely freed Jenny.
Rounding the landing on the upper floor Vastra saw that two large men now guarded Kostya’s room. When she approached they demanded her weapons. She handed them over knowing that if she needed to protect herself, she had deadlier weapons with her hands, feet, and tongue.

Entering the room Vastra’s heart sank. Sitting at the table between Kostya and one of his large goons was Jenny. Jenny’s clothes were not her own and Vastra couldn’t pick up Jenny’s familiar scent, only the stringent smell of harsh soap. Jenny’s eyes were dull and dark. She was obviously drugged; most likely in effort to keep Vastra in line. There was no way Vastra could simply grab a groggy Jenny and fight her way through this many men without risking serious injury to both of them.

“What have you done to her?” Vastra demanded answers.

Kostya laughed; a sound that Vastra had grown to hate in just under a day. “Not nearly as much as you did to my men this morning. She is fine.” Kostya put his arm around Jenny and hugged her to him. “Aren’t you little dove?” He laughed again. “Maybe she is better this way? No? She fights less.”

Jenny stared blankly at no particular thing. The opium, or whatever they had given her was keeping her sedated and unresponsive.

Vastra wasn’t surprised she had fought; she was happy to hear that. But at the moment she seethed to see Kostya with his arm around Jenny.

“Now, have you done what I have asked you to do?” Kostya asked.

Vastra approached the table, never taking her eyes off of Jenny. She threw the mark’s wallet and signature pipe in front of Kostya.

Kostya examined the evidence. “This does not prove you have killed him,” he scoffed, “only that you are a thief.”

“Send one of your men to the Drake to see for themselves. The police should be investigating the scene as we speak.” Vastra watched Jenny from behind her veil. She was still unresponsive and dazed. Perhaps this was best. Perhaps this way she wouldn’t remember any of this horrible experience.

“Yes,” Kostya said. “I think this is a good idea.” Kostya spoke to one of his men in a language Vastra didn’t understand. It was similar to Russian, but nothing she was fluent in. The man nodded and left the room. “As for you,” Kostya refocused on Vastra, “you will wait downstairs. Jenny will wait with me. My man will return and we will see what the rest of the evening has in store for us.”

Vastra couldn’t protest. She simply maintained her gaze upon Jenny from beneath the veil.

“Take her to the bar. Maybe she likes women. Give her someone, on the house.” Kostya was enjoying antagonizing Vastra. He wanted this assassin to know what and who he was and what he was capable of should she even attempt to double cross him. “Maybe Lena, she looks like Jenny. No?” Kostya roared into laughter once more.

Vastra was escorted downstairs and directed through a door across from the foot of the stairwell. Through the door, a set of stairs led down into the basement. She saw why this was called “the bar” as the only accommodation was an iron pole, or “bar,” that ran from floor to ceiling in the middle of the room with a set of shackles dropping down from the top.

She imagined this was the place Kostya would take those who he intended to extract information
from or simply punish for whatever reason. She searched for Simon’s scent and found it to be barely lingering in the damp soil that made up the floor. No doubt it was his blood that had soaked in.

She was brought here to be intimidated, but she was unfazed. She knew Kostya’s man would find the proof he needed.

As she waited, the sounds of purchased sex emanated from the floor above her. Soon, a woman was brought in. She was young with long brown hair and brown eyes. She did favor Jenny, but only as far as those superficial traits. Vastra wasn’t adept at telling humans apart, but she had memorized every feature of Jenny’s face.

The goons laughed and pointed at Vastra. They said something in the language that Vastra didn’t understand and the girl began to make her way toward the veiled woman.

“No. Leave,” Vastra said in Russian before the girl could even get down the steps.

The girl stopped and looked back at the goons who laughed. They motioned her back up the stairs and one led her away.

Vastra loathed apes. Forced prostitution was one thing Silurians never perpetrated. She attributed the matriarchal nature of Silurian society with that. She would take pleasure in dismantling this house of ill repute once she had Jenny safely at home.

Within the hour Kostya came to basement to personally speak with Vastra. “As you said, bobbies were cleaning up your mess at the Drake. You did good. You have passed the first hurdle and now we are building trust. I trust you know that you must do as I say if you want Jenny.” Kostra laughed.

He handed Vastra the names of two men: brothers who ran a sweat shop that fronted a human trafficking ring out of Hong Kong. Once a supplier of women for Kostya’s brothels, they were now hated rivals who figured out they could make more by renting the women to multiple men than selling them only to one.

“These men have been more than a thorn in my side. They have taken a great deal of profits from my humble business. I want them dealt with immediately,” Kostya said as Vastra took the cards with the names from his hand. “Bring me evidence of their death by midnight tomorrow and your debt for killing my men is cleared.”

“I want to see Jenny,” Vastra insisted.

“So many demands and conditions. You will pay for every request I grant. Are you sure it is worth it to see her again so soon? It comes with a high price not to mention more time.”

Vastra stood, stoic. She wanted Jenny back as soon as she could manage it. She had seen her tonight and she was so drugged she didn’t know who she was or where she was. It wasn’t worth it for Kostya to pile on more hits.

“Midnight tomorrow,” Kostya repeated. “Your swords are outside.”

Midnight Saturday
An hour before midnight on Saturday Vastra stumbled through the doorway of the Flying Marlin. She held a cloth to her side with her right hand and steadied herself on the doorway with her left.

Kostya’s men quickly retrieved her swords and escorted her down the now familiar hallway and up the stairs. The same two goons were in the upstairs hallway guarding the door to Kostya’s office. They stepped aside as the obviously wounded Vastra was herded through, then made a solid wall of bodies across the open doorway to prevent her escape.

Jenny was nowhere to be seen.

Vastra refused to look weak in front of Kostya and would not use anything or anyone to stabilize her unsteady and wounded body. She pressed the cloth to her side as it continued to fill with blood.

“I see these two were more effort than the first one,” Kostya laughed looking at the blood soaked cloth at Vastra’s side.

“Where is Jenny?” Vastra asked through clinched teeth.

“She is a fighter, that one.” Kostya laughed, leaning back in his chair. “We do not like fighters around here. Not with our women anyway.”

“If you have harmed her,” Vastra began.


Vastra pulled two items from her cape pocket and tossed them onto the table. A small shiny object clinked across the tabletop while another, larger object stopped with a loud “thunk” right in the middle.

Kostya slapped his hand on the table trapping the small object and preventing its escape onto the floor. Picking it up for examination, he immediately recognized it as one of the older brother’s gold teeth. He smiled. The other object was a knife, completely covered in blood.

“I assume you pulled this from the older brother,” Kostya said holding up the tooth. “And this,” He pointed to the knife, but would not touch it, “I assume, you pulled from your side.” He looked at Vastra. “The tooth and the wound are a nice touch, but I have to make sure. You understand?”

“Where is Jenny?” Vastra was single minded in her effort.

“I told you,” Kostya said, “that one is a fighter. She is waiting for you at the bar.”

Vastra turned on her heel without hesitation or instruction. She knew Kostya would send men to verify that her task was complete, that she had killed the brothers. And she was more than ready to spend the time waiting with Jenny.

The “bar” was dank and dark; all the things you expected a basement to be. Jenny was huddled in the corner, shivering.

Vastra rushed down the steps to Jenny’s side while the goons stayed outside the closed door in the hallway. “Jenny,” Vastra softly spoke her name as she knelt beside her.

Jenny was dazed and seemed unable to focus. She turned to Vastra, but did not recognize the veiled woman right in front of her. She had only responded to the sound.

Vastra lifted her veil so that she could look directly into Jenny’s eyes. “Jenny, I am here and I am
working to get you home. You have to stay strong. Do you hear me?”

It was no use. Whatever they were using to keep Jenny sedated kept her just at the point of consciousness, without any ability to function. She was, for lack of a better comparison, a ragdoll.

Vastra conceded and sat beside Jenny on the dirt floor. She took Jenny’s hand in hers. Jenny’s body temperature was cooler than normal, and she smelled different. Vastra had been cursing herself for not smelling Jenny when she was brought up to meet with Kostya. But now she realized that Jenny no longer smells like Jenny. Her hair, skin, and clothes smelled of a strong astringent cleanser masking any sign of the real Jenny. The clothes she was wearing were not her own. Her eyes were lightless. Jenny was truly lost to her at the moment.

“Jenny come back to me,” Vastra whispered.

Vastra searched her person for something to leave with Jenny; something to let Jenny know she was on the case and that she was fighting to get her out of there. But there was nothing; nothing in her pockets, no jewelry, no hat pins. It seemed there was nothing to leave with Jenny.

A sharp pain in Vastra’s side brought her back to reality. The stab wound was deep and needed medical attention, but that would have to wait. Pulling the cloth away, Vastra could see that the bleeding had slowed a bit. Thick dark blood stained her scales.

She thought back to the time Jenny had cauterized the wound on her arm; she would have to do that to herself when she got home. This was not a pleasant task she looked forward to, especially alone, but it wouldn’t be the first time.

One scale hung on by the smallest piece of skin. Its light green hue was now stained dark red with blood. This was the thing, the thing she would leave Jenny. It was crude to think of leaving such a token as a symbol of hope and reassurance, but it was also unmistakably Vastra. When the drugs wore off, and Jenny found this, it would let her know Vastra was fighting for her.

Gritting her teeth, Vastra pulled the scale from her skin. The effort reopened the wound and it began to bleed again. No matter. She wiped the blood off the scale as best she could and carefully tucked it into Jenny’s hair. She hoped the mass of hair, in Jenny’s signature bun, would keep the scale safe and in place until Jenny was conscious enough to find it.

After half an hour or more, the door to the basement opened and one of the goons yelled for Vastra.

“Soon,” Vastra whispered to Jenny, then stood and ascended the stairs.

From the ground floor hallway, Vastra was directed back up to Kostya’s office.

“You have created quite the mess,” Kostya said to Vastra. “The sweatshop is swarming with bobbies. My men tell me that women are being rounded up and taken somewhere. There is even a rumor that you cleaved one of the poor bastards in half!” Kostya eyed the veiled assassin for just a moment past Vastra’s comfort. “This is good!” he said finally. “This is very good. With the brothers out of business profits will rise for me.”

Vastra couldn’t focus. Her side was excruciating after pulling off the scale and reopening the wound. Jenny’s new scent was all over her and she hated it. All she wanted was the name of her next mark so she could get to the business of rescuing Jenny.

“You should see a doctor about that,” Kostya said pointing to Vastra’s side. “Get that stitched up and be here tomorrow at 4:30 p.m. Wear church clothes. And leave your swords at home, you will have no need for them.”
“So I am not to kill for you tomorrow?” Vastra asked.

“No,” Kostya said. “I have changed my mind. You will make a delivery for me. That is all you need to know. This will pay for your insistence of anonymity and your insistence on seeing Jenny. After tomorrow’s task we will discuss Jenny’s price.”

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Vastra stumbled into the scullery and set herself to the task of tending to her wound. She started a fire in the oven and shed her clothes onto the kitchen floor. “Worthless thing,” she cursed the hardened leather vest and threw it into the pile on top of her cape. The whole pile would need the blood washed from it and some mending.

She put a kettle on and retrieved the medical kit from the cupboard that Jenny had insisted upon creating. Pouring pure grain alcohol onto a clean cloth, she washed the wound. The sting made her hiss in pain, but she regained her composure despite being alone. A Silurian warrior shows no sign of weakness.

The kettle finally whistled signaling Vastra to inspect the coals inside the oven. They were red hot and ready for the task at hand. She placed the blade of a large knife into the oven and waited for it to get hot enough to cauterize skin. Wrapping the handle in a cloth, Vastra pulled the knife from the coals. Without hesitation, she laid the red hot metal to her skin to seal the wound and stop the bleeding. She gritted her teeth and counted to three then dropped the blade to the floor.

Breathing heavily, she sat back in the chair and let the wound settle. After a few minutes she pulled herself up and retrieved a container of fresh blood from the ice box. She turned it up and drained the bottle. Leaving the clothes and the knife in the kitchen floor, she headed to her bed where she immediately fell into a deep sleep.

-----

Jenny woke with a start. She sat bolt up in a small rickety bed and looked around; nothing looked familiar. She was confused and groggy at first, then began to remember she had been kidnapped and held against her will. She had no idea what day it was, but she could see out a small window that it was daytime.

“Is it Sunday?” she asked herself. She couldn’t remember much since Friday, but there were moments in between being drugged she could remember and from that she tried to piece together a timeline.

She remembered being taken to the opium den on Friday and when she refused to divulge the whereabouts of Simon’s hidden loot she was drugged. After that she woke up in the stockyard at the wharf with George. From what he had said she should have been tortured until she divulged useful information. Instead, she had been seized and brought here where she was ordered to take a bath using harsh soap to get the stockyard smell out of her skin and hair.

After that everything went hazy and she couldn’t remember much of anything. Whatever they were keeping her drugged with completely erased any memory of what happened while on it and left her with a massive headache when she regained consciousness.

She rubbed her temples and the rest of her head. As she did, she felt a tuft of hair that was matted with a thick substance. She examined closer and pulled her hand away to reveal dark, almost black, dried blood. She felt for a head wound. Had she been injured? Is this why her head hurt so badly? But there was no wound to be found. Then whose blood was in her hair?
Realizing that her hair was still, mostly, in a bun she began to remove the few hairpins that kept it in place. There was a “plink” on the wooden floor.

“Bloody pins,” she cursed and went to retrieve it. Unable to find the pin, she was just about to give up when she saw it. A light green piece of something lay on the floor. It was square-ish and small, about the size of a shirt button.

Picking it up, she recognized it immediately. “This is one of Vastra’s scales!” she gasped. “But how? When? Oh God!” She had no memory of being with Vastra since she left home last Wednesday. She had no memories since Friday other than short bouts of consciousness within this very room after being taken from the stockyard.

The pain in her head spiked again and she rubbed her temples. Why did she have one of Vastra’s scales in her hair? How did she have one of Vastra’s scales in her hair? It didn’t just accidently get there. Vastra had to have placed it there, the only place it would be kept safe. But why? How? She hoped her captors would give her answers.

Walking to the door she listened for signs of guards. The lock was simple enough, she could pick it easily with a hairpin, but she could hear the voices of men and women just outside her room.

“Oi!” she said, banging on the door. “Somebody let me out of ‘ere.”

Within minutes the lock was being manipulated from the outside and the door opened. In walked the older woman who had demanded she bathe in the harsh cleanser some time earlier.

“Hold your tongue,” she screeched. “You’ll scare the clients.”

“I demand to know where I am and why I’m bein’ ‘eld against my will!” she said as forcefully as she could muster. Her accent beginning to thicken.

“Calm yourself!” the woman screeched at Jenny. “If it were up to me you’d be workin’ like the rest of the girls here, but the boss says you’re earnin’ your pay in other ways. So if I was you I’d be happy you aren’t on your back and the worst you got it is locked up here.”

“If I’ve been locked up here how come there’s dried blood in my hair and dirt on my dress?” Jenny asked.

“Well aren’t you the little ‘who dun it’?” The woman laughed. “If you’re so smart then I guess you can just figure it out.” The woman turned and walked toward the door.

“Wait,” Jenny softened her tone and her accent faded back to her new normal. “Please. I don’t know where I am or even what day it is. I don’t understand why I’m being held and I don’t know what to do to get out of here.” She watched as the woman turned back around to address her.

“All I know is I was told to keep you ‘ere while my boss deals with your boss. Keep you ‘ere and keep you out of it so’s you don’t cause nobody no trouble.”

Jenny’s heart began to race. She tried to remain calm and composed. “What do you mean ‘deals with my boss’?”

“Don’t know, don’t care. I’s jus’ told to keep you ‘ere so I’m keepin’ you ‘ere.” The woman grabbed the knob and opened the door. Turning back to Jenny she said, “I’ll send a girl up with a pitcher of ‘ot water and some soap. You can wash the blood out of your ‘air and clean up. I’ll send up some food too. You haven’t eaten since yesterday.”
“Is it Sunday?” Jenny asked quickly as the door closed.

“Why?” The woman laughed and then spoke through the door as she locked it. “You got to go to church?”

With that Jenny was left to a mostly bare room to think about what she meant by “while my boss deals with your boss.” She rubbed the scale between her finger and thumb and got lost pondering all the possibilities. But she knew for sure that Vastra was working on getting her out of here, she just didn’t know how.

Sunday Evening

At 4:30 Sunday evening Vastra showed up at the Flying Marlin dressed, in what she deemed, clothes suitable for church and without her blades. She was met at the entrance by two of Kostya’s goons and led along a familiar route. As she moved down the long hallway she searched for Jenny’s scent, new or old, but could not catch the slightest hint.

The two guards were at Kostya’s door and inside Kostya’s office were two more men, but no Jenny. At the table sat Kostya and a small boy. She wasn’t good at judging the age of human children, but this boy was smaller, and she assumed younger, than the butcher’s delivery boy.

“Ah,” Kostya said at the sight of Vastra. He could tell that she was looking at the boy. “I would introduce you, but you refuse to tell me your name. No matter.”

“What am I to deliver?” Vastra asked wanting to get this done so she could get to the business of discussing terms of Jenny’s release.

“Always in such a hurry,” Kostya shook his head. “You will go to the cathedral on Commercial Road and attend mass. You will take the boy. After the service you will speak to Father Reilly. Tell him that the boy is his, as promised, and I consider the matter with him closed.”

If Kostya could see beneath Vastra’s hood he would see a look of confusion sweep across her Silurian features. She wasn’t a human trafficker. She had no desire to deliver a boy to a priest as some sort of payment. But she also couldn’t refuse. Not if she wanted Jenny back.

Kostya broke the silence. “I trust you have no problem with what I have asked you to do. You will do as you are told if you want to discuss payment for Jenny.”

“Yes,” Vastra agreed. “Of course.”

“Good,” Kostya smiled and laughed. “The boy has two pennies for contribution.”

Vastra wanted to ask “why her” but she knew Kostya was just testing her. Testing her limits. Surely there were any number of people in his employ who could have easily taken the boy to the priest. He was testing how far he could push her and the lengths she would go to save Jenny.

“Let us go,” Vastra said to the boy; but he just sat there as if he hadn’t heard her.

“He only speaks Russian,” Kostya said, then laughed.

“Come,” Vastra said in perfect Russian.
Kostya looked at her with a puzzled look on his face.

“You speak Russian?” he asked in Russian tongue.

“Da,” Vastra responded.

Kostya then spoke something in another language that Vastra didn’t understand. Noting the lack of response, Kostya laughed. “But you do not speak Ukrainian.”

“Net,” Vastra said.

Kostya laughed again and this time spoke in English. “You had better get going. Service starts soon and you don’t want to be late.”

“Come with me,” Vastra spoke in Russian to the boy and they headed out, down the stairs, and out of the Flying Marlin toward Commercial Road.

As the two headed north on Barrel Street and then zig-zagged east toward the cathedral, neither noticed the tall man in the bowler hat following some twenty paces behind.

Chapter End Notes

Feedback/reviews encouraged and appreciated. Thank you.

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A Lizard, a Maid, and a Thief Part III

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The author recommends re-reading Parts I and II before reading Part III. This is the final installment in this trilogy.

Chapter 14: A lizard, a maid, and a thief Part III

SUNDAY MORNING, HEADED TO CHURCH

Vastra and the boy--she never bothered to ask his name--continued their walk to the cathedral on Commercial Road zig-zagging through alleyways and streets along the most efficient route. They were silent and walked with a purpose. Vastra’s internal monologue was on a constant loop of “Do this, get Jenny back.”

Vastra had never attended a human religious service before. Why would she? She took a seat on the first available pew with enough space for her comfort and indicated to the boy to sit beside her. Neither noticed the man in the bowler hat who sat behind them on the opposite side of the aisle.

The activities of the service were lost on Vastra. She didn’t understand all the standing and sitting and kneeling and other various things that went on; but the boy seemed to understand, or else he was adept at following the crowd. He didn’t miss a single step despite not understanding the language. Vastra, however, remained seated throughout.

At the conclusion of the service Vastra lingered at the back of the nave. The boy hung close. When no one was paying attention she grabbed the boy by the shoulder and slipped into a small room closing the door behind her.

“What is your name?” she asked in Russian.

“Yury,” the boy said meekly.

The door opened behind them and in walked the man in the bowler hat.

Turning to look at him, Vastra nodded and DCI Lang closed the door.

“This is Yury,” she said, “I am to deliver him to a priest named Reilly following the service. He is to be compensation to settle some matter. That is all I know at this time. I fear the worst for the boy.”

“He is your delivery?” DCI Lang asked, shocked. He didn’t know what to expect when Vastra had come to him that morning to tell him that instead of a hit she would be making a delivery for Kostya. But then again he hadn’t known just what to expect since her initial visit last Friday.

FLASHBACK TO FRIDAY, VASTRA LEAVES KOSTYA’S THE FIRST TIME

Vastra took every precaution to make sure she wasn’t being followed. The last thing she needed was Kostya knowing anything about her: where she lived or how she made her living. She took a
cab to a random location and got out and walked to another random location several blocks away. Here she caught another cab and repeated the process just to throw anyone off her trail. When she was convinced no one was following her, she walked home to put away her swords and change clothes before heading to Scotland Yard to see DCI Lang.

She had to withhold certain information from DCI Lang, this was a given. He couldn’t know Jenny’s connection to Simon. It went without saying he couldn’t know that she had held Simon in her basement for days preceding his death or that she knew the whereabouts of the stolen items. And for now she couldn’t tell him that Jenny was being held captive by Kostya and that this was truly her ulterior motive for seeing Kostya brought to justice. But the cab rides and walks had given her time to concoct a plan.

“Madam Vastra,” he said, “we simply cannot go after every opium den and brothel in London. If we did no other crimes would be solved. Not to mention we would never be able to fully end either practice. This is something Scotland Yard must simply turn a blind eye to.”

“I fully comprehend the logistical impossibilities with ending prostitution and drug use in London, Detective Chief Inspector. However, I am quite convinced that Mr. Kostya is responsible for Simon Higby’s death and that he is involved in the art heist. It is my belief, based on the research I have gathered in the past few days, that Kostya killed Mr. Higby in the act of torturing him to extract information as to the whereabouts of the stolen property. It is also my understanding that returning the missing items from the heist to their rightful owners is still a top priority for Scotland Yard.”

Lang let out an exasperated sigh. “What proof do you have?”

“I am still working toward acquiring the needed proof,” Vastra said. “Given that the only known witness to Mr. Higby’s murder, Mr. Higby himself, is dead I will need more time to gather intelligence on the case.”

“And how do you propose to gather this intelligence, Madam Vastra?” Lang asked.

“I have taken the initiative to go undercover and offer my services to Mr. Kostya in hopes of uncovering more details.”

“What sort of ‘services’ are you offering to Mr. Kostya?”

“I shall act as his hitman.” Vastra said very matter-of-factly.

“Hitman?” DCI Lang asked. “Why on Earth would anyone hire you as a hitman?”

“I can be very convincing, Detective Chief Inspector.”

“How do you know he will take you up on the offer?”

“He already has.” Vastra informed him. “I have been given a mark.” Vastra handed Lang the card with the name. “He is to be found at the Drake on Sweep Street and I am to do the deed tonight.”

Lang read the name. “Samuel Pines. He is a well-known snake oil salesman and all around con artist. Why would Kostya want him dead?”

“He said that he had been a ‘thorn in his side’ for some time now,” Vastra said. “He did not elaborate further.”

“Well you can’t go around killing people just to gather information on the off chance that Kostya is
involved in Simon’s death or the heist.”

“I do, of course, realize that, Detective Chief Inspector.” Vastra would have been insulted if she didn’t think so little of human intelligence. “I can make it appear as though I have killed him. But he will only be unconscious, drugged. I will need you to plant someone there to verify he is dead and not let anyone else examine him. Then let the police investigate as if a murder had occurred. Take the man to a secure location, away from any other prisoners, and when he regains consciousness give him the option to turn on Kostya. Interrogate him to find out what he knows about Mr. Kostya and his connection to Mr. Higby and the art heist.”

“I already give you enough latitude with your commission to get myself fired. Now you are asking me to play along with this outlandish scheme in hopes we get some information from this criminal to connect this Kostya fellow to the heist and to Mr. Higby’s murder?”

“Yes, Detective Chief Inspector, I thought I made that abundantly clear.”

FLASHBACK TO SATURDAY AFTERNOON, VASTRA LEAVES KOSTYA’S

Vastra repeated the same process of cab ride and walk until she was certain Kostya wasn’t having her followed. She needed to update DCI Lang and see if there was any news concerning her mark from the Drake.

“I have been given the names of two brothers as my next mark. I am to make the hit tonight, before midnight.” Vastra handed him the names. “They run a sweatshop near the wharf which fronts a human trafficking ring. They were suppliers of women to Mr. Kostya, but now run their own prostitution business. Mr. Kostya blames them for a drop in his revenue. So I am to take them out.”

“Yes,” Lang said. “I know the Tseung brothers. They have ties to the Tongs.”


“Yes. It is highly unlikely they will cooperate with the Yard, even if it is to help convict a rival.”

“But we must try,” Vastra insisted.

“What are your orders for tonight?”

“To kill both brothers.”

“They will be guarded,” Lang said. “And there will be women there who work in the sweatshop as well as the prostitutes.”

“I will scout the factory before nightfall,” Vastra said. “If there is a back way in, I will find it. Once inside I can deal with whatever I may find.”

“You aren’t capable of taking on both brothers and their guards,” Lang said. “You will need backup.”

“I am quite capable, Detective Chief Inspector. Besides, what do you have to lose? If they kill me then that is just one less thorn in your side to deal with.”

“You are not a thorn in my side, Madam,” Lang said. “You are an asset to the Yard and I would
hate to lose you on a pointless suicide mission.”

“This is not pointless,” Vastra snapped. “And I will proceed with my mission with or without your support.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes.”

DCI Lang took in a deep breath. “Then I suppose we should formulate a plan.”

“I will need the files of both the Tseung brothers and Tongs.”

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At ten p.m. Saturday night Vastra hid outside the factory the Tseung brothers ran their human trafficking and prostitution rings out of. From her scouting expedition earlier that day she noted several entrances, but only one that was appropriate for tonight’s mission. The front of the factory had a single door, similar to a storefront. There was a large entrance in the back, big enough for deliveries by carriage. As well as another regular size door. There were no doors on the sides, but there were lots of windows. Almost all of the windows on the second and third levels were boarded or barred, this must be where the women were housed until they could be sold or taken to brothels.

There were no guards outside the factory so getting in was simply a matter of finding the opportunity. She used a window on the second floor that wasn’t barricaded. Scaling the wall and gaining access to the factory was the easy part. Once inside she had no idea what awaited her.

Lang listened for the signal a few blocks away.

“What are we doing here again boss?” officer Brown asked DCI Lang.

“We received an anonymous tip that Kostyantyn Bondarenko is planning to hit the Tseung brother’s prostitution ring tonight. If we hear trouble we need to be able to respond quickly. But we can’t look like we were expecting it.”

“That why you’re wearing a patrol uniform?” Brown asked.

“Yes, Brown.”

“All I’m sayin’ is if you had filled me in a little more I wouldn’t have to ask so many questions.”

“The less you know the better protected you will be.”

“Who all knows besides us, boss?” Brown asked.

“Never you mind about that. Just keep quiet and help me listen for trouble.”

Vastra snuck around the factory as stealthily as a cat. She clung to shadows and took out the two guards with a simple flick of her tongue. Opening the office door she saw that one of the brothers was busy drinking and enjoying his Saturday night.

Upon noticing the intruder, he jumped to his feet. Several women screamed and ran out of the
office, Vastra made no effort to hinder their escape. She closed on the man with purpose. “Kostya sends his regards,” she said and hit him in the neck with her tongue at point blank range. She had to make sure he didn’t see her face or her tongue. She had to appear human for the plan to work. He dropped to the ground unconscious.

From out of nowhere the other brother sprang on the intruder knocking Vastra to the ground. Before she could react he plunged a knife into her side.

She let out a hiss and hit him square in the jaw as hard as she could. Her Silurian strength combined with adrenalin knocked him off of her as several of his teeth rolled across the floor.

He let out a savage scream but quickly recovered and came at Vastra again. She was ready this time with a large knife in hand.

He swung wildly as Vastra dodged the attacks and managed to land a few thrusts with her blade. He yelled in a language Vastra did not understand and came at her again, this time managing to rip her veil from her face.

The shock of what he saw beneath the veil froze him in his tracks, giving Vastra the opportunity to strike. She couldn’t leave him alive. He would have to die. She plunged the knife into his chest attempting to mimic the stab wound she imagined one of Kostya’s goons would have left.

He dropped dead on the spot.

Vastra quickly sheathed her knife and began to set the scene. She picked up the knife the brother had used and his gold tooth. These would be her evidence to Kostya. She then pulled a revolver from beneath her cape and fired one shot at the walls and one at the ceiling attempting to appear as though she had shot at the brother but missed. She then threw the firearm across the room as though it had been kicked or hit from her hand forcing the assassin to resort to a knife. Finally, she placed Kostya’s signature card on each of the brothers’ bodies.

The revolver served as a signal to DCI Lang as well as a plausible excuse for officers to come to the factory. That is why she could not fire it until the job was finished. The shots were also serving their final purpose, to create confusion with the women in the factory who were now fleeing the sweatshop. This chaos would hopefully keep Kostya’s men at a distance and convince them of a job done.

Vastra fled the scene from the rear of the factory and trusted that the police would be there soon enough. The guards and brothers would be carried off as though they had been killed, but DCI Lang would know the truth. That is why it was so important for him to be the initial officer on the scene.

It was a longshot, and there was every reason for the plan to fail. But as far as Vastra was concerned, failure wasn’t an option. Not if she wanted to free Jenny.

FLASHBACK TO THIS MORNING, SUNDAY

Vastra met DCI Lang at the Rose Kettle Tea Room, as planned, on Sunday morning.

“That was a messy affair last night,” he said as he sipped his Earl Grey. “Were you injured?”
“I will live.”

“You know what you are doing is not legal,” he said.

“I do,” Vastra said, “but I am getting the job done.”

“Are you?” Lang asked. “Are you any closer to uncovering evidence to tie Kostya to Higby’s death and the heist?”

“I think so, yes,” Vastra said. “I believe soon enough I will have the proof we need. I just need to continue with the charade a bit longer.”

“Your tactics are rather unorthodox, but then again, so is the man who recommended you for this job. But we can’t continue these bizarre missions. Especially if people keep dying. One brother is dead. That wasn’t supposed to happen.”

Vastra ignored the last statement. Honestly, she wasn’t going to be upset that she had ended the life of a known human trafficker. “Is the living brother speaking?” Vastra asked.

“No. He is refusing to speak to anyone other than to curse us in some foreign language. Probably Chinese, but since I have to keep them sequestered from other inmates so that Kostya will think they are dead, I haven’t been able to get an interpreter to them.”

“It could also be Cantonese or Mandarin. I can possibly interpret, but not today,” she said.

“Out of the question. You are to stay as far away from these men as possible. If they connect you to the Yard then all of this will be for naught.” Lang looked to his companion who seemed to understand. At least, she didn’t argue. “Who are you to kill for Kostya today?”

“No one,” Vastra said, sipping her tea beneath her veil. “I am to make a delivery.”

“A delivery? Of what and to whom?”

“I do not know. I thought it best not to ask questions. Though I cannot understand why Kostya would demote me to delivery boy unless the parcel is dangerous. It could be a set up.”

“I will escort you from the Flying Marlin,” Lang said. “I will be there in case you need back up.”

“That may be wise.”

The door opened and in walked the man in the bowler hat.

Turning toward the man Vastra nodded and DCI Lang closed the door.

“This is Yury,” she said, “I am to deliver him to a priest named Reilly following the service. He is to be some sort of payment to settle some matter. That is all I know at this time. But I fear the worst for the boy.”

“He is your delivery?” DCI Lang asked, shocked. He didn’t know what to expect when Vastra had come to him that morning to tell him that instead of a hit she would be making a delivery for Kostya. But then again he hadn’t known just what to expect since her initial visit last Friday.

“Yes,” Vastra said, “This needs to be kept quiet and done quickly. I will deliver the boy to Father Reilly, but you will need to come in as soon as I leave. You will not be able to leave with Father
Reilly nor the boy in the event Kostya is watching. I will return to Kostya and let him know the delivery is made. He may send someone to check, he has with the hits. If so, make sure Father Reilly understands he is far better off cooperating with Scotland Yard than with Kostya.”

“I can handle things after you make the delivery,” Lang said. “Even if Kostya sends someone to check, I’ll be prepared.”

“Very good,” Vastra said. She turned to Yury. “This man will protect you,” she said in Russian. “He will look after you and keep you safe. Do you understand?”

“Da.”

“He only speaks Russian, so he will not understand what is being said between you and Father Reilly. As long as it is kept civil he will have no reason to think anything ill is at play.”

“Then let’s get this taken care of,” Lang said and left the room.

A few moments later Vastra exited the room with Yury in tow to make the delivery.

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Arriving at the Flying Marlin Vastra was met by the same goons and went through the same routine. The same two guards were stationed in the hallway. And Kostya sat at the same place at the table with the same men keeping him company in his office. But this time was different for Vastra. This time she was there to negotiate for Jenny’s safe release.

“So you have made my delivery?” Kostya asked.

“Yes,” Vastra said. “Now we are even. Tell me the price for Jenny.”

“It is Sunday,” Kostya said. “It is bad manners to talk money on a Sunday. Take some time off. You will come back tomorrow and we will discuss the price for Jenny then.”

Vastra was furious. Sheer willpower kept her from killing Kostya and his men right here and now. She would find Jenny one way or another. But alas, she held her tongue knowing that the best way to get what she wanted was to play along for one more day.

“Very well,” Vastra finally spoke. “I will return tomorrow and I will expect this matter to be resolved.”

“Of course,” Kostya laughed and waved his hand for Vastra to leave his office.

She obliged. She couldn’t leave fast enough.

On her way out, she heard muffled screams emanating from the “bar.” They were clearly human male, but other than that Vastra could make out no detail. And frankly she didn’t care. All she wanted now was Jenny’s safe return and she wouldn’t risk any action that kept her from getting what she was after.

She spent the rest of the night meticulously studying the case files of Kostya and the Tong gang.

MONDAY MORNING
Vastra returned to Kostya’s first thing Monday morning. The usual goons met her at the door and escorted her through the building.

The door to the “bar” was open. It smelled of fresh blood, fear pheromones, and human sweat. Vastra wondered who the poor bastard was that had suffered there last night and what sort of information Kostya was trying to extract.

The same two goons guarded Kostya’s office, but inside the room was a surprise. Sitting at the table with Kostya was a beaten and defeated man. He was barely recognizable, but Vastra suddenly remembered his scent. She thought the pheromones in the “bar” were familiar. He was a low life thug that Vastra had apprehended some time ago. He would have been incarcerated at the same time as Simon; but didn’t serve nearly as much time. What’s more, he knew full well it was the Veiled Detective who had spoiled his crime spree and sent him to jail.

Vastra didn’t react. She pretended as best she could that she had no idea who the poor chap was that sat beside Kostya. But she knew Kostya had him there for a reason. Maybe he was going to blackmail her, but perhaps it was something much worse.

“Bring in the girl,” Kostya said.

Vastra’s heart raced. She hoped Jenny would be drugged again so she wouldn’t have to witness what she was prepared to do. This had gone on too long and had been taken too far. It had to end.

She turned to greet Jenny and her plan fell apart. It wasn’t Jenny at all. It was a young girl, dark haired and dark eyed but with a slightly darker complexion than Jenny’s. Vastra wasn’t sure where she was from, as most apes look remarkably similar to her, but she was certain she wasn’t British.

“This is one of the whores you sent scurrying Saturday night from the Tseung brothers’ factory,” Kostya said.

Vastra did not speak and did not move.

“Ivan, bring her ‘round,” Kostya ordered.

The goon led the girl to a spot beside Vastra.

“Now, give her a knife.”

Vastra braced herself for a fight. Was he really planning on having this girl kill her? Or at least try to kill her.

The goon placed the knife in Vastra’s hand.

Vastra looked at the knife then to Kostya.

“Cut her throat,” Kostya demanded of Vastra. “Cut her throat and I will send for Jenny. Your debt will be paid.”

The woman began to speak in a language Vastra understood, but Kostya and his men didn’t seem to.

Vastra returned the conversation in Mandarin.
“Silence,” Kostya screamed. “Cut her throat!”

“No.” Vastra said and dropped the knife.

Kostya laughed. “Why is it that you will spare the life of this worthless whore yet you slaughter my men like animals? And you kill indiscriminately when I write a name on a card? Do I need to write her name on a card for you?”

“I will not kill an innocent, helpless woman,” Vastra said. “The others you sent me to kill were criminals. I brought them to justice.”

“You brought them to the end of your sword,” Kostya laughed. He waved to Ivan to take the woman away.

Ivan retrieved the knife by Vastra’s feet and led the girl out.

“Well, do you know who this man is?” Kostya asked Vastra as he motioned to the man beside him.

“Should I?”

“We are done playing games,” Kostya said. “This man has told me a great deal about you, Madam Vastra, veiled Detective.”

Vastra stood stoic.

“Sit,” Kostya motioned to a chair but Vastra didn’t move. “It was not a suggestion.”

Vastra sat but remained on high alert.

“I may not know your face, but your veil is just as recognizable. Maybe even more so. I know a lot of people; a lot of people that do a lot of different things around London. And it did not take a lot of searching to find stories about a veiled woman who wields swords. I was surprised, to say the least, to find out that you worked for Scotland Yard. But now I understand why you have complied with my requests instead of contacting the authorities about Jenny’s,” he paused as though looking for the right word, “situation.”

Vastra refused to verify his accusations. But she was relieved to know that he still believed she had complied with all of his demands.

“My friend here,” Kostya looked toward the battered man, “has told me some very interesting things. He was behind bars with Simon. And Simon told him that he suspected that a woman was responsible for his capture. A woman! I wouldn’t have believed it, but when I was ‘questioning’ Simon before his death, I asked him who had done those horrible things to him. Who had beaten him and cut him, he murmured a name ‘Vastra.’ Of course I did not know who this ‘Vastra’ was. He would also say ‘monster.’” Kostya paused. “Are you a monster, Madam Vastra, veiled Detective? Is that why you hide your face?”

Vastra’s own “truth serum” had worked against her. Simon was still under the influence of it when Kostya found him. He had named Vastra whether he wanted to or not. But then how he kept from divulging the whereabouts of the missing items was beyond her. Perhaps Kostya didn’t ask the right questions. They had, after all, been quite cleverly concealed.

“So you see. I know you are the detective who apprehended Simon, even though there was no mention of you in the newspaper. And I know you tortured him after he escaped. The only reason for that would be for you to extract the whereabouts of the remaining items.” Kostya took a
moment to light a cigarette. “If you want Jenny back and if you do not want Scotland Yard to find out about murdering three of my men as well as three innocent men, not to mention delivering a young boy into a life of abuse, then you will bring me the remaining pieces. That is the price for Jenny and your secrets.”

Kostya sat back in his chair, quite proud of himself.

“Very good, Kostyantyn Bondarenko. I see we have both done our homework.”

Kostya smiled. “It seems we have.”

“I have pored over your files since leaving this place last Friday, and I cannot find a single connection between you and the heist. Since I am to be your lackey, because I cannot fathom a reality where you do not continue to blackmail me to keep my secrets safe, tell me one thing. Was it you who hired Simon?”

Kostya laughed. “I saw that man after you interrogated him. Tortured him. And you mean to tell me you did not think to ask who hired him?” Kostya laughed again, much louder. “No. I had nothing to do with the heist. As I told you upon our first meeting. Simon owes me a great sum of money. Between the whores and the opium he accumulated quite the debt. But when one sees the opportunity to collect what they are owed plus interest, that is what one collects. Those remaining pieces should just about cover his debt.”

Vastra had asked Simon who had hired him, but he truly did not know. It was safer that way for him. He dealt with a middle man and knew enough that anyone who could afford what he was charging was not a man to be trifled with.

“What if I do not know the whereabouts of the remaining pieces?” Vastra asked.

“Then that will be very unfortunate indeed,” Kostya said as he exhaled a cloud of smoke. “Unfortunate for you and very unfortunate for Jenny. I have been very kind to her so far.”

“Kind?” Vastra snapped before she could stop herself.

“Yes, kind.” Kostya said.

“You have kept her drugged and imprisoned god knows where for days,” Vastra said.

“And surely you realize what the alternative would be?” Kostya looked at Vastra.

Of course Vastra knew. She knew the type of man Kostya was. She knew the type of businesses he ran. And she knew what he thought of women--what their worth was and where their place was. She also knew that the only thing saving Jenny from that fate was her willingness to do whatever Kostya asked of her.

“I will bring you the remaining pieces,” Vastra finally said. “I will exchange them for Jenny. And our business will be settled.”

“Very wise, Madam Vastra,” Kostya smiled. He dropped his cigarette to the floor and put it out with his shoe. “I have an office near the stockyards on the wharfs east of here. It is above a leather factory and is more private and secure than this dump. You will bring the pieces there tonight at ten o’clock. I will have Jenny and we will make the exchange.”

“How do I know you will keep your end of the bargain?” Vastra asked.
“The same way I know you will keep yours,” Kostya said. “I know how badly you want Jenny back, so you will do as you are told. And I know the value of having a friend inside Scotland Yard whom I may call on for a favor. You would be well compensated, of course, for your time.”

“Very well,” Vastra said. “I will be there.”

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Vastra met with DCI Lang at the Rose Kettle Tea Room for afternoon tea as planned. She sipped her tea beneath her veil and listened as Lang updated her on the situation with the boy and the priest.

“We were able to get an interpreter in to speak with the boy this morning,” Lang said. “He said he came over from Russia with his mother and several other women and children a week or two ago, but he hasn’t seen his mother in days. He and the other children were put to work cleaning factories and various houses; I’m guessing the houses he is referring to are brothels. But he said one night when he got back to the place they had been staying his mother and the most of the women were gone. Only the children and a handful of women remained.”

“He does not know why he was sent to the priest?” Vastra asked.

“No,” Lang replied. “And the priest isn’t saying a word. I stayed at the church for a few hours, in case anyone came by checking on the boy. No one did by the way. And I had a long chat with Father Reilly. He assured me he had no idea why the boy was sent. But he was clearly lying. I told him I would have a plain clothed detective sitting in one of his pews ‘round the clock watching him like a hawk. And if I got so much as a peep of him being out of line I’d drag him down to the Yard faster than he could say ‘Hail Mary.’”

“There is always the possibility Kostya sent me on a fool’s errand,” Vastra said. “A task to test my loyalty.”

“You would think that murdering three people for him would be test enough of your loyalty,” Lang said. “Unless he suspects something. Do you think he suspects the hits were faked?”

“I do not believe so,” Vastra said. “At least he has not indicated he suspects they were not legitimate.”

“What does he have you doing now?” Lang asked right before taking a bite of sandwich.

Of course she couldn’t tell him that Kostya had discovered her secret identity or that he now demanded the remaining pieces at large. But more than that, she could not let him know of the plan she was currently devising for tonight. “He has not given me another job,” Vastra said. “I went to see him after I left you at the church and he told me to ‘take some time off.’”

“Let me know as soon as he contacts you again. In the meantime, I have a case for you.” Lang handed Vastra a rather thin casefile simply labeled “Mason.”

“There does not seem to be much to go on,” Vastra said as she thumbed through the meager pages.

“There isn’t,” Lang said, “which is precisely why it is being handed off to you.”

“I will get started immediately,” Vastra said and tucked the file away.
The rutty conditions of the mud streets of East End made it easy for Vastra to assume control of Kostya’s carriage without the passengers in the back even realizing the exchange had taken place. She simultaneously hit the driver with her tongue, leapt onto the seat, and assumed a position beside his limp body taking the reins as they slipped from his hands.

Street lamps were few and far between creating the perfect amount of darkness. Any onlookers would not look twice at the slumped man in the driver’s seat and the hooded figure beside him. To make matters more advantageous for Vastra, there was very little foot or carriage traffic in this part of town at this time of night.

As she drove east toward the factory she took inventory of the occupants of the carriage. She picked up the lingering stale scent of Kostya’s cigarette smoke as well as the stringent soap that Jenny had been forced to use. She could also make out two other distinct human male scents; they were the large goons that typically guarded Kostya’s office door. Their pheromones indicated they were calm and felt in control. Vastra was sure there would be more men waiting at the leather factory. There was no way Kostya wouldn’t try to ensure he had the upper hand, and he had witnessed how easily she could dispatch three of his men.

At the proper intersection, Vastra diverted the carriage along an alternate path to an alternate location. Arriving at an abandoned factory she drove through the back delivery access which she had opened just hours before. Vastra had read in the casefile that this location was used on occasion by the Tongs to “conduct business.” It was off the main path and close enough to the original meeting location to not make Kostya suspicious if he bothered to notice the new route. Which apparently, he had not.

Bringing the horses to a halt, Vastra picked up the dead body of the driver and effortlessly threw it to the ground on the left side of the carriage. Just as the limp body made contact with the factory floor, Kostya realized the carriage wasn’t at all in the location it was supposed to be. He began to yell in Ukrainian.

The right side of the carriage opened and one of Kostya’s large goons exited. Before he could get both feet firmly on the ground, Vastra jumped from the driver’s seat and decapitated him causing blood to spray in every direction. His headless body hit the factory floor with a wet “smack” and blood began to pool.

Vastra stood outside the carriage looking in. The decapitated body lay between her and her focus. The remaining goon, Kostya, and a sedated Jenny were now huddled inside. The goon was attempting to shield Kostya. “Exit the carriage and give Jenny to me and neither of you have to die.”

Kostya had a dead body on either side of him on the factory floor outside the carriage; and he knew he would be next if he didn’t kill Vastra and kill her now. He barked orders to his goon who promptly drew a revolver and took a shot at Vastra.

The Silurian easily dodged the bullet. She was done asking for Jenny, it was time to take her. She pulled her veil from her head exposing her true self.

The goon began yelling in Ukrainian and firing the revolver erratically but before the last bullet left the barrel Vastra leapt atop the carriage and thrust her katana down through the roof and into the man’s skull.
Leaving the sword through the roof and the goon inside, Vastra dropped to the ground on the left side of the carriage. She opened the door with such force it was ripped from its hinges.

Kostya and Jenny were pinned between her and the goon she had just skewered. She grabbed Kostya by the coat and pulled him out, throwing him behind her and onto the ground as she scrambled to catch Jenny before she tumbled to the factory floor.

Jenny was covered in blood, but was so drugged that she was completely unaware of what was happening around her--gruesome as it was. Whatever they had been using on her, they seemed to have upped the dose for the exchange.

Vastra’s keen ears picked up the sound of a revolver being pulled from Kostya’s coat pocket. She whirled around and disarmed him with her tongue before he could take aim and fire. He scrambled backwards on his hands and buttocks. His feet kicking wildly, unable to gain purchase in his slick bottomed shoes.

“What are you?” Kostya yelled. “Monster!” He began to slur. The venom Vastra had injected when she disarmed him was starting to take effect. She dosed him with just enough to keep him uncoordinated and unable to run, but not enough to knock him out. He was to be fully cognizant for what she had planned.

For now Vastra ignored Kostya’s ramblings and walked around the carriage to the other side of the factory with Jenny cradled in her arms. She gently placed her on the ground and out of sight of what she was about to do. She retrieved her veil that she had thrown aside and she took off her cape and covered Jenny to make her more comfortable. Beneath the cape Vastra was dressed in her solid black gi and soft soled boots.

The horses were getting restless. Vastra cut the leather straps that held them to the carriage sending them clumsily trotting into the night. The bloody hoof prints now scattered about the factory made for an even more eerie scene. She calmly walked over and closed the factory door leading out to the alley. She then leapt once more atop the carriage and grasped the tsuka firmly, pulling her katana from the goon. As she did, his body slumped and made a quiet “thud” in the floor of the carriage.

She jumped down and slowly made her way toward Kostya. Despite being covered in blood, her exterior seemed calm and in control. But a storm raged inside the Silurian. Her eyes were now as black as a starless night sky.

“Monster,” Kostya slurred. “Simon was right.”

“Simon knew nothing of ‘monster,”’ Vastra said, approaching to within mere feet of Kostya. “I was gentle with him compared to what you are about to endure.”

Vastra flicked her wrist and cut into Kostya’s right arm. The blade easily penetrated the suit jacket and shirt and soon a small amount of blood soaked through. “Have you ever heard of lingchi, Kostyantyn Bondarenko?” She flicked her wrist again and cut him in the leg this time.

Kostya cursed at her in Ukrainian and attempted to stop the bleeding from each of his wounds with his hands.

She flicked her wrist again, this time cutting his left arm. “Lingchi is an ancient Chinese torture technique. It means ‘death by a thousand cuts.’” She flicked her wrist again and cut his hand that he was attempting to use to fend off her attacks.
Kostya whimpered and began to plead. He had backed up all the way to the wall and lacked the strength to move any further. “Please.”

“When administered properly,” she flicked her wrist and cut his face, “the skin and flesh are slowly stripped away, one small cut at a time, one limb at a time, until the entire limb is taken.” She cut once again on his arm. “Taken alone, no single cut is all that horrific, but as the skin and flesh are taken bit by bit, the pain becomes unbearable.” Another cut to the arm.

“In the hands of a professional, the torture lasts for days. Limbs are removed one at a time and tourniquets are applied to the stumps until only a torso and head remain.” She made a series of cuts to his legs and arms. “And finally, after days of small cuts, the torture is ended by driving a blade through the poor soul’s heart.”

“Yes,” Kostya cried. “Kill me.”

“But the Tong gang doesn’t adhere to the traditional standards,” Vastra made several more cuts to the whimpering Ukrainian. “They are lazy and inefficient and are satisfied with only the smallest portion of torture being administered.” Several more cuts were placed along Kostya’s body.

“Kostyantyn Bondarenko, you are being punished for what you did to Jenny. You are being punished for what you did to Simon. You are being punished for what you have done to so many women and children over the years, selling them into prostitution. You are being punished for what you have done to so many men to extract information from them.” A series of cuts were administered about Kostya’s body as she read him his charges. “You will never be fully brought to justice. Not by Scotland Yard. Not even if I frame you for the art heist and by association, Simon’s death.” More small cuts.

Kostya pleaded. “I will confess. I will confess to anything. Just stop.”

Vastra shook her head. “When the Yard finds your body, they will assume the Tongs have settled the score for the death of the Tseung brothers.” Vastra scattered another round of cuts to Kostya’s arms and legs and face. “You see, the Tseung brothers and the Tong gang are very close. And the Tongs are most upset with you having sent an assassin to murder their colleagues.”

“They do not know I sent you,” Kostya managed.

“But they do,” Vastra smiled. “I made sure to leave your calling card at the scene. And I made sure to leak that detail to the right people. There will be no doubt who ordered the hit.”

Kostya’s eyes grew large.

“The Tongs will be looking for you. They do not care who wielded the blade, only who gave the order. In fact, I would not be surprised if they are at the Flying Marlin right now. It was risky to time it all so close, but a chance I had to take. They should find a note there letting them know you will be at the leather factory tonight. It was only mildly cryptic. I had to make it easy enough for their simple minds to decipher.”

Vastra walked around Kostya cutting him with one small cut after another.

“You were right about one thing. I knew you would bring Jenny tonight. I knew how valuable it was for you to have a cooperative person inside Scotland Yard. But you were wrong that I would simply bring you the remaining pieces. Not when I could rescue Jenny, kill you, and frame you for the heist.”

“You can’t do that.” The venom was wearing off. Kostya was no longer slurring, but he was too
weak from blood loss to move.

Vastra dangled a gold key from her gloved hand. “When they find this key in your coat pocket, they will search for a safety deposit box in your name at the Central Bank. They will find that you rented a box there some time ago under one of your known aliases. And when they look inside they will indeed find the missing pieces.”

“Impossible,” Kostya sputtered.

“Not impossible,” Vastra smiled. “The paperwork is quite in order.”

“If you kill me, a helpless, defenseless man then you truly are a murderer,” Kostya spat.
“Monster!”

“You should have handed Jenny over when I first came to you,” Vastra said. “You are the monster here, Kostyantyn Bondarenko. I am simply setting things right.”

Vastra thrust the blade of her katana through Kostya’s heart removing it only after he had slumped to his death.

She placed the key in his coat pocket. She had been careful to not cut that area. She left his wallet untouched and made sure the scene looked as much like the ones she had painstakingly studied in the criminal case files of the Tong gang’s record. The Tongs tortured people to settle scores, not for profit, so they always left the bodies unsearched and with their possessions. It got the point across even more that they did what they did with singular purpose.

Sheathing her katana, Vastra went over to Jenny who had fallen fast asleep. Scooping her up in her arms, Vastra left the gruesome scene of the warehouse and walked the hundred or so feet to an alley where she had previously stashed fresh water and a large bag filled with clean clothes.

She stripped and washed and changed into a skirt and top in the cover of darkness with the speed of an artist. Her bloody gi, cape, and swords were stuffed into a large bag before shifting her attention to Jenny. She did her best to wash the blood splatter from Jenny’s face and hands. But did not have time to change Jenny’s clothes completely so she wrapped her in a clean cape and covered her head. She would carry her home and properly clean her up there before she could awaken to any of the horror.

TUESDAY MORNING

“Vastra!”
The sound of her name being called from upstairs drew Vastra’s attention away from the “Mason” casefile. She jumped up from behind her desk and ran up the stairs to Jenny’s room.

A bewildered and wide-eyed brunette was sat up in bed when Vastra arrived at the door. “What day is it?” Jenny asked.

“Tuesday.” Vastra smiled at Jenny.

“Is it over?”

“Yes.” Vastra came into the room and sat at the foot of Jenny’s bed. “It is over. You are safe. You
Jenny began to cry. Tears rolled down her cheeks and soaked into her night dress. She had no idea how she wound up in her own bed, but she was ever so grateful. “I am so sorry I blamed you for killing Simon. I am so sorry I ran away.”

Vastra gently placed her hand onto Jenny’s leg that was still safely tucked under the covers. “It is quite alright, dear.” She smiled at Jenny in an effort to comfort her. “You had every reason to suspect I had killed Simon. I had not given you any reason to think otherwise.”

“You told me you didn’t, and that should ‘ave been good enough,” Jenny sniffed, her old accent beginning to slip through.

“Let us not talk about that,” Vastra said. “What do you remember?”

Jenny recapped what details she could remember from the initial abduction Friday morning to the last time she remembered being in the room she had been kept in on what she assumed was Monday. “I still don’t know why they were keeping me there and keeping me drugged. I don’t even know who it was that took me. All I know is that I was taken because they thought I knew where Simon had stashed the remaining items from the heist and then I was told that their boss was dealing with my boss. I assumed that was you since I found the scale you hid in my hair.”

Jenny mindlessly reached up and felt her head. Her hair was not in her usual bun and she could tell it desperately needed to be properly washed.

“Speaking of,” Jenny started back. “How did you manage to get a scale in my hair? And where did it come from? Were you hurt?”

“Never mind about that,” Vastra smiled. “I just needed to give you something that would reassure you I was working to get you out of there. I pray it gave you hope.”

“It did,” Jenny smiled. “I knew you’d save me. But I’d like it if you told me how you did it.”

“For now let us just be content that you are home. Honestly the less you know the safer you are.”

“Ordinarily I would demand you tell me everything,” Jenny smiled. “But today I think I will just agree to be ignorant for a bit longer.”

Vastra stood up and made her way to the door. “Take today to recover. Do whatever you need to do for yourself. The house will be here tomorrow and I can manage my own meals.” Vastra was just about to exit the room and leave Jenny to herself when she stopped and turned back around. “And should anyone call today, I shall answer the door. If you would please just stay out of sight.”

Jenny had no idea why Vastra would request such a thing, but she was all too willing to accommodate her request. “Yes, Ma’am.”

With that Vastra left Jenny’s room and returned to her study. She expected DCI Lang to call on her at any time to inform her about finding Kostya and the key and the missing art; but so far there had been no visitors. For now, she could only chalk this up as a good thing.

As she worked from her study on the “Mason” case, she could hear Jenny meander around the house. She heard her filling the copper tub in the kitchen for a bath and then cooking something to eat. Later she heard her in the front room, presumably reading.

At two o’clock Jenny gently knocked on the door to Vastra’s study. “Tea, Ma’am.” She entered
without invitation with a full tea service. Her hair was up in her signature bun and she began to serve Vastra as if all were right in the world.

“I told you to take the day to tend to yourself,” Vastra said as she took the tea cup from Jenny’s hand.

“I get bored doing nothing,” Jenny smiled. “But if you don’t mind I’ll take my cup of tea in here with you. It’s awful lonely reading in the front room by myself.”

“By all means,” Vastra welcomed the company. For every ounce she had worried about Jenny over the past week, she had equally simply missed her. She missed every part of her day that Jenny was typically a part of. But she wouldn’t let Jenny know how she felt. That would be wholly inappropriate.

“What are you working on?” Jenny asked as she took a seat across the room.

“A new case. There is very little to go on. So as of now I am devising the best way to maximize my research efforts on the streets tomorrow.”

“Why don’t you go out today?” Jenny asked, full well already knowing the answer.

Vastra didn’t look up from her work, “I will go out tomorrow.”

“So tomorrow it’ll be back to business as usual?”

“Yes, Jenny.”

That evening a telegram arrived for Vastra. It simply read. “Afternoon tea tomorrow.” Vastra knew instantly that the Yard had discovered Kostya and the key and most likely the items. No doubt Lang would have some hard questions for her tomorrow at the Rose Kettle Tea Room, but Vastra was more than prepared, as always.

WEDNESDAY MORNING

Jenny walked into the kitchen to a sight she had never seen before. From what she could make out, Vastra was preparing breakfast complete with eggs, bacon, bread, cheese, and tea. Egg shells were all over the counter, butcher paper was strewn about, and a heaping pile of cooked bacon was set upon a plate. A hunk of cheese was sitting by a loaf of bread and a kettle sat upon the small kitchen table. Vastra stood over a cast iron skillet at the stove.

“What’s all this, then?” Jenny asked.

“Breakfast,” Vastra said very matter-of-factly.

Jenny walked over to the stove to check out Vastra’s cooking skills. “Have you ever cooked eggs before, Ma’am?” She asked peering into the skillet.

“No,” Vastra said. “Why? Are they not correct?”

Jenny eyed the half dozen or so eggs sizzling in the skillet, some fried to a crisp and some runny, and smiled. “Hard to mess up fried eggs,” she said.
“Please sit and help yourself to tea,” Vastra motioned to the table.

Jenny watched and sipped hot tea. When everything was finished, Vastra presented Jenny with a plate of bacon that was partially raw and partially burned, a mound of eggs which were simultaneously runny and fried to a crisp, a hunk of cheese, and two slices of bread sans butter.

“Here you are,” Vastra smiled as she sat the plate in front of Jenny.

“What’s the occasion?” Jenny asked.

“I thought after what you have been through I could at least make you a hot breakfast. Besides, you will need all the calories you can eat. Today we begin your training.”

Chapter End Notes

Feedback/reviews encouraged and appreciated. Thank you.

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Chapter 15: Devotion and Evolution

“Training?” Jenny exclaimed, spitting bits of bread and egg from her mouth.

“Yes,” Vastra said, joining Jenny at the small kitchen table. “I do not want what happened to you last week to ever happen again. So we shall begin your martial arts training today.”

“You mean you’re going to teach me how to use one of those swords?” Jenny’s eyes lit up.

“No immediately, no,” Vastra said. “First you must learn patience, discipline, and form. We will start with basic hand to hand and you will learn to defend yourself. We will train two hours per day, five days per week. As my schedule permits.”

“Two hours a day?” Jenny asked. “Five days a week?” Surely she misheard what Vastra had said.

“Yes.” Vastra didn’t realize that Jenny thought this to be an unreasonable amount of time. She was still mediocre, at best, in reading human facial expressions and vocal tones. But Jenny’s pheromones were suddenly raised and Vastra picked up hints of anxiety.

“And when do you expect I will have time to train for two hours a day, most days?” Jenny asked.

“We shall have to vary the time of day as my investigation schedule allows,” Vastra said. “But I see no reason why that should be a problem.”

“I’m just wondering where you think this two hours will come from with all I have to do each day. Between hauling firewood for year-round fires, cleaning out hearths, preparing meals, afternoon tea, laundry, going to the market, and cleaning the entire house from floor to ceiling by myself I barely have time to read and study case files. And I don’t want to give that up. I’ve really enjoyed that. And I was so useful helping solve the missing children case.” Jenny was out of breath from making her point.

“Well I suppose I could hire another maid to help relieve some of the burden,” Vastra suggested.

“You bloody well will not!” Jenny insisted.

“Then I supposed you could save some time if you cut out trips to the market and had your food delivered as mine is,” Vastra suggested.

“And deprive myself of what little social interaction I get during the week?” Jenny was not happy with this suggestion at all. “Going to market is the highlight of my work week. You can’t take that from me.”

“Then what do you suggest is done differently?” Vastra asked.
Jenny thought for a moment and came up with one possible solution to relieve a bit of her weekly burden. “We hire a laundry service for our clothes and linens. I usually do all the laundry on Sunday and it takes almost ten hours between heating water, scrubbing, rinsing, drying, folding, and putting away. Not to mention if there’s any ironing or mending that needs done.”

“But that only alleviates the burden of one day,” Vastra said.

“I will still have to carry firewood and make meals daily,” Jenny said. “There’s no way ‘round that. But I can do two hours less house cleaning each day and make it up on Sundays instead of doing laundry. If I restructure my schedule, it should lessen the overall load each day to allow time for training.”

Vastra was impressed with how quickly Jenny seemed to solve the issue of time. “I will take over your chore of replenishing firewood. It seems only right as I am the one who requires the fires. I will see to restocking each hearth every morning with enough wood to last the day.”

“That will help tremendously,” Jenny smiled. “I can’t carry as much as you and it takes several trips up and down the stairs just to stock the bedrooms.” Of course what Jenny meant by that was Vastra’s bedroom as she did not require a fire in her room at this time of year or during the summer months.

“Then it is settled,” Vastra said. “I will advise you each day as to what time training will occur and you will adjust your schedule accordingly. I suggest you begin purchasing more food at market this week as you will need extra calories.”

“I need to go to the market this morning since I missed last Wednesday,” Jenny paused a moment. She thought back to how her horridly wretched last week had all started.

At first Vastra didn’t notice Jenny’s sudden shift in mood; but then picked up on the change in her pheromones. She wanted to change the subject and not dwell on the past. “I shall bring extra money for the market shortly. See that you stock up on everything you will need in case there are weeks you must cut your visits short. Also, select a laundry service that picks up and delivers today while you are out. Use some of the extra funds if they require a deposit to secure services. I have an errand this morning and a meeting this afternoon so today’s training shall take place this evening, an hour past supper,” Vastra said.

“I can’t wait,” Jenny grinned from ear to ear.

“Splendid.” Vastra got up to leave but remembered a final detail. “There is a shilling in the icebox for Tommy, the delivery boy. Please see that he gets it.” With that she left the kitchen to go about her day.

“A shilling for Tommy?” Jenny said to herself. “And how does she know his name?” Jenny shook her head and finished eating what she could, but ended up throwing most of what Vastra had prepared away. She hated to waste food, but honestly it was inedible.

The outside door to the scullery opened and then the kitchen door. “Miss Jenny!” An excited Tommy sat the delivery on the floor and rushed over to give his favorite house maid a giant hug.

“Alright then,” Jenny said pulling Tommy away from her waist. “What’s gotten into you?”

“I was so worried, Miss Jenny,” Tommy said, hurriedly. “When I saw those men takin’ you into that place I feared the worst I did. I ran right over and told your Madam what I seen. Told her to get a bobby on it right away.”
“You told her?”

“Yes, Miss,” I saw those men takin’ you in that place and I knew they were up to no good. But I see you’re a’right now.”

“Yes, Tommy,” Jenny smiled. “I am quite alright now.” She now understood why Vastra had left Tommy the shilling. It seems this boy’s chance witness to her abduction into the Flying Marlin may have been the thing that saved her life.

Today Jenny took her time while out on the town and spent the first part of her morning in search of a laundry service. She worried that Vastra’s often blood-stained and torn clothing may cause alarm, so she opted for a service closer to her old stomping grounds as opposed to one that high society women may choose.

Upon hearing the address, the laundress looked at Jenny, “We don’ get much business in that part o’ town, Miss. You sure you wan’ to ‘ire this service?”

“Quite sure,” Jenny said. “If it’s not too far for your delivery boy.”

“No Miss,” the laundress smiled. She was missing several teeth. “Not too far at all. We’re ‘appy to get tha business.”

“Splendid,” Jenny smiled. She always loved when Vastra used that word. “What days for pickup and delivery?”

“Wut ever days you like, Miss. We work for you.”

“Wednesday and Sunday mornings then,” Jenny said. “I’ll leave the first pickup in the scullery this Sunday. Tell your boy to come in and through the back door and everything will be ready and waiting. Please let him know he is not to go beyond the kitchen.”

“Yes, Miss. I’ll tell ‘im.” The laundress was so excited to get the new business she almost forgot to give Jenny the laundry bags. “Where’s me head! Take these and jus’ have ’em in the scullery for Sam; he’ll know what to do.”

Jenny left the laundress and headed to the open air market. The market was Jenny’s favorite weekday getaway. She loved all the smells: fresh flowers, fresh baked bread, and fresh herbs. If she didn’t have chores waiting at home she would spend all day here just pursuing the vegetables and other goods.

It wasn’t uncommon for her to purchase herself a small treat from the confectionary or a fiction book for a bit of casual reading and today she treated herself to both. Although she wasn’t sure she would have time to do any reading for pleasure with the training schedule Vastra had mentioned.

After the market Jenny went to the general store and stocked up on kitchen staples of oats, sugar, salt, rice, and flour. She splurged on canned fish, jars of jam, tins of tea, and some premade biscuits-- all of which were to be delivered later that day.

Reluctantly she returned home after spending the better part of her morning strolling around and enjoying the nice spring weather.
Two o’clock at the Rose Kettle Tea Room didn’t come soon enough for Vastra. She was anxious to find out what DCI Lang and the yard knew about Kostya’s death and whether or not Lang suspected that she had anything to do with it. She would be using her tongue beneath her veil to monitor Lang’s pheromones for any suspicions he may be hiding.

“Madam,” Lang greeted Vastra when she arrived at the table. He had reserved a private room so that they may speak in confidentiality and without interruption.


Tea was served and a tray of various sandwiches and pastries was brought to the table. Lang thanked the server and asked that they not be disturbed for the remainder of their visit.

Lang was not one to sugar coat police work. It was brutal and messy and he knew Vastra had the stomach for it. “The Flying Marlin was raided Monday night by the Tongs. They killed two of Kostya’s men and made a right mess of the place. Apparently they didn’t find what they were looking for there, but they knew where to go next. They slaughtered four of Kostya’s men at a leather factory near the wharf stockyards. And they apparently saved the big fish for last. Kostya was found dead with three of his men in an abandoned factory nearby. One of the men was decapitated, one had been skewered through the skull, and the third simply dead. We haven’t yet determined cause of death.”

“And what of Kostya?” Vastra asked.

“It was brutal. The Tongs tortured and killed him with the ‘death by a thousand cuts’ technique that they are so fond of. From the looks of it, he suffered plenty before finally being killed with a blade through the heart.”

Vastra sipped her tea. She snaked her tongue out slightly beneath her veil to pick up Lang’s pheromones. Nothing was particularly alarming to her. “I assume the Yard is searching Mr. Kostya’s businesses. Is there any evidence of the heist or the pieces?”

“Not exactly,” Lang said. “Not with his businesses.”

“Oh?”

“Kostya had a key in his pocket to a safety deposit box at the Central Bank. I went over personally to check the box. And you’ll never believe what was inside.”

“From the context of our conversation is it too much to hope that it was the missing pieces?”

“That’s exactly what it was,” Lang said. He sipped his tea and shook his head. “It all seems a little too easy. He just happened to have that key in his pocket when he was killed? Those pieces have been missing for two years. I can’t imagine he would carry that key with him everywhere he went. And why didn’t the Tongs search him? They could have taken the key and no one would have been the wiser. A missing wallet or pocket watch we would notice, but not something we weren’t expecting to find in the first place.”

Vastra wasn’t getting nervous just yet. Even if something was suspicious about Kostya’s death, there was certainly nothing to tie her to it. Still, she snaked her tongue out once again to taste Lang’s pheromones. Nothing to be alarmed about.
“Are you sure he didn’t suspect that you worked for the Yard?” Lang asked.

“Well I certainly did not volunteer the information,” Vastra said, avoiding the actual question. “Besides, why would he suspect a woman would be working for the Yard?”

“I don’t know,” Lang said. “But then again, why would he have reason to believe you could take out those hits?”

“There are female assassins, Detective Chief Inspector,” Vastra said, a little put out. “And some of the most famous ones are Russian.”

“Kostya was Ukrainian, not Russian,” Lang said, flatly.

“Of course, you care correct.” Vastra dropped the subject.

Lang let out a sigh. “Madam. I hope this goes without saying. But we cannot speak of your undercover work with Kostya. I am already in hot water having to explain why I have two men in custody that were targets of Kostya, not to mention the boy I had to place with a home. I have thus far simply refused to name the officer who was undercover and if it comes to it I don’t know what we will do if I am pushed on the matter.”

Lang’s pheromones were elevated. Vastra didn’t have to search too hard to pick up his anxiety, fear, and regret.

“I will need the files back that you have on Kostya and the Tongs. I’ll send a messenger this evening to retrieve them before supper. Is that alright?”

“That will be fine, Detective Chief Inspector,” Vastra said. “And I will certainly not discuss any involvement with Kostya with anyone at the Yard.”

“I’m afraid this is the last time I will allow you to talk me into such a scheme, Madam. We will both be lucky to be employed if internal affairs decides to pursue the matter any further.”

“I understand completely, Detective Chief Inspector,” Vastra said. “But know this, if you are called out I will confess to my part in the undercover work. I will not let you take the fall for both of us.”

“Thank you, Madam,” Lang said. “You are a woman of great conviction. I admire that. At least for now the Yard is so pleased to have the missing pieces back and Kostya dead that they are not asking too many questions. This may be a case where they had rather not know. It isn’t like there is any family rushing to the aid of the two men who are incarcerated.”

“Perhaps you are right. Perhaps the whole nasty situation will simply disappear.”

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As Vastra and Jenny finished up supper, Vastra presented her maid with a gift. “This is for you. I had to guess at your measurements.” She handed Jenny a package wrapped in brown paper and tied with twine.

Jenny blushed. She could tell that whatever was inside was made of cloth and was bulky. “Thank
“Well,” Vastra said. “Open it.”

Jenny opened the package and inside was a pair of heavy, black skirt-like pants like the ones Vastra wore on occasion either for work or when practicing her sword in the basement, a pair of thinner white cotton trousers, a heavy white cotton top with no buttons or fasteners, and a thick white belt of the same fabric.

“That shall be your uniform when we train in the basement, your aikidogi. You may wish to wear a thin undershirt beneath your keikogi as it is simply wrapped and tied with the obi, or belt. The white trousers are to be worn beneath your hakama, the black bottoms. And you are to be barefooted.” Vastra didn’t know how Jenny would respond to the clothing. “The hakama will take a bit of getting used to as they are quite heavy.”

“It looks a lot more comfortable than some of the dresses I see those high society women wearing,” Jenny said. “Thank you again, Ma’am.”

“It is my pleasure, Jenny,” Vastra smiled. “You must be properly attired. Now, if you will excuse me I will get ready and get in some time with my katana before you join me in an hour.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

Jenny cleared the table and washed the dishes and hurried upstairs to try on her new uniform. The white trousers were easy enough to put on and cinched with a simple built-in tie. The keikogi wrapped around her torso and was held in place with the obi, but Jenny wasn’t sure if there was a proper way to tie it or not. The hakama, however, was not so simple. Jenny held up the “skirt pants” and first had to figure out front from back. Convinced she had figured it out, she stepped in and realized that there were ties on either side, front and back, for a total of four rather long strips.

At first she tried tying the front and back right side strips together; and then the left. This clearly was not correct as she could not get the garment tight enough around her waist to stay up.

She untied both sides and started over. This time she wrapped both back strips around to her front and tied them; and then wrapped the front strips to her back and tied them. This enabled her to get the ties cinched up enough around her waist; but the straps were so long that even tied they hung almost to the floor.

“That can’t be right either,” she said and untied and began again. This time she double wrapped the belts around her and tied them in a neat bow first in front, then in back. She didn’t know if this was correct, but the garment was staying up and the ties weren’t hanging to the floor, and that was an improvement.

Jenny stood at the bottom of the basement steps and watched the slow, methodical movements of her Madam. Vastra stepped carefully; fluidly moving her whole body, not just the sword, through a series of motions. Her feet swept in large arcs and her stance was wide and steady. She was graceful, powerful, and elegant; and in that moment Jenny thought she could watch her for days.

“You will not learn anything from there,” Vastra said, not at all looking toward her maid. “Come in Jenny.”

Jenny slowly walked across the room. This was one of two rooms she wasn’t previously allowed in. And had only ever been here when her mentor had been tied to a chair and held captive. Vastra had cleaned Simon’s blood from the walls and floor and even taken the chair away, leaving no
trace of him here any longer.

Jenny shook the thoughts out of her head and looked around the basement taking it in properly for the first time. It was completely empty save the shelf with a single wooden rack upon it. The rack currently held two swords. One was seated in the middle space and a much smaller one was seated in the bottom. The largest sword, the katana, was in Vastra’s hands but Jenny assumed it was kept in the top, currently empty, space of the rack.

Vastra ceased her movements, bowed, and returned her katana to the top of the rack. Turning to Jenny she looked her maid up and down. “Everything seems to fit. Let me check your knots.” She inspected Jenny’s hakama and was impressed that she had done so well. It wasn’t tied perfectly, but with no instruction Jenny had more than adequately donned the garment.

Jenny felt uneasy being “inspected” but was pleased to hear she had done a good job.

“Are you ready to get started?” Vastra asked.

Jenny nodded.

Vastra pointed to the swords in the rack upon the shelf. “You will not learn the katana until you have learned your own body. However, just as the katana is a weapon, your body is also a weapon. You will learn to use it in ways you never imagined possible. And as with any weapon, never brandish it unless you are prepared to use it. Do you understand?”

“Yes Ma’am.” Jenny was nervous and excited.

“Good,” Vastra continued, “this may be a basement, but this is a sacred space while practicing. You will honor this space and be humble when you practice. Understand that you will always have something to learn; no one is ever complete in their training. You will do well to remember that when you think you know everything. This is your first step in a long road. It is not a race to be won with speed. The path may be a slow and tedious journey, but you will be a better warrior for taking it.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

Vastra bowed to Jenny and Jenny followed suit. “First you will learn proper stance.” She stood beside Jenny and showed her how to stand in the “ready” position. Jenny tried to mimic Vastra as best she could, but Vastra’s trained eye caught many flaws which she attempted to correct.

Jenny was nervous and her body was rigid making Vastra’s work harder than she had the patience for. “Get lower. Wider stance,” Vastra barked as she kicked Jenny’s foot to where she thought it should be. “And turn your hips.” Vastra placed a hand on each of Jenny’s hips and turned her so that she was square.

Jenny let out a barely audible gasp at the touch and Vastra quickly pulled her hands away.

“Sorry, Ma’am,” Jenny quickly apologized. “I’m just excited, that’s all.” In reality she was very nervous. And Vastra’s hands on her hips had just made her even more so.

“You will learn to channel your energy, steady yourself, and focus your mind on the task at hand,” Vastra explained. “These traits will serve you in other areas of your life as well, not just Aikido.”

“Aikido?” Jenny asked, “Is that what this is called?”

“It is similar,” Vastra said. “I learned a comparable combat style as a young warrior, before ever
coming to the surface. I have merged my training with the Japanese art of Aikido and made it my own."

Vastra lost herself for a split second as she remembered her training. The hard ‘thwack’ of cane against her scales as she was corrected over and over on her form, stance, motion, and grip. She considered for a moment if Jenny would be tough enough to master the art. But resolved that only time would tell.

She snapped back to the present, “Again!” she barked. “Ready stance.”

Jenny mimicked again; and again Vastra corrected her form. This time Jenny did not react to Vastra’s hands on her hips except to make the requested corrections.

“Good,” Vastra said. “That is the correct position. Your legs will begin to hurt as you hold this stance. Notice how wide your feet are and how low you are. That is to give you stability. If I attempt to push you over,” Vastra put her hand on Jenny’s shoulder and pushed, “you will be much more stable than if your feet were together and you were standing up higher. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“Good. That is lesson one.”

“Standing is lesson one?” Jenny asked, her brow furrowed in disappointment.

“Yes, Jenny. This stance is the first building block to everything else you will learn. Without the understanding of how you gain stability, you will remain unstable.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“In aikido you will learn to use an opponent’s momentum against them. This takes very little effort on your part while subduing and defeating an attacker. Aikido is the art of defense; not offense.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“To prepare your body to learn the various throws, you must learn how to fall and roll so that you will not get injured,” Vastra said.

“So you’re going to throw me around?” Jenny asked.

“Not tonight,” Vastra said. “First you will learn safety. This is the forward roll. Watch me then I will walk you through.”

Vastra fluidly rolled across the floor, stood, turned, and rolled back toward Jenny.

“That is a forward roll,” Vastra said.

“You make it look so easy,” Jenny said nervously.

“It is nothing more than a procedure,” Vastra said. “It will take practice to get fluid, but you will get there. Now, stand with your left leg in front and your right leg behind and turn your feet and hips like this.” Vastra demonstrated beside Jenny.

Jenny did her best to mimic Vastra’s stance, but as with the ready position, she wasn’t quite right.

Vastra adjusted Jenny’s stance, widening her feet and turning her hips slightly. “Good. Now you will place your weight onto to your left leg, bend your left knee, and raise your right leg behind
you. As you do you will lean your left shoulder down and tilt your head down a bit.” Vastra helped guide Jenny’s body through the process. “Now place the outer edge of your left hand on the ground and bring your right hand to your left so that your arms make a circle.”

Vastra was holding Jenny up at this point as she attempted to balance in this wholly awkward position.

“Lower your head and look behind you through your arms. Keep your head down like this as you roll. When you roll, you will go up your left hand, through your forearm, and all the way up your shoulder.” Vastra traced the path with her fingers. “The momentum will carry you through and back to your feet. Ready?”

“I…”

But Jenny wasn’t allowed to finish her thought. Vastra shifted Jenny’s weight and began the roll. Jenny tumbled awkwardly and fell over when she tried to return to her feet.

“I didn’t do it,” Jenny said, looking up at Vastra. She was embarrassed and didn’t immediately get up.

“On your feet. Again,” Vastra said. If she were training Jenny the way she had been trained, Jenny would have already received the cane twenty times or more. But Vastra was sure Jenny’s delicate human hide couldn’t handle it; besides, it was a horrible way to learn.

Jenny got to her feet and got ready again. Her stance was good and Vastra was impressed that she had the focus to remember.

“This time I will not hold you up, you will do everything of your own accord,” Vastra said. “Remember, you are rolling up your entire left arm from your hand to your shoulder and across your back.” Once again, Vastra traced the path with her fingers. Jenny blushed. “Your arms should make a circle and your head should be tucked.”

Jenny tried again, this time all on her own. She made the roll and got back to her feet, nearly losing her balance at the end, but managing to stick the landing. She quickly turned, positioned, and rolled back toward Vastra.

“I did it,” Jenny said. She was so excited.

Vastra smiled at her student. “Yes, Jenny. That was the forward roll from standing position. There are many more rolls yet to learn, but for now we will keep practicing that. Moving on, I will now teach you how to fall. In order to protect your head, neck, and spine, you must learn breakfalls. When preformed correctly breakfalls will disperse the impact of the landing across your body. This will lessen the chance of injury.”

Vastra explained how to properly land by spreading the impact out across one’s arms. She demonstrated by falling onto her back from a standing position and letting her arms and hands slap onto the floor.

“Now you will try,” Vastra said. “First you will squat to get yourself closer to the ground.” Vastra demonstrated beside Jenny. “Tuck your chin to your chest, this will help protect your head. Put your arms out to your sides and gently roll back. As you roll backwards, slap your arms to the ground to disperse the impact.” Vastra demonstrated from the squatted position.

Jenny tucked her head, spread her arms, and began to fall backwards. Her instincts to catch herself
took over and she put her arms down too soon and did not execute the fall correctly.


Jenny got back to her feet and tried again. This time she didn’t attempt to catch herself and did as instructed.

“Good,” Vastra said.

The rest of the hour was spent with Jenny practicing forward rolls and various breakfalls. The second hour she learned backwards rolls and more falls. She was surprised how tiring it was to simply roll around and fall.

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Five a.m. came around and Jenny leapt from bed to start her day. She let out a yelp as soreness gripped her entire body and she realized she could hardly move.

Vastra entered the kitchen for breakfast to find Jenny moving stiffly and slowly about. She wondered if the young human would give up on her new training or stick it out. She hoped Jenny would continue as she saw great aptitude in the maid. And despite all her internal protesting to the contrary, Vastra had very much enjoyed the time together.

“How are you feeling today?” Vastra asked as she sat at the table to read the paper and sip tea until breakfast was ready.

“I’m quite sore, but other than that I’m alright,” Jenny said finishing up.

“I have some investigating to do which will keep me out all day,” Vastra said. “We will train tonight an hour past supper just like last night. Please be prepared.”

“I will be, Ma’am,” Jenny said, placing Vastra’s breakfast on the table. She didn’t want to complain about being sore. She wanted to show Vastra that she was tougher than the Silurian gave her credit. Housework today would be a chore for sure; but she was more than ready to tackle another training session.

As training sessions continued, Jenny practiced forward and backward rolls until she could fluidly tumble a circular path around the basement floor behind Vastra. She practiced falls from various squatting and standing positions. And Vastra began to demonstrate more basic stances and movements and Jenny would mimic. Jenny learned quickly, but still needed adjustments from Vastra. Over time her soreness became less and less. And Training sessions easily fit into her day.

Eventually the time came for Jenny to learn how to defend against attackers. It was easier to defend against an attacker who was coming at you from the front and who had a bit of momentum behind them, so that is where Vastra chose to start.

“Tonight you will learn how to throw an opponent who is attacking you. In order for this to be safe
and not lead to injury, you must remember that the rolls and falls you have learned will be applied when you are the one being thrown.”

“Being thrown?” Jenny asked, exasperated. “Isn’t it a bit too soon?”

“No, dear,” Vastra said flatly. “It is not soon enough.”

It seemed simple enough when Vastra went through it slowly and step by step. But when it was time for Jenny to actually come at Vastra as though she had a knife, the Silurian suddenly looked seven feet tall and very menacing.

“I can’t,” Jenny protested. “You’re going to throw me across the room.”

“That is the point,” Vastra said. She could see her directness didn’t ease Jenny’s fear. “Jenny, you know how to fall and roll. You are simply doing that now, when thrown. That is all.”

Jenny still wasn’t convinced, but she knew she had to do it, so she may as well get it over with. “All right.”

Jenny came at Vastra as though she meant to attack her with a knife. Vastra side stepped, grabbed Jenny’s wrist, and moved her body in such a way that made Jenny flip and land on her back.

Jenny remembered her training and tucked her head and put her arms out to absorb the impact.

“There, see, no harm done,” Vastra said. “And what is more if you were an attacker you would now think twice before coming back at me. And I barely moved.”

Jenny laid on the floor for a second, then popped up with a smile. “That was bloody brilliant.”

“Now it is my turn to come at you and your turn to throw me,” Vastra instructed.

“I can’t throw you,” Jenny protested. “You’re so much taller than me. And stronger.”

“Size and strength does not matter, Jenny. I dare say that any male attacking you will be stronger and quite larger than your petite frame.”

Jenny blushed.

“Now remember how I showed you,” Vastra said. “Side step, grab my wrist, and move your body the same way I did. It will not matter who is larger or who is stronger. The principles are all the same.”

Again, Jenny wasn’t convinced. But, again, she knew it must be done. She nodded to Vastra and the Silurian came at her. Jenny side stepped, grabbed Vastra’s wrist, and then completely forgot what she was supposed to do with her body to complete the throw.

Vastra capitalized on Jenny’s mistake and countered with a move of her own and tossed Jenny like a ragdoll across the room. Jenny wasn’t prepared, but she managed to roll and fall correctly to avoid injury.

Jenny stood up wide eyed and shaking. “You didn’t bloody tell me you were gonna do that!”

Vastra got defensive and raised her voice. “An attacker is not going to tell you when he is going to attack you, Jenny. You must be prepared at all times.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Jenny said, and hung her head.
“None of that,” Vastra said. She did know THAT human body language and she did not abide pouting. “Come back and let us try again.”

Jenny walked back to the starting position.

“Let me show you what you did wrong,” Vastra said.

Vastra walked toward Jenny. “Side step now.”

Jenny side stepped.

“Good,” Vastra said. “Now, grab my wrist.”

Jenny grabbed Vastra’s wrist.

“This was your first mistake,” Vastra pointed out. “You grabbed like this, but you should have grabbed like this.” Vastra took Jenny’s hand and repositioned it on her wrist. “Do you see?”

“Yes,” Jenny said. She was holding Vastra’s wrist and noticing how cool it was.

“Good,” Vastra interrupted her thoughts. “Once you have my wrist like this, you will drop this leg and pivot your hips. Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

“Full speed now.”

Vastra came at Jenny again. Jenny sidestepped, grabbed Vastra’s wrist, and lowered and pivoted her body throwing the Silurian to the ground.

“Very good,” Vastra said, quickly getting up. “We will practice a few more times each and then move on to the next exercise.

Practice continued like this with Jenny learning a few more throws to avert an attacker. Jenny soon learned that Vastra did not resist being thrown about so long as Jenny’s form was correct and she was executing the moves with the balance and strength expected. But if Jenny’s form faltered, she found herself on the other side of the basement.

At the conclusion of the lesson Vastra bowed to Jenny and Jenny to Vastra.

“I hope you enjoyed tonight’s lesson,” Vastra said.

“I did, Ma’am.”

“Tonight you learned the basics of what to do when someone is rushing toward you. Tomorrow will begin lessons on how to get out of holds. How to free yourself once an attacker has grabbed you.”

“Like when Simon grabbed me from behind?” Jenny asked.

“Yes. As when Simon grabbed you from behind.” Vastra paused. “I am sorry that Simon was killed.” Vastra paused again. “He loved you very much.”

Tears welled in Jenny’s eyes. “He did?”

“Yes. He told me so. He told me he would keep my secret because of his love for you. But he
asked that I not tell you. He did not want you to seek him out. He had to leave and he said it would be all the harder if you knew.”

“Stupid, silly man,” Jenny sniffed.

“I am sorry,” Vastra said. “For my part in it all. In his death.”

“You didn’t kill him,” Jenny said. “You did the right thing.”

“Did you…” Vastra paused as if she struggled to pull the words from her throat. “Did you love him?”

Jenny smiled. “As a friend. As a mentor. As a father figure who accepted me as I was. Yes, I loved him for those reasons. But if you’re asking if I was in love with him. Well, Ma’am, he simply wasn’t my sort.”

Vastra smiled and left it at that. She didn’t get Jenny’s full meaning, but she was relieved that she wasn’t responsible for the death of Jenny’s love.

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After proper warmups and stretching, Vastra got on about explaining the night’s lesson. “It is crucial that you pay very close attention to all of tonight’s instruction, Jenny. It takes only a small amount of pressure to break bones and dislocate joints. Even with carefully choreographed movements a hand out of position or too much pressure in the wrong place can have severe consequences. I will show you where and how to apply pressure to get the desired results but without injury. We will begin very slowly with these types of moves. It will take weeks and months for you to begin to master them.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“I will begin by showing you how to get out of the clutches of someone who has grabbed you from behind,” Vastra said. “Please stand behind me and put your right hand to my throat as though you had a knife to it.”

Jenny did as she was told.

“It may seem contrary to every instinct,” Vastra said, “but you will grab the attacker’s hand and pull him into you.”

“Well that doesn’t sound right,” Jenny said.

“Let me show you. Grab the attacker’s hand with the knife and pull his body into yours. Then slightly dip your body weight down and pull the attacker into you, extending and rotating their arm as you do so. This will put their elbow onto the top of your shoulder and from here you can easily break the joint.”

Vastra could feel Jenny’s body heat rising.

“I am not going to break your arm, Jenny. You need not worry. If it is too much simply tap me somewhere on my body with your free hand and I shall release you.”
The advice didn’t seem to help. Jenny was getting more nervous.

“We will begin slowly.” Vastra slowly and carefully went through the motions, careful not to harm Jenny.

Jenny forgot to tap Vastra when she had enough and instead let out a yelp.

Vastra ceased pressure immediately.

“Please tap out, Jenny. That is the most effective way to make it stop,” Vastra said.

“Sorry, Ma’am,” Jenny hung her head.

“Not to worry,” Vastra said. “Now you have felt how little effort it takes to cause pain if applied correctly. Remember it is not about strength or size; it is always about technique and form.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“Now, it is your turn,” Vastra said.

Vastra moved behind Jenny and put her hand to her throat as though she had a knife. Jenny thought back to the night with Simon and wondered if things would have gone differently if she had known how to defend herself. But she soon thought that no, things would have gone worse, if anything.

“Jenny,” Vastra said, snapping Jenny back to the lesson.

“Sorry.”

“Just go nice and slow,” Vastra said. “I shall talk you through and if I tap your shoulder, that means let go.”

“Got it.”

Jenny grabbed Vastra’s hand, the one at her throat. She dipped and leaned her body as Vastra had directed and shifted her weight to pull Vastra close. There was only a small amount of fabric that separated them. Jenny’s heart raced as she pulled Vastra tighter to her body. She forgot to rotate Vastra’s arm and Vastra countered.

Jenny found herself on the ground with her arm wrenched in a painful position. Vastra released only when Jenny tapped out.

“You must rotate my arm such that my elbow is directly on your shoulder. That is how you break the joint. You did not do it correctly.”

Jenny jumped to her feet. She was embarrassed that she let Vastra’s body so close to hers distract her from what she should do. “I’m sorry, Ma’am. I forgot what to do.”

“It will come more naturally in time. For now you are learning.”

Vastra seemed unfazed by the proximity of their bodies and Jenny was even more embarrassed.

“Again.”

Jenny took her position and once again Vastra posed as if she had a knife to Jenny’s throat. This time Jenny remembered the moves and slowly executed them until Vastra tapped her on the shoulder.
“Very good,” Vastra smiled. “Now I shall teach you how to get out of another hold.”

Tonight’s lesson was hard and painful. More than once Jenny screamed as Vastra got the upper hand in a throw and drove Jenny to the mat, arm twisted behind her. But each time, Jenny got to her feet, sweating profusely in the thick training garb.

The lesson had gone on far beyond the scheduled two hours as the two lost track of time. Jenny endured the activity until finally, upon standing, he swayed a bit and Vastra could see that she had had enough.

Vastra bowed, “That is enough for today, Jenny.”

“But I can do more,” Jenny insisted and didn’t bow.

“We are done,” Vastra said sternly.

“But, Ma’am,”

Vastra snapped at Jenny. “Know your limits, Jenny. It just may save your life one day.”

The lesson set in and Jenny bowed. “Yes, Ma’am.”

With that last word, Jenny fainted.

She woke, in her bed with a cold damp cloth on her forehead and Vastra seated beside her. Her sweat soaked hakama had been removed and she laid atop her blankets in her keikogi and white trousers. The obi had been untied and her keikogi was loosened to allow her body temperature to cool.

“Wut, ’appened?” Jenny asked, groggily; her accent coming through.

“I am afraid I worked you too hard, my dear,” Vastra answered as she smiled at the brunette. “You fainted there at the end; but in your defense, you went down in spectacular fashion.”

“Oi,” Jenny sighed. She noticed the gapping keikogi jacket and felt her face heat up a bit although she was still perfectly covered beneath. “Sorry, Ma’am.” She cinched the jacket and sat up in the bed.

Vastra continued to sit beside her. “Sorry?” Vastra asked, puzzled. “Whatever do you have to be sorry for?”

“For fainting,” Jenny said. “For letting you down.”

“Oh, Jenny,” Vastra smiled, “you did no such thing. We simply found your limit today that is all. I pushed you much too hard. We shall take tomorrow off and start again on Monday.”

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Training continued from spring through the summer. Week after week Jenny was becoming quite proficient in aikido, or at least what she had learned so far with rolls, falls, and controlled attacks. The cool basement felt good as sessions increased from two hours up to four or more on days where schedules would allow. And her overall strength, flexibility, and balance were improving.
Jenny somehow managed to keep up her workload with the house, her training, the occasional night out with Frankie, and her favorite pastime of assisting Vastra with cases. Several casefiles came and went over the summer, but one hung around—the “Mason” file. It was proving unsolvable as the case became colder and colder and any would-be leads dried up.

Vastra sat at her desk, papers scattered across its surface, with her head cradled in her hands. If there was a clue hidden here, she was yet to find it. She didn’t hear Jenny’s light knock on the French doors nor did she seem to notice when the maid entered the room and placed the tray on the small table.

“Ma’am,” she said, just above a whisper as she walked toward the desk. There was no noticeable reaction from Vastra.

Jenny walked behind the desk and looked at the scattered papers, photos, and notes. It was the “Mason” case. Vastra had been obsessed with it for weeks. It wasn’t Scotland Yard’s top priority but it was most certainly hers. She hated an unsolved case.

“Ma’am,” Jenny said again; this time gently laying her hand on the Vastra’s right shoulder. “Come have some tea.”

“In a minute, Dear,” Vastra said, still in her haze. She raised her left hand across her body to her shoulder and mindlessly placed it on Jenny’s.

“Vastra,” Jenny gently squeezed her shoulder, “come have some tea.”

With the vocalization of her name, Vastra was pulled from her haze. She turned her head to see both their hands on her shoulder then looked up at Jenny. It was only then that either fully realized the intimacy of their touch.

Jenny slowly pulled her hand away and walked over to the small table. She poured two cups of tea.

“Come have some tea,” she insisted. “It’ll do you good to get away from that desk for a bit. You won’t see anything new unless you look at it all with new eyes. Maybe take some time to practice your sword in the basement.”

Reluctantly, Vastra got up and joined Jenny at the table. “Perhaps you are right,” she said. “The physical activity would be good for me, get the blood moving.”

“Of course I’m right,” Jenny smiled. “The sooner you recognize that the better off you’ll be.”

Vastra returned her maid’s smile, but did not say anything.

“Are you sure you don’t want me to take a look at that case?” Jenny asked. “I may see something you don’t. Human eyes and all.”

“Thank you, Jenny, but not quite yet. I have taken this on as my personal mission to solve. It is frustrating because my usual weapon of smell is of no use. All pheromones I picked up from the victim have been accounted for and each of the humans who belong to those scents has an alibi.”

“I saw your list of suspects,” Jenny said. “It was quite extensive. Were there really that many people who wanted to kill that poor man?”

“No, those were simply the men whose scents I was able to confirm from the victim. They all belong to his fraternity, the Freemasons.”
“Freemasons,” Jenny said. “I’ve heard of them. Smart builder types.”

“Yes,” Vastra said. “Educated, upper class, some even royalty. So you see why I cannot risk a false accusation. It could very well end my services with the Yard.”

Vastra finished her tea and sighed. “I suppose I will take a few minutes in the basement to practice my katana. Do you care to join me?”

“No thank you, Ma’am,” Jenny smiled. “I want to catch up on a few things tonight to free up some time tomorrow. Speaking of which, I’m going out tomorrow night, so I would prefer not to train too late. I have a full night planned and I’d rather not be too beat up.”

“Why don’t we take the weekend off,” Vastra said. “I could use some more time on this case and we have been working rather hard as of late. I am sure we could both use a break.”

“Thank you, Ma’am.”

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Saturday night at two a.m. Vastra’s head snapped up when she heard the front door open and then close. She then heard Jenny giggle as she hung her coat and hat on the rack.

Closing the door to her office behind her, Vastra joined Jenny in the entry hall. Vastra immediately smelled the tell-tale scents of a night out on her maid: stale smoke, ale, and…

“Well,” Vastra started, “it seems as though you had a good time tonight.”

“Aye.” Jenny said, smiling mischievously.

“The hour is late. Cabs are hard to come by. I do hope you were careful walking home.” Vastra’s concern was clearly not warranted as here Jenny stood, safe and sound in their home.

“Appears so, Ma’am,” Jenny said dryly. “If there’s nothing else I really should retire. I am quite knackered.”

“Of course,” Vastra said and stepped aside.

As Jenny walked past Vastra to the stairs, Vastra let out an audible gasp. Jenny turned to look, and Vastra quickly diverted her eyes to the floor.

Jenny stopped, descended the two steps she had taken up, and stood at the bottom of the stairs.

“What’s gotten into you?” Jenny asked. “You didn’t wait up for me, did you?”

“Certainly not,” Vastra protested.

“I told you I would be out late. Not to worry. That I had… plans.” Jenny over emphasized the word ‘plans.’ She was toying now with Vastra and it was fun.

“You did.”

“Then what’s gotten into you?” Jenny asked. “You seem,” Jenny searched her vocabulary for the right word, “bothered.”
“Bothered?” Vastra scoffed. “Whatever would I be bothered by?”

“You tell me,” Jenny insisted. “Whenever I walked past you, you gasped as though something startled you.”

“No. I,” Vastra stammered.

Jenny closed the gap between them now standing a mere foot away from her Madam. “You. What?” Jenny pressed.

Vastra straightened up to her full height. “You smell,” she paused knowing what she was about to say was wholly inappropriate, “of another woman. Her pheromones are all about you.”

Jenny’s eyes glinted and she grinned a mischievous grin. “Aye.”

“I am sorry,” Vastra looked away. “It is not my place. It is not my business.” She made to turn and walk back to her office but Jenny caught her wrist and forcefully turned her around to face her, pulling her within inches.

“But it bothers you?” Jenny asked. Not taking her hand off Vastra’s wrist.

“It is NOT my business,” Vastra reaffirmed her position. “Now kindly release me.” Vastra didn’t have to ask to be released. She was clearly well adept at defending herself.

Jenny closed the gap further and released Vastra’s wrist. Vastra was now encircled in the smells of Jenny’s night out: smoke, ale, Jenny’s sweat, and the pheromones of a strange woman. It was enough to make Vastra’s scales stand up on end.

As Jenny pressed the full length of her body against Vastra she whispered. “Perhaps you wish it was your scent all over me?”

Vastra gasped, “I dare say. I would never.”

Jenny moved back a bit, separating herself from Vastra. “No. I suppose you wouldn’t.” She looked Vastra directly in the eyes, “You’re too scared to.”

Vastra’s eyes flashed with the intensity of a storm in spring. She grabbed Jenny by the shoulders and spun her around, pinning her to the wall. She leaned in but hesitated.

“What are you waiting for you daft old lizard?” Jenny’s voice was thready. “Kiss me.”

Vastra hesitated still. Finally speaking in broken words, “I. I do not know the human way.” Vastra’s eyes seemed to plea for some help.

Jenny strained against the force of her captor raising slightly to put her lips closer to the Vastra’s face. “Then do it the Silurian way.”

Jenny had no idea the primitive urges she had just awoken in the ancient reptile. Vastra’s eyes flashed again and the normally bright clear cerulean blue turned a milky storm gray with bolts of white breaking up the tempest.

This should have been enough to scare any human beyond words, but Jenny was not afraid. Her body relaxed and she instantly ceased any resistance, even in play. She looked directly in Vastra’s eyes, laid her head back against the wall, and turned to expose her neck fully to the Silurian. She had no idea why she did that, it just felt right.
Vastra gasped. Her long Silurian tongue snaked out slowly first tasting the air. She had done this many times in the past after Jenny had left a room, tasted the air around Jenny. She savored the taste of the girl on a normal day, but today it was mixed with the scent of another woman. Vastra didn’t care. Not in this moment. Her tongue made the short journey to Jenny’s neck and stroked the tender skin. Jenny gasped and Vastra made to pull away; but Jenny moved her hands to Vastra’s waist and pulled her tight into her.

Vastra drew her tongue back inside her mouth as she lowered her teeth to Jenny’s neck. She bit down. Hard. Jenny gasped again, pulling Vastra even harder against her. This fed Vastra’s desire. She rubbed her face on Jenny’s cheek and Jenny could hear, or more to the point feel, a low, deep rumble of sorts coming from somewhere inside the Silurian’s head or throat. It was reminiscent of purring, but much deeper and more primal, perhaps a purr mixed with a growl. Vastra’s tongue flicked in and out of her lips, tasting the air, tasting Jenny. She bit Jenny, lightly on the neck and shoulders. Jenny gasped and her body heat rose. All of this fueled Vastra’s desire.

Vastra released Jenny’s shoulders but kept her pinned to the wall with her body. Jenny’s hands explored the Silurian’s back, her fingers digging in when Vastra would bite or lick her flesh. Her hands made their way up, almost to their target: Vastra’s head and crests.

Then Vastra pulled away. “No.” She said sharply.

“What’s the matter?” Jenny asked and attempted to touch Vastra’s cheek with her hand.

Vastra intercepted the hand, grabbing onto Jenny’s wrist. She reveled in the warmth of Jenny’s skin.

“You have had quite a long night. I am afraid your inhibitions have been,” she thought carefully, “altered, by the alcohol. And,” Vastra paused not knowing exactly how to go on.

“And what?” Jenny urged her on.

“And you have been with another woman tonight.” Vastra’s gaze now left Jenny’s.

“Ah.” Jenny said and smiled. She cupped her hand around Vastra’s fingers that held her wrist, and squeezed. “I have been out, aye. But I’ve not had a drop of alcohol for myself.”

She moved her hand up and gently touched Vastra’s cheek bringing the Silurian’s gaze back to her own.

“As for another woman.” Jenny smiled bright; her thumb caressed Vastra’s cheek. “I escorted my very drunk friend home. Her state required me to steady her along the way as she draped about me singing in merriment. I took her home and tucked her into bed and left her to sleep off the night.”

Jenny removed her hand from Vastra’s grip and placed it on her other cheek. Cupping the Silurian’s face. “You’re the only woman I want to touch,” she pulled Vastra to her. “To kiss.”

Jenny touched her lips to Vastra’s. The contrast of warm and cool sent a flash through both women. Jenny parted her lips and Vastra followed suit falling into a deep passionate kiss.

Jenny separated from Vastra’s lips and pushed her gently away to look at her. Their eyes met again and the milky gray churned in Vastra’s gaze. “That’s the human way.”

Reluctantly, Vastra pulled away from Jenny. “You should get to bed,” she said with disappointment in her voice. “You are tired. I do not want to keep you awake.”

Jenny leaned in again and placed a final soft kiss on Vastra’s lips. “I’ll see you in the morning.”
With that, she left the Silurian in the entry hall and made her way upstairs.

Chapter End Notes

Feedback/reviews encouraged and appreciated. Thank you.

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Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 16: The More Things Change

Jenny slept in late, for her. It was after sunrise by the time she finally rolled out of bed. She smiled as the memories from the night before flooded back to her. She had enjoyed baiting Vastra and pushing her to what she knew they had both wanted for some time now. But she resolved to let Vastra make the next move. She felt she had made her desires perfectly clear.

With the cold water in her basin, she washed the previous night off her skin and out of her hair which would have to suffice until she could take a proper bath. She slipped on some breeches and a shirt and ran her fingers through her long hair to detangle it. Wrinkling up her nose, she looked at the pile of clothes that would need to be laundered to remove all the spilled ale and stale smoke. She let out an exasperated sigh. “Better get these to the scullery for pickup.” Then she lazily made her way down the stairs.

Entering the downstairs hallway she noticed that the door to Vastra’s study was open. This was not normal. Those doors were always closed whether Vastra was in there or not, mostly to keep the heat in. Pausing for a moment, a smile crept across Jenny’s face. She got her emotions in check and walked past the open doorway toward the kitchen purposefully not turning her head to look into the room.

“Jenny,” Vastra called to her from behind her desk.

Jenny stopped, fought back another smile, and returned to the open doorway. She stood, leaning up against the door frame, her long brown hair falling down around her shoulders, still damp.

Vastra’s eyes flashed.

“Yes?” Jenny asked.

Vastra stood up and walked to the front of her desk and leaned up against it. “I feel I must apologize for my actions last night.”

Jenny tilted her head slightly to the right. “Apologize?”

“Yes,” Vastra continued. “Please come in. Sit.” She motioned toward a chair in front of her desk.

Jenny regarded Vastra for a moment, placed the dirty laundry in the hallway, and then made her way to the chair in front of Vastra.

“My actions last night were inappropriate.” She paused and her eyes darted about the room.

“You weren’t alone in those actions, Ma’am,” Jenny reassured her.

“But I am your employer,” Vastra continued. “It is inappropriate for an employer to make such advances toward her employee.”

There was a long pause as Jenny thought about what Vastra said.

“Haven’t we already decided there isn’t anything normal about our relationship? A maid doesn’t
normally sleep in a bedroom upstairs alongside the Madam of the house, much less share a table. Not to mention my training and assisting with your cases.” Jenny felt quite proud of herself for making such a strong argument.

“Yes, but, are there not some lines that an employer simply must not cross with her employee?” Vastra countered.

“I see,” Jenny said. “I suppose you’re right. There’s only one thing for it then.” Jenny stood up and began to make her way toward the hallway as Vastra continued to speak.

“Thank you, Jenny. I did not want what happened last night to harm our relationship,” Vastra said.

Jenny turned back to Vastra addressing her just before leaving the room. “I quit.” And with that she retrieved the laundry she had left in the hallway and made her way toward the kitchen.

Vastra remained, stunned, leaned against her desk. All words failed her. Finally, after a few moments, she came to her senses and followed after Jenny to the kitchen. Jenny was putting a kettle on to boil.

“So you’re just going to quit and then come in here and have tea?”

“Will you be having some as well?” Jenny asked.

“Jenny Flint!” Vastra said, exasperated. “I do not know what you are playing at here, but you cannot simply terminate your employ as my maid.”

Jenny raised an eyebrow. “Oi! I can and I did!” Jenny said firmly. “I have worked off my debt proper and as such am free to stop being your maid any time I bloody well please.”

Vastra was in shock at Jenny’s brashness. “Where will you go? What will you do?”

“Oh I’ll be staying right here,” Jenny said. “The way I see it, I’ve been acting as your assistant with the cases for some time now. So really, when you think about it, a portion of the Yard wages is mine. And I reckon that makes me your partner, not your employee. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have chores to do.”

Jenny left the kitchen, again leaving Vastra in her wake and speechless. Vastra snapped to and followed after Jenny up the stairs. She stopped suddenly seeing that Jenny was in her room stripping her bed. “What are you doing with my bed?” Vastra asked sharply.

“I told you I’ve chores to do. The laundry service will be here soon and I want to get the linens out,” Jenny replied. She finished collecting Vastra’s things and started making her way into her own bedroom.

Vastra followed, attempting to sort out what was going on.

“What? Are you just going to keep …?” Vastra was clearly flustered. “I do not understand. You quit as my maid yet you are still going to perform maid duties?”

“Well someone bloody well has to,” Jenny said as she bundled the laundry together. “This house was a right mess before I got here.”

“So the only thing that changes is that I am no longer paying you to do them?”

Jenny stopped in her tracks, her arms full of laundry. “Oi! If that’s the only thing that changes ’round here, then you are thicker than I thought.” She brushed past Vastra in a huff and headed
back to the kitchen.

Vastra, once again, was left speechless.

*****

The following week was awkward for both Vastra and Jenny; though more so for the latter. Jenny didn’t understand what the issue was now that she had quit as Vastra’s employee and Vastra didn’t seem to think anything had actually changed. Or at least she wasn’t making any efforts to the contrary. Either way neither would acknowledge the events of Saturday night or the feelings either clearly had for the other.

As the weeks continued Jenny hoped things would get better; but Vastra was spending more time out of the house during the day with her field work as the season was slowly shifting into cooler fall weather. And she spent a lot of her free time at home sequestered in her greenhouse; the only remaining room that Jenny was not allowed entry.

Jenny buried herself in housework, case files, and training. She was now hitting the basement for an hour here or there just to release her pent up frustration at how thick Vastra was about the whole ordeal. And she was spending more and more Saturday nights out with Frankie.

They hardly spoke to one another other than Jenny acknowledging direct questions or instructions. Vastra, not being one for small talk in the first place, seemed unaffected by the change. But it made home life for Jenny quite lonely again. They still shared breakfast and supper at the same table; but they ate quickly and in silence.

Training sessions were the hardest time for either of them as they were constantly in direct physical contact with one another. Vastra maintained a no-nonsense, professional attitude; and Jenny was respectful and astute.

In mid-September Vastra introduced a new type of training. Prior to now, they had simply practiced individual moves, attacks and defenses, first slowly then gradually up to full speed as Jenny learned the skill. But starting today, they would enter into a whole new aspect of training: sparring.

“Today we begin sparring,” Vastra was all business. There was no playfulness to her tone, not that there ever was really. “Sparring presents the greatest potential for injury thus far in your training; therefore it is imperative that you apply all the skills you have thusly acquired to remain safe. While sparring we are free for either to attack the other at any moment. But remember to tap out before you risk broken bones or other damage.”

Vastra bowed to Jenny. Jenny bowed back. They both took the ready stance.

Jenny didn’t hesitate. She lunged at Vastra and attempted to grapple her. Vastra simply stepped aside and with little effort at all sent Jenny sailing across the room. Jenny landed with a loud ‘thud’ and lay momentarily out of breath.

Vastra had been much easier on Jenny thus far than her own instructor had ever been with her. That was a mistake that Vastra sought to correct post haste.

Jenny got up and came at her again. Again she attempted to grapple the Silurian and again she
found herself on the floor, air knocked out of her lungs.

“Remember, Jenny,” Vastra stood ready waiting for the next attack. “I am simply using your own momentum against you. Do not give me so much to work with.”

Jenny got to her feet and this time approached Vastra more carefully. She found purchase on Vastra’s aikigo and attempted to muscle Vastra to the ground. Vastra simply grabbed Jenny by the wrist and with a simple twist she had her on the ground begging for release.

Vastra let go and stepped away.

Jenny got to her feet and rubbed her bright red wrist.

Again Jenny slowly approached, altered her hips and angle, and attempted to take down the Silurian by lowering her center of gravity. But again, Vastra was too quick, too agile, and too strong for Jenny. Jenny found herself in an arm bar yelling for mercy.

Jenny made to come in for another attack. “No,” Vastra said and quickly bowed to Jenny. “Today’s lesson is over, and I believe you have learned it well. You adjusted your attack each time and you never gave in to frustration. Sometimes simply keeping calm can win a seemingly unwinnable battle.” Vastra bowed to Jenny. “You did well.”

Jenny bowed.

“You never attacked,” Jenny said.

“I never had to,” Vastra said. “I simply had to defend myself. You were all too eager to be the aggressor.”

Jenny glared at Vastra. She didn’t know if this statement had deeper meaning or if she was simply reading into it.

“Continue your forms and we will pick this up tomorrow.” Vastra instructed Jenny.

*****

“I swear that woman makes me so mad I want to spit,” Jenny said.

Frankie watched as Jenny downed another pint and slammed the mug onto the table. “You better slow down, Jenny. The night is young and you’re on your way to bein’ kanurd before I ever hit the stage.”

“I’ll be fine,” Jenny said. “At least I know you’ll still love me if I act a fool. Not like some people.”

“What are you goin’ on about?” Frankie asked. “Did you and your madam have a falling out?” Of course Frankie guessed it was something to do with Vastra, as that was the only person Jenny ever mentioned.

“Sumthin’ like that.” Jenny’s accent came out more and more as she drank.

“Well, wut ‘appened?” Frankie asked.
“She’s a daft old li….” Jenny stopped herself before she said “lizard.” “She’s just a daft old woman who doesn’t know when she’s got a good thing. That’s all.”

“You mean you?”

“Of course I mean me,” Jenny barked at Frankie. “Who else would I mean?”

“I’ve told you before, Jenny,” Frankie started. “Women like her can’t get on with another woman. It’s just too deep in their proper upbringin’. They aren’t like us modern, progressive.”

“It’s not like that,” Jenny said. “She’s not like that.”

“Well have you told ‘er how you feel?” Frankie asked.

“I bloody well did more than that. I kissed her.”

“Oi! When’d you do this?”

“Remember the night a few weeks back, in summer, you opened at the Olympic theatre?”

“Bloody right I do,” Frankie smiled, “don’ know how I could forget that night.”

“Well quite frankly I’m surprised you remember anything at all that night you were so drunk,” Jenny said. “Anyway, I got home and Madam was still up and I just...” Jenny hesitated.

“Jus’ what?” Frankie asked, smiling and raising her eyebrows.

“I goaded her into kissing me.” Jenny attempted to hide her face in her hands.

Frankie pulled Jenny’s hands away. “Don’t be embarrassed. What happened?”

“Nothing,” Jenny said. “We kissed, and right well I might add, and then I went to bed. The next day she was all ‘I am sorry. I took advantage. I was inappropriate.’” Jenny mocked Vastra attempting to speak in her voice. “And nothin’s happened since.”

“Have you tried talkin’ to her about it? About how you feel?”

“She bloody well knows how I feel! I couldn’t have been more clear about that.”

“What made her give in?” Frankie asked. “You said you goaded her. What did you say?”

“I think she was jealous. She said she could smell another woman on me. And I said that I bet she wished it was her and then she threw me against the wall and kissed me.”

“She said she could smell another woman on you?” Frankie looked confused. “That’s a right odd thing to say.”

“Not for her it isn’t,” Jenny scoffed.

“Wait,” Frankie said, suddenly realizing she may have missed something. “Were you with anyone that night?”

“No!” Jenny said. “Of course not. She could smell you because I practically carried you back to your flat. I had your sweat and most of your last pint all over me.”

“Then, make her jealous again. If that’s what got her last time, just make her jealous and see what
“I won’t play games. I won’t beg.” Jenny was quite adamant on this point. “If she can’t come to me on her own terms, I won’t bait her again.”

A man waved to Frankie from beside the stage.

“I’m about to go on,” Frankie said. “Thanks again for coming out, love.”

“I wouldn’t miss it,” Jenny smiled.

Frankie kissed Jenny on the cheek leaving a bit of lipstick. “Don’t you dare wipe that off!”

Jenny smiled and sat back to watch the show.

*****

As the weeks rolled into October casual conversation picked back up with Vastra and Jenny. Suppers weren’t nearly as silent and the two women were once again comfortable with each other in their home.

“You shall need to double the firewood delivery. Temperatures are dropping and we do not want to be caught unprepared,” Vastra said at the end of supper.

“Yes, Ma’am,” Jenny said. “And I’ll not be going out if you are to be out on the job. I would very much like some notice on that so that I can plan my Saturday nights accordingly.”

“Please do not let me get in the way of your plans,” Vastra said. “If there is someone…”

Jenny cut her off. “There’s no one. Ma’am.”

“I do not wish to be a burden, Jenny. You are, after all, no longer my maid so you do not have to be at my beck and call.”

“I don’t do it because it’s my job, Ma’am.”

“Very well,” Vastra said. “I shall keep you updated.”

Jenny reached over to the chair beside her where she had cleverly hidden a package before calling Vastra to supper. She retrieved a box, roughly four by eight inches. Upon its top was a drawing of a woman sitting at a dressing table brushing her long dark hair. Her reflection in the mirror revealed that she looked a great deal like Jenny herself, minus her beauty mark. She held the box out to Vastra.

“What is this?” Vastra asked.

“Open it,” Jenny directed.

Opening the box Vastra found three black handkerchiefs inside. Each was delicately detailed with elaborate black stitching around the edge and each had a “V” stitched into one corner in emerald green thread.
“They are mourning handkerchiefs,” Jenny said. “But since you wear mostly dark colors and go skulking about at all hours of the night, I thought it better to get black instead of white.”

“Thank you, Jenny.” Vastra was sincerely touched. “Whatever did I do to deserve these?”

“If you’ll remember, Ma’am, it was two years ago when I came to live here.” Jenny started to hang her head as she remembered the circumstances by which she had come to live under Vastra’s roof. But then she thought about how far both she and their relationship had come and smiled. “So it’s our two year anniversary of sorts. At least it’s my anniversary of being here. And the woman at the store said the gift for two years was cotton.”

“You apes have…” Vastra caught herself. “There are specific gifts you give one another to commemorate anniversaries?”

“Appears so, Ma’am.”

“Thank you, Jenny,” Vastra said. “These are beautiful. I am afraid I did not buy you a gift. I was unaware of both the significance of the date as well as the tradition.”

“That’s quite alright, Ma’am,” Jenny smiled. “It’s silly, really.”

“Nonsense,” Vastra chided. “I shall treasure them always.”

Vastra wasn’t sure which she liked more, the handkerchiefs themselves or the drawing on the front of the box that reminded her of Jenny.

*****

November was drawing to a close and Jenny wondered how Vastra was able to tolerate the cold damp basement conditions day after day. But the Silurian pressed on with training without complaint.

Entering the basement Jenny noticed that a second sword rack had been added to the shelf. There were two katanas on the rack; but other than simply noticing them, she didn’t pay them much attention.

The two women had developed a routine that they performed in silence to begin Jenny’s training sessions. Upon entering and bowing, the two would go through a series of rolls and falls followed by what appeared to be a choreographed set of motions they performed side by side. Vastra no longer needed to correct Jenny’s form throughout the warmup and Jenny knew the routine by heart.

After the warm up, Vastra would inform Jenny of what new thing she would learn that night. And tonight, practice took yet another completely new turn.

Vastra walked to the rack and retrieved one of the new katanas and brought it over to Jenny. “This is your daito.” She handed Jenny the bokken.

Jenny took the sword and began to examine it. It was made entirely of wood. It was a deep, rich reddish brown. The handle was intricately wrapped in cream colored cloth. And just above the handle a series of Japanese characters were carved. “What does it say?” Jenny asked.
“White rose,” Vastra answered.

Jenny thought of the lock box Vastra had given her upon repaying her debt and the inlaid white mother of pearl rose set into its lid. “It’s beautiful, Ma’am.” Jenny was stunned.

“This will be your practice weapon. While it is more crude than the katana and will not slice, it will deliver a smart blow, break bone, and rupture organs. In the right hands it is just as deadly as any metal blade.”

“You mean we will be hitting each other with these?” Jenny asked. “It’s so beautiful. Surely it belongs on display.”

“It is not fragile,” Vastra said. “It will withstand punishment. And it will be a long while before we are ready to spar with weapons. For now you will learn new forms, parries, and thrusts. You will primarily learn how to attack an opponent with your sword who is not similarly armed. There is not much occasion for proper sword duels these days.”

Vastra went to the new rack and retrieved her own daito. In stark contrast to Jenny’s hers was made of very light colored wood, almost white, with black wrappings on the handle. Hers too had Japanese characters at the base of the blade; but Jenny did not ask what they meant.

“I chose the light colored wood so that you could easily see the blade in the dark basement,” Vastra explained. “First you shall learn grip.”

Vastra showed Jenny how to hold the bokken firmly, yet delicately. “The katana is a weapon of grace and elegance. It is not an axe, you do not chop with it. It does not rely on brute strength. The katana must remain fluid in your hand. You must be able to vary the direction of the swing and counter attacks from many fronts.”

Vastra moved the sword within her hand—blocking low then high, slicing invisible opponents from front and behind. It was like an extension of her own body. The motions seemed effortless.

Jenny attempted to mimic, but the bokken soon clanked along the floor. “Sorry,” Jenny said retrieving the daito.

“You will drop it. That is why you practice. Please do not apologize every time you do so.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

The rest of the training session was spent with Jenny learning basic motions and forms with her daito. Her previous training in hand to hand melded into this and the transition was seamless for her. And right away Vastra recognized the dexterity Jenny had with the sword. No wonder she had been so good with lock picks.

*****

Jenny had learned from her experience last winter, so this year while Vastra was out working on cold nights, she stayed awake with water preheated on the stove and a large fire roaring in the front room. If Vastra came home too cold she wouldn’t be able to get up the stairs and would need plenty of space in front of the fire to rewarm. She kept a pint of blood at room temperature to be quickly heated as Vastra tended to be weakened, even if she wasn’t near freezing. She also had a
fully stocked medical kit ready to go as well as a variety of instruments that could be used to cauterize Vastra’s tough skin. Jenny was as prepared as she could be at home.

Not wanting to do anything too physical and tire herself out at night; Jenny used this time to study case files as it was quiet and she could concentrate on details. Vastra hadn’t expressly forbidden her from researching the “Mason” case, but she also hadn’t asked for her help. So along with the other cases she was helping with, Jenny took it upon herself to look at that one too.

The “Mason” case was every bit the mystery Vastra had indicated. Based on all the evidence and research it seemed impossible that the murderer was anyone other than one of the Freemasons who had signed into the lodge registry that night. But no one who had signed in that night had any real motive to want the man dead. Not to mention it would be very foolish to murder a brother at an official event.

Vastra’s secret weapon to solve cases the human detectives couldn’t was her incredible sense of smell. If she was able to pick up pheromone signatures from the victim and match them to humans it would help her create a suspect list and solve the case. Yet all the scents Vastra had picked up on the victim had been accounted for either in the Freemason registry or as one of the officers or detectives on the scene. There were no unaccounted for pheromone signatures on the man according to Vastra’s list. Therefore, one of the Freemason’s must be the killer, but which one?

The only other people allowed in the lodge that night were a handful of boys hired to bring drinks, cigars, and other refreshments around to the men. The night in question was what the Mason’s called “game night” to disguise the fact that all the men did was sit and play poker. It was important to have the boys on game night as the men didn’t want to leave the table unless absolutely necessary. And young boys were selected as there was a strict rule of no women allowed on game night.

The boys were typically hired right off the street and typically ranged in age from six to fourteen or so. They were paid a penny to don ill-fitting waiter uniforms complete with coats and gloves and serve the men. If the men didn’t have to wait too long for a drink or a cigar they would tip the boys a penny here and a penny there such that it was the best money the boys could hope to make all month.

None of the boys would have motive or means by which to murder a high society gentleman; not to mention very few of them were large enough or strong enough to take on a grown man. And the victim had died of several stab wounds to the stomach and chest. All of this is coupled with the fact that there were no unaccounted for pheromones on the victim which, as far as Vastra was concerned, eliminated the boys as suspects altogether.

As Jenny sifted through all the notes she saw that nothing but stellar detective work had been done. The officers had secured the scene and searched extensively for any sign of wrongful entry. Of which they found none. They confirmed that no deliveries had been made that night and testimony of witnesses in nearby buildings had been recorded in proper fashion. Each member of the Freemason lodge had willingly given testimony, some twice, and yet no conceivable option stood other than the murderer was one of the Freemasons on that registry whose pheromone signature was also on the victim.

So who had killed the victim in the water closet of the Freemason lodge? This was the question that had haunted Vastra since last spring. And to accuse any man on that list without solid, tangible evidence would be the death of any detective’s career.
Jenny paced back and forth in the kitchen waiting for Vastra to get home. It was very cold out, but Vastra had assured Jenny that she would be spending most of her time tonight in a pub surveilling a suspect. Still, any time Vastra was out in winter conditions without her, Jenny worried. And tonight she had even more reason to want Vastra home as quickly as possible.

At a quarter past midnight the scullery door opened and within seconds a shivering Silurian made her way into the kitchen and right up to the stove to warm up.

“Hello, Ma’am,” Jenny said. She was grinning from ear to ear.

“What has gotten into you, Jenny?” Vastra asked. “You look very proud of yourself. Even I can see that.”

“I’ve done it, Ma’am,” Jenny said, still smiling like a Cheshire cat.

“You have done what, Jenny? I am in no mood to tolerate riddles,” Vastra snapped.

“I’ve solved the ‘Mason’ case, Ma’am.”

Vastra just stood for a moment and processed what Jenny had said. “You what?”

“I solved the ‘Mason’ case, Ma’am,” she repeated. “I’ve been looking at it all month each night you were out; and I came up with the only possible suspect that you and the other detectives may have missed.”

Vastra was skeptical. “Well do not leave me in suspense.”

“You’re freezing. Go into the parlor and warm up by the fire,” Jenny instructed. “I’ll be in shortly with some warm blood and a cuppa and I’ll talk to you.”

Vastra did as she was told. She was highly skeptical of Jenny’s discovery and assumed Jenny had just done what she had done in the beginning and forced a motive onto one of the men. Only to discover that she had no proof and the motive was such a stretch the mere suggestion of it wouldn’t make it out of DCI Lang’s office.

Jenny sat the tray on the table and brought a bowl of warm blood to Vastra. Vastra only agreed to drink from a bowl, rather than a cup, as she remembered that broths and thin soups were often drank directly from the bowl in some cultures. So at least there were examples of it being proper. Once she began to warm up, inside and out she was ready to hear Jenny’s theory.

“Now,” Vastra said, “out with it please. It is past time to call it a night.”

“The way I see it there’s only four options as to who the killer is,” Jenny started. She was so excited she could no longer sit and paced back and forth in front of Vastra as she spoke. “The first three are almost the same, just slight differences. One, the killer acted alone and is on the list of suspects you have created from the scents you picked up from the victim. Two, there was a small group of killers, all on that list, who conspired to kill the victim. Three, the entire fraternity conspired together to kill their brother and are all guilty. But none of those theories have any evidence to support them. Not to mention, if the killer is on that list, and everyone on that list was interviewed, by you, then they would be hard pressed to pass your natural lie detector—your tongue.”
Jenny paused for a moment to catch her breath.

“That’s why I think option four is really the only option. I believe the killer is someone not on your list of suspects.”

Vastra interrupted, “That is highly unlikely as the killer’s pheromone signature is bound to be on the victim. I cannot imagine how one would be able to stab a man to death and not get their scent upon him.”

“I agree,” Jenny said. “But are you sure that every single person whose scent was on the victim is on that list?”

“Quite,” Vastra said, almost at the point of being offended.

“What about the wife?” Jenny asked.

“What about the wife?” Vastra countered. Emphasis on “about.”

“Was her scent on the victim?”

“Well of course it was. She was his wife. Naturally her scent would be on him. But it is irrelevant. No women were allowed in that night and I am quite positive that if anyone had seen a woman, much less the known spouse of one of the members, they would have said. That would have been highly suspicious indeed.”

“But what if she was there, right under their noses, and no one saw her?” Jenny asked.

“And how would she accomplish that?”

“She was one of the boys.”

Jenny could see the wheels turning in Vastra’s mind as she thought about what she had just said. “But I do not see how that is possible. Would she not have been recognized?”

“I suppose that depends on how convincing her costume was,” Jenny said. “I have a friend, Frankie, who’s a performer. She often dresses like a man for her skits. If you didn’t know her, didn’t know better, you would be hard pressed to see that she was a woman once she got into costume. That’s what gave me the idea that the killer might be a woman dressed as a man. But all the members are known to one another, so she would have to be one of the boys.”

Vastra still wasn’t convinced. Not to mention, Jenny wasn’t offering any real evidence, just a theory.

“When you interviewed the wife, you noted her unusually small stature. I’m not sure why you noted it, but you did. You said she was hardly five feet tall,” Jenny said. “You must have thought it was important at the time. You aren’t one to record useless information. What’s more, according to your notes, you didn’t interview her as a suspect. You interviewed her mostly to get more information on the men in the fraternity. So she didn’t have to pass your lie detector.”

Jenny continued. “She would have known that women weren’t allowed on game night. And she more than likely knew about the young boys who were hired to serve the men. And if you would ever get out to the theatre you would know that women dressed as men is all the rage in the modern show. So I can easily see how she got the idea. If she were already small in stature and young, which she is, then it’s easy to see how she could pull it off.”
“But all of your theory is circumstantial,” Vastra said. “It is a solid theory, but without proof I cannot accuse the victim’s wife.”

“I thought about that,” Jenny said. She went to the case file and retrieved a report she then handed to Vastra. “This is the doctor’s report. I don’t know anything about stab wounds, Ma’am; but if you look just here,” she turned a few pages into the report, “on the diagram of the body, the doctor noted that the suspect was likely short. I’m guessing that is based on the way the wounds looked or something. That fact wasn’t in his official report, just scribbled on the diagram. Just there.” Jenny pointed out the marks to Vastra.

Vastra studied the writing. It was hardly more than a scribble, but once noticed, she could read that the coroner had indeed written “short” and underlined it twice.

“Jenny, this is brilliant work,” Vastra said. “I had become so blinded by the impossibility of the case that I never even thought to suspect the wife.”

“Thank you, Ma’am.” Jenny was beaming with pride.

“I shall get started tomorrow looking into possible motives. If it was the wife, the most likely motives are either infidelity or money. And I shall need to schedule a meeting with the coroner to discuss the wounds. I would like a bit more to go on before I take the theory to Detective Chief Inspector Lang.”

Vastra resisted every instinct in her not to pull Jenny close and kiss her. But that would be wholly inappropriate. And she had already resolved her mind on the matter. Instead she excused herself for the night.

“I must be off to bed,” Vastra said. “I am very tired and weak from the cold. I do appreciate your insight on this, Jenny. You are becoming a remarkable detective.”

Chapter End Notes

Feedback/reviews encouraged and appreciated. Thank you.

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Chapter 17: The Blizzard and the Fire

Day 1 Wednesday

Jenny woke to an unusually cold house. Her fire had all but died so she went directly into Vastra’s room to check on her. One thing she had come to understand about her Madam over the years was that cold was more dangerous to her than a gunshot or stab wound. Sure enough, the fire was almost dead and Vastra was cocooned, completely hidden, in a mountain of blankets and quilts.

Jenny threw three logs on the fire and went to the window to open the curtains and let in some sunlight. Sometimes the sun through the panes of glass would make warm spots that the Silurian would seek out like a cat. But this morning an unexpected and unwelcomed site filled Jenny’s eyes.

The ground and houses and all the things were covered in snow. There had been no warning; no one had seen this coming. Several inches of snow covered everything and more was steadily falling. She snapped the curtains closed; there would be no warm sun rays today. She quickly put two more sticks of wood on the fire and headed downstairs to start her day.

The bottom floor was freezing. First she needed to get Vastra’s breakfast warming. She got a fire burning in the stove and sat out Vastra’s meat and blood for breakfast. She sat the meat near the stove so it would heat up faster, and she arranged a double boiler to heat the blood. Then she went to Vastra’s office to get a fire started in there.

With her own breakfast cooked and Vastra’s quickly approaching proper temperature, she was curious why the Silurian was yet to make it down for breakfast. This was very peculiar indeed. She went to Vastra’s office to check the fire once more, then made her way upstairs to check on Vastra.

To Jenny’s surprise, Vastra was still cocooned in bed under a pile of covers. “Get up lazy,” Jenny poked in jest. Of all the things you could call the Silurian, lazy was certainly not one of them. Vastra didn’t stir and Jenny began to worry. Jenny didn’t know of things like hibernation, but she had heard Vastra speak of times when Silurians would go into a deep sleep to conserve their energy and help them survive the cold. She wondered if this was perhaps one of those times spurred on by the sudden cold snap. But Vastra had work to do and a human society to fit into and hibernation was not on the list of things she was allowed to do anymore.

Jenny approached the bed and laid her hand on what she assumed was Vastra’s shoulder. “Vastra, you need to get up now,” she said sweetly. “Your breakfast is almost ready.”

Nothing.

“Vastra,” she said again, this time with more volume. “You are supposed to make a plans to meet with the medical examiner today about the Mason case.”

Vastra hissed something incomprehensible from beneath the mound of blankets. Jenny assumed it was a curse word in Silurian.

“Well at least you’re still alive under there.” Jenny was seconds away from throwing all the covers off, then she thought better of it. “Look, I know it’s cold, but I’ve got your fires burning and your
breakfast is warm and you have work. Now get up you old lizard.”

Vastra hissed again and Jenny left her in her cocoon.

Some fifteen minutes later, a half dressed Vastra stumbled into the kitchen. It wasn’t like her at all to come down stairs unpresentable; but today her dress was haphazardly applied and she had forgotten most of her other clothing, like her shoes, petticoat, and gloves.

“Are you alright, Ma’am?” Jenny asked, genuinely concerned.

“Yes, Jenny. This sudden cold is throwing me off,” Vastra admitted. “I simply need to warm up.”

Vastra stumbled, catching herself on the doorframe.

Jenny rushed over to help Vastra to the table. Taking her by the arm, Jenny felt the cold coming through Vastra’s sleeve. “You’re freezing.” She touched Vastra’s cheek with the back of her hand.

“Stop touching me,” Vastra snapped, “I am not an exhibit.”

“No, but you’re right sick,” Jenny told her. “I don’t think it’s just the cold out there that’s making you miserable. I think you’ve caught something. You’ve got the opposite of a fever. Instead of making you hot, whatever you’ve caught is making you cold.”

“Do not be ridiculous,” Vastra said. “I am perfectly healthy. I am supposed to be cold. I am after all Silurian.”

“Yeah, well you ain’t supposed to be this cold. You’re like a block of ice,” Jenny said. “We need to get you fed and back into bed. I’ll get word to the Yard that you’ll be unavailable for a few days.”

Jenny sat the warm blood and hot tea in front of Vastra. “Drink that while I cut up your meat.”

“I am not a hatchling,” Vastra snapped again, “I can manage my own meat.”

“Oi!” Jenny pointed the knife at Vastra. “You’ll drink your blood and you’ll let me take care of you. Now shut your gob, lizard.”

Grumbling and hissing under her breath, Vastra did as she was told and drank the blood and tea and waited for her plate of cut up meat. By the time she was finished eating she was exhausted.

Jenny saw that it was all Vastra could do to stay upright in the chair. “Let’s get you back up to bed.”

Vastra didn’t feel like arguing and stumbled her way through the dining room and to the stairs. At the first step, Jenny put her arm around Vastra’s waist.

“What are you doing?” Vastra snapped.

“Oi!” Jenny snapped back. “I’m helping you up the stairs, you daft lizard. You barely got through the dining room on your own.”

“That is the third time today you have called me ‘lizard.’ If I cannot call you ‘ape’ then I hardly see how it is appropriate that you call me ‘lizard.’”

“Call me ‘ape’ all you want if it’ll get you up these stairs any faster. Now will you just stop complaining and let me help you?” Jenny said.

Vastra acquiesced. She put her arm around Jenny’s shoulders and was immediately rewarded with
the mammal’s body heat as Jenny pulled her close.

It took a few minutes to get the lethargic Silurian back up the stairs and into her bedroom, but Jenny managed. She sat Vastra on the side of the bed.

“You have to get out of that dress and into some night clothes.” Jenny insisted. “And I’m going to help you so best you don’t fight me.” Jenny tried to be as quick and as unobtrusive as she could. She got a nightgown from Vastra’s wardrobe.

Vastra sat on the edge of the bed with her feet and legs dangling off the side. She was already falling asleep.

“You have to stand up now,” Jenny said.

Jenny grabbed Vastra’s cold hands and heaved her up, resting Vastra’s entire upper body onto hers. “I need you to help me here, Vastra. Hold onto my shoulders and stand up for me.” Vastra mindlessly did as she was told and Jenny helped to hold her up.

“Now let’s get you out of your dress and into this nightgown.” Jenny unlaced Vastra’s dress and began to slip her arms out of the bodice while helping her maintain her balance.

Vastra hissed incoherently.

“It’ll just be a minute and you can curl up in the bed again,” Jenny soothed her.

Her arms now free, Jenny did all she could to protect her Madam’s modesty, but modesty wasn’t her primary concern for the Silurian right now. Jenny slipped the gown down over Vastra’s head while simultaneously pulling her dress down and past her hips. She sat Vastra back in the bed and pulled the dress off at her feet.

“There you go, love,” Jenny cooed in Vastra’s ear as she laid her favorite lizard into bed and covered her with as many blankets as she could find.

As she turned to walk away, she felt a weak hand grasp her wrist. “Jenny,” Vastra said, faintly, “thank you.”

Jenny tucked Vastra’s hand back under the covers. “My pleasure, Ma’am.” She pulled the covers up and tucked Vastra in tight. “I’ll be back shortly but if there is anything you need you just call and I’ll come running.” She was certain Vastra was already fast asleep by the time she finished her sentence.

Throwing another log on the fire, Jenny decided it would be best to get some work done while Vastra was freshly fed and sleeping. Her main concern now was keeping Vastra warm. She needed to get more wood up to Vastra’s room. Since she wouldn’t need a fire in the parlor today, she decided she would bring up some of the extra wood from there to Vastra’s room.

After she stocked Vastra’s room, she decided that she should bring all the firewood from the backyard into the scullery. This way, she wouldn’t have to wander out into the snow each time she needed more.

Making sure the dining room door and the kitchen door were both sealed shut behind her to keep out as much of the cold as possible, Jenny began the daunting task of hauling in the wood. It took her the better part of an hour carrying only a few pieces of wood at a time, but finally she was done. She was burning up hot from the labor, but now the scullery was packed with firewood and she wouldn’t have to brave the elements for it again.
“Now to get word to the Yard,” she thought. Using some stationary from Vastra’s study, she wrote out a note in her absolute best penmanship informing DCI Lang that Madam Vastra had taken ill and would need at least a week of rest and recovery before continuing with any of her current cases or having any new cases delivered. She sealed the letter and made her way out of the front of the house. To her surprise it looked as if another few inches of snow had fallen just in the time it took to pen the letter.

Several children were out playing—throwing snowballs and chasing each other around.

“Oi,” Jenny yelled. “I have two pence to the lad who wants to deliver a letter for me.” Within seconds there were three boys standing at Jenny’s feet looking up. “A’right,” she said, “all three of ya then?”

“Yes, Miss.” They all answered in unison.

“Then it’s a penny each,” Jenny said. They all smiled at the thought of having a penny to spend at the sweet shop. She handed the largest boy the letter and each of them a penny. “And if this letter don’t get to Scotland Yard within a half hour I’m gonna be takin’ that penny out of each of yur hides.”

“Yes, Miss.” The boys ran away and Jenny went back inside to check on Vastra. She took another armload of firewood up the stairs and slowly opened the door. Vastra was completely covered and wrapped into her cocoon of blankets and quilts; much the same way Jenny had found her that morning. She placed the wood in the box beside the hearth and added another two logs on the fire. The room was hot, even by Vastra’s standards; but to the sick Silurian it probably felt like there was no heat at all. Jenny saw that she would need to get a bucket and shovel and take out ashes soon as the fire box was filling up quickly with all the extra attention. She put this on her list of things to do.

A noise from the back yard got Jenny’s attention. She went to the window and saw Tommy, the butcher’s delivery boy, so she rushed downstairs to meet him.

“Come warm up, Tommy.” She took the packages of wrapped meat and the container of blood from the boy and put them in the icebox. “Pull up a chair and sit by the stove, love.” She got out some cakes for him to enjoy as he warmed up a bit and poured him a cup of tea.

“Thanks, Miss Jenny,” he said, smiling as he devoured the cakes. “This is always my favorite house.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” Jenny said. “I have a favor to ask you. Can you come back tomorrow and bring a double order of blood and a bit more meat? My madam is sick and needs to keep her strength up.”

“I’ll try me best, Miss,” the boy said. “But I may not ‘ave anythin’ to bring ya. Everyone’s buying up extra just like you.”

“Because of the snow? Well that is bad news, isn’t it?” Jenny got a worried look on her face. She hadn’t realized she should be worried about a little snow.

“Here,” she pulled two pounds, from her pocket. It was from her savings. “I want you to get yourself a warmer coat, love. And some proper boots and gloves.” She tucked the money into his little hand and closed his fingers around the coins. “And I want you to do everythin’ you can to get more meat for me today while there’s still some left in the shop. Can you do that?”

The boy looked at his closed hand. “Yes, Miss Jenny.” He brushed the cake crumbs from his face.
with the back of his hand. “For you, I’ll do anything. I’ll be back today. I promise.”

“Good boy,” Jenny smiled. “Just put whatever you can bring me in the icebox here. And I don’t care what it is. Liver, meat, even bones; I just need as much as you can bring.”

With that, the boy left and Jenny suddenly got very anxious about the state of her Madam and the grey skies above and all the snow that just wouldn’t seem to stop falling. Vastra was eating very little with the cold; but what she did eat had to be raw meat or blood. And if the butcher was running low, she didn’t want to run out at home.

She got the pail and shovel from the scullery and took them up to Vastra’s room. Working around the glowing embers she shoveled as much of the ash out of the firebox as she could. Then left Vastra to her sleep and continued with her housework.

Just before sunset she heard the door to the scullery open and she went to make sure it was Tommy. Sure enough, it was and to her delight he had some more packages for her.

“Bless you,” she said and she began taking the packages from him.

“Sorry it ain’t more, Miss Jenny,” he said. “I took a few packages here and there from the other deliveries and gave them to you. Not everyone is as nice as you. And I took wut I could from the shop without notice. I managed to get you a bit more blood, and some organ meats,” he turned up his nose, “never did like them much. An’ I got you some bones. I suppose you’ll be making some soup with those?” His mouth almost started to water.

Jenny noticed the look in the boy’s eyes. “Have you eaten a proper meal today?” Jenny asked.

The boy shook his head. “No Miss. Don’ get fed til the day is done.”

“Then you sit right there and you let me fry you up a couple of eggs.” Jenny got the skillet from the top of the stove and spooned some reserve bacon fat in. Then she cracked two eggs into the pan and tore off some bread from the last loaf in the house. She buttered the bread for the boy and sat it down in front of him with the eggs and a cup of tea. He ate it all quickly and with much appreciation.

“Thank you, Miss,” he said, “I best be on me way.”

“You get that coat!” Jenny yelled as he ran across the yard and out the front gate. She barred the scullery door and went back inside.

The sun had set—not that it had been out at all today--but with all the snow it was a very bright night. Jenny sat out some blood and began to heat it in the double boiler and she chopped up some of the liver and kidney that the boy had just delivered and put it in a bowl beside the stove to warm. She cooked herself some eggs and buttered herself some bread and sat down to eat.

Going up to Vastra’s room she sighed and opened the door. She wasn’t looking forward to waking the Silurian and getting her to eat. But Vastra needed to eat to keep up what strength she could and fight off whatever it was that had her down and out.

Still enveloped in her cocoon of blankets, the Silurian slept peacefully. But Jenny knew what she had to do. She set the tray on the table and walked to the bed. Sitting on the edge, she placed her hand on Vastra’s shoulder. “Vastra, I need you to wake up now. I need you to eat.”

There was no response from the Silurian; Jenny tired again. “Vastra,” she said with more volume, “I need you to wake up, love. I need you to eat. You need to eat.”
There was a hiss and a growl from the cocoon.

“You can hiss at me all you want, you ol’ lizard. But you will get yourself up and you will eat this liver and kidney I just cut up for you.” Jenny was starting to peel back the covers. She anticipated the worst, but Vastra merely looked at her with sleepy eyes.

“There’s my daft ol’ lizard.” Jenny caressed Vastra’s face and it was ice cold. Even with the roaring fire and the mountain of blankets, Vastra was freezing. “Just eat your supper and I promise I’ll let you get right back to sleep.”

With Jenny’s help, Vastra managed to pull herself up and lean back on the headboard. Jenny brought the tray and put it in her lap. “Drink your blood first. It’s getting cold. I’ll go fetch some hot tea to have after you eat to warm up your insides.”

“You’re too good to me, Jenny,” Vastra managed between swigs of blood.

“Not at all, Ma’am.” Jenny closed the door behind her.

When she returned she was pleased to see that the blood was gone and only a bite or two of the liver was left in the bowl. Vastra quickly finished that and Jenny set a cup of hot tea on the tray.

“I don’t know what to do except keep the fire burning and let you rest,” Jenny said as she hung the cast iron kettle on a hook above the fire to keep warm. “I’m going to wake you up for your usual two meals a day. And when I do I need you to wake up and eat. You hear me?”

“Yes, dear, I hear you.” Vastra smiled.

“I’ve let the Yard know you are ill and not to expect you for a week. That should give you time to kick this and get back to it.” Jenny smiled and looked at her poor sick madam.

Jenny gathered the tray and all the dishes. “I’m going to clean up from supper. I’ve placed a bell on your bedside table, if you need anything you ring that bell and I’ll come running.”

Vastra scooted back into her cocoon as Jenny left to go clean up.

Other than the kitchen, the ground floor was freezing cold as the temperatures were plummeting outside. So when Jenny was finished cleaning up she decided she’d spend the evening in Vastra’s room reading and keeping an eye on her madam.

She gathered an extra lamp, some candles, matches, and oil to take up so she wouldn’t have to come back down. She also grabbed a stack of novels from the parlor as well as a stack of casefiles from Vastra’s office. She took everything to Vastra’s room then went to her room to change into night clothes.

Jenny’s room was freezing as she had neglected to keep a fire burning in there throughout the day. She quickly built a fire and then dressed in her nightgown and returned to Vastra’s room where she lit the oil lamp and snuggled herself up on the loveseat to read. It didn’t take long for the day’s chores to catch up with her and she fell asleep. After an hour or so she woke with a stiff back and aching muscles.

“Bloody ‘ell,” she cursed while she stretched. She put more wood on Vastra’s fire and then retired to her own room for the evening.

Day 2 Thursday
Jenny awoke the next day, threw on a heavy house coat and first set herself to getting the fire back up and roaring in Vastra’s room. Then she braved the cold of the rest of the house. Passing through the dining room she looked out the window and saw that more snow had fallen overnight and was still coming down. “Glad I got all that firewood in when I did,” she said aloud.

In the kitchen, she got a fire going in the stove and began gathering items for breakfast. Setting up the double boiler she started heating some blood for Vastra and then set out a package of meat. Opening it she saw it was a nice lamb roast, quite an expensive cut, and she was sure this was one of the deliveries Tommy nicked from another household. She hoped she had not gotten him into any trouble.

Again she went through the routine of waking her Madam and getting her to eat. Vastra was so weak today she could barely feed herself and she fought Jenny with every bite just to go back to sleep.

“You can go back to sleep once you drink your tea, love.” Jenny said as she cut her eyes toward the cup on the tray.

Vastra did as she was told. Not only was she too weak to fight, the hot tea helped her warm up.

“I have to go out today to buy some supplies. I won’t be gone long and I doubt you’ll even know I’m away; but if you call and I don’t come up that’s why.”

Vastra had slumped in place; she was out cold and only half sitting up against the headboard. Jenny removed the tray from her lap and tucked her back into the bed.

Jenny got the breakfast dishes cleaned, then dressed for a trek to the market.

The whole affair was miserable. The wind whipped relentlessly and snow continued to fall. She stopped by the butcher’s shop but a sign on the door simply read “out of meat” so she kept moving. She went to the general store, which was open and packed with people attempting to do the same thing Jenny was doing. She managed to grab some dried beans, rice, oats, and honey. They did have a few eggs and some butter so she bought those for herself. But that was the last of anything considered “fresh.”

The door opened and a blast of icy air poured in. “Miss,” the newly arrived woman called across the crowd to the shop keeper. “Do you have any bed warmers?”

The shopkeeper looked mildly irritated at the interruption, but a sale was a sale. “Yes, dear.” She called back. “Be with you in a jiff.”

“What’s a bed warmer?” Jenny asked, suddenly sure that she, or more to the point Vastra, needed one.

“What’s a bed warmer?” the clerk repeated Jenny’s question. “They’re the best selling item in me shop today that’s what.” She went to the back and returned with two copper warmers with long handles. She put one on the counter in front of Jenny and the other she put to the side for the other patron.

“How’s it work?” Jenny asked.

“Where’d you grow up, dear? The tropics?” the clerk jabbed at Jenny. “Can’t believe you’ve never used a bed warmer before.”

Truth was, something like this would have been too expensive for her family to have owned. And
if Vastra didn’t already have one then where in the world would she have ever seen one used?

“Ya just put some coals in the pan and stick it under the covers in the bed,” the clerk told her. “Gets the bed nice and warm to crawl into. They been selling like warm bread today! These are my last two.”

Jenny eyed the other woman in the store, and only because she wasn’t a greedy wretched person, she decided to buy only the one and leave the other to the woman who had asked about them in the first place. “I’ll take one.”

“You won’t regret it,” the clerk told her. “Wouldn’t be surprised if these were the last two left for sale in London. This snow’s thrown the whole city for a loop. Word among the shops is that no one can get any meat or vegetables and the restaurants are all going to have to close until the roads clear to get the supply wagons moving again. And I heard the Thames is frozen solid.”

“That ain’t true,” another woman in the shop said in a huff, as if she took personal offense to the lie. “It ain’t froze solid; but it’s froze enough that the barges can’t get through. There’ll be no more nothin’ comin’ into London ‘til it stops snowin’ and warms up.”

“Thank you for the information,” Jenny said. “I think I’ll have the rest of those eggs you have there, if you don’t mind.”

“Don’t mind at all dear,” the clerk said.

The trek home was more miserable than the way out. Not only were there were still no cabs available and the snow was deep and steadily falling; but now Jenny was weighed down with all the new provisions and a cumbersome bed warmer.

She got home and rebuilt the fire in the stove and put some beans on to cook. She would make herself a large pot of bean and rice soup to have for the cold weather and save all the meat for Vastra since she wasn’t sure when she’d get more. She used one of the bones Tommy had delivered to flavor her soup and cut up what few fresh vegetables she had before they spoiled.

She then went upstairs to see if she could use the new bed warmer to get Vastra a little more comfortable. Using the tongs from the fire kit she gathered up some of the larger coals and put them into the pan before starting the fire blazing once again.

Wrapping a sheet around the pan to help keep it closed, she slipped it in between the covers so she wouldn’t put the hot metal directly on Vastra’s skin. As soon as she placed the hot pan in the bed; Vastra responded immediately moving closer to the heat source beneath the covers.

“There you go, love,” Jenny whispered to the sleeping Silurian.

Jenny stayed in the room to keep an eye on things and make sure the contraption worked as it should and didn’t start a ghastly fire in the bed. It seemed to work like a charm. She checked it after a bit, and when it all got cold, she’d refill it with coals and place it back under the covers. But she still wouldn’t leave it unattended. Her entire afternoon was spent reading novels and casefiles on the loveseat in Vastra’s room. Housework was indefinitely suspended except what was absolutely necessary.

Eventually it came time for supper so she packed the warmer away and headed to the kitchen. She began warming Vastra’s blood and chopping up liver and kidney. Her soup was ready, so she ate a bowl of that with some bread and butter as Vastra’s meal warmed.

Waking Vastra was becoming harder as it was the Silurian’s natural tendency to sleep when it was
this cold out. And being sick on top of that was really making it rough for Jenny. She endured lots of hissing and threats of bodily harm from Vastra upon waking; but once she finally got her awake, Vastra was grateful for the warm food and hot tea.

Jenny saw no need to worry Vastra with the troubles of the outside world right now, but she was truly worried about two things given supplies had been cut off: fresh meat and firewood. She would have to do a careful inventory of both, tomorrow. But in the meantime she spared no fuel keeping Vastra’s room as warm as she could possibly make it.

After supper she cleaned up and then returned to Vastra’s room, placing the warmer under the covers until at last it was time for her to retire to her own bed.

Day 3 Friday

The third day of the blizzard was starting out much like the two previous days. Snow was still steadily falling bringing the total to what looked to be almost 24 inches, the sun was nowhere to be seen, and from all accounts looking out the windows, no one was venturing out unless absolutely necessary.

It was time to inventory provisions and begin rationing. Jenny separated the remaining meat into ten portions. This would get Vastra through until the next Wednesday delivery—in case things stayed bad and she didn’t get her Sunday delivery. After that, if the deliveries hadn’t picked back up, she’d have raw eggs and bone broth for Vastra.

While Vastra’s breakfast warmed she surveyed the firewood supply which was getting lower and lower; but as long as her delivery arrived tomorrow as scheduled, things would be fine. She thought she was burning less wood by not having fires in the parlor and office; but she was burning as much in Vastra’s room now as she did in the rest of the house on most days, so she wasn’t saving any fuel at all. To be on the safe side Jenny decided to no longer have a fire in her room. She’d deal with the cold as best she could.

She divided the wood in the scullery into piles based on how much she had been burning each day. She was able to make a little over three piles. There was a small amount of wood left in the parlor and the office, as well as a few sticks in her room. After accounting for that, she’d have enough for four stacks. Each stack would be the absolute maximum she would burn in one day. If the delivery didn’t arrive tomorrow she’d have to cut the piles more and figure out new ways to conserve. One possibility was to nix the stove altogether and warm food in Vastra’s room.

It was time to once again wake Vastra and get her to eat her breakfast to keep her strength up. Vastra was even harder to wake up this morning. But with a little coaxing, Jenny managed to get the hissing lizard sitting up in bed with the tray of breakfast in her lap.

Vastra ate lazily and didn’t bother to chew the lamb. She asked for more cups of tea just to warm up a little. Jenny happily obliged. She watched in wonder as Jenny filled the bed warmer and stuck it under the covers. She was sure Jenny had already explained to her what it was, but she couldn’t be certain.

“What a wonderful device,” Vastra said, almost in a slur from fatigue. Vastra finished her tea and returned to her cocoon, honing in on the heat of the warmer.

Once again, the rest of Jenny’s day was spent in Vastra’s room studying casefiles and reading novels and tending to her Madam. When it was time for bed Jenny went to her room and quickly changed and crawled into bed. After five minutes of tossing and turning and trying to get warm, she realized it was a losing battle. There was no way she could sleep in there without a fire. She
conceded and returned to Vastra’s room.

Standing in the middle of the two, her eyes shifted from the bed to the loveseat. The bed was by far a more appealing option. But if Vastra caught her there she wasn’t sure what would happen. Finally, she decided comfort was more important than propriety and crawled into the unused side and snuggled down beneath the quilts.

Vastra immediately honed in on the heat source. And, though in deep sleep, drew herself into Jenny for warmth. Jenny almost welcomed the cold. Vastra’s room was stifling hot, and if her body heat aided the old lizard in getting well, then Jenny was happy to help.

Day 4 Saturday

Under normal circumstances, today was delivery day for the firewood. But circumstances were anything but normal. The dwindling supply was weighing heavily on Jenny’s mind, second only to Vastra’s health. But there was nothing for either situation, so Jenny got on about her day as usual.

Waking Vastra was a chore. It took Jenny a solid five minutes of talking to her, rubbing her shoulder, and enduring a steady stream of hisses and curses. But finally the groggy lizard sat up and ate.

“I had the strangest dream last night,” Vastra said, sleepily. “I dreamed there was a fire in my bed.”

“A fire?” Jenny asked.

“Yes. It was invisible, yet persistent. It was a welcome comfort.”

“Perhaps you will dream of it again,” Jenny smiled.

After cleaning up from breakfast Jenny returned to Vastra’s room to read. She couldn’t help looking out the window every few minutes waiting on the delivery of firewood. Finally she was up and down so much, she found herself pacing; constantly waiting to hear the gate open and the delivery man coming around with his wagon. But noon came and went with no delivery. Snow continued to fall and everything was eerily silent.

Just after sunset, just as Jenny was about to give up and begin re-rationing the fuel supply, she heard the gate. Rushing to the window she saw the delivery man pulling a sled through the snow covered yard. She rushed down stairs to meet him at the scullery door.

“Am I glad to see you,” she practically drug the poor man into the scullery with a hug.

“Don’t get too excited, Miss,” he said beneath layers of wool. “I don’t ‘ave a full load this week. As you might imagine, there’s high demand, but I’m doin’ me best.”

“Anything’s better than nothing,” Jenny said. “Can you stack it in here?”

“Gladly,” he said. “I’d love a cuppa if you have a kettle on.”

“I’ve been conserving fuel, so the stove isn’t burning,” Jenny said and the man looked sad. “But I have a kettle upstairs over the fire. I’ll go grab it and we’ll have a nice cuppa if you don’t mind being in a cold kitchen.”

“Warmer than out ‘ere,” he smiled. “I can vouch for that. This wind is murder.”

Jenny disappeared upstairs and the man began unloading the sled and filling the scullery with
wood.

Jenny decided it wasn’t time to start cooking in Vastra’s bedroom just yet, so while the man stacked the wood, she started a fire in the stove. The delivery looked to be about half the normal order, which may very well be a full order for most households of two humans. But a half Silurian household takes a lot more wood.

After the wood was stacked in the scullery the man joined Jenny in the kitchen for a hot cup of tea. They sat close to the stove for warmth.

“I had to prioritize my deliveries,” he said. “I had to make sure houses with old people or young kids got wood first. I wasn’t sure about your madam, I’ve never met her, so I wasn’t sure if she’s old or has some special need for all the wood; but this house has the largest order all year round, so you made the route.

“Thank you so much,” Jenny said. “I’ve been worried all day.”

“Sorry to worry ya, Miss. I’m using a sled so I couldn’t bring as much, and the horses are about knackered from walking in the snow. But this should hold you for another few days.”

“Is there any word on when they think this mess will end?”

“Nothing I’ve eard,” he said. “Took everyone by surprise. Whole town’s shut down. Barges can’t navigate the Thames. Can’t imagine being out on the streets. There’s gonna be a lot of bodies found beneath this blanket when it finally melts away.”

Jenny’s heart sank. She thought back to the days she lived on the streets. She never had to deal with a blizzard like this. If she had, it may have very well been the death of her.

He noticed the sadness wash across Jenny’s face. “I’m sorry, Miss,” the man apologized. “I shouldn’t talk of such things to a sweet young woman like you. Please forgive me.”

“There’s nothing to forgive,” she smiled. “What you said is true enough. Nothing for it now.”

“I best be on my way.” The man stood up and put his cap, scarf, and gloves back on. “I still have a few stops and a long trek back home. Besides, if I leave that sled for too long me livelihood’ll get nicked. You lock and bar your doors, Miss. There’s a lot of thieving afoot.”

“Yes sir. I’ll see to it.” Jenny smiled at the man. “Do you know when you’ll bring more? Will it be before next Saturday?”

“I’ll try me best, Miss,” he said. “If it’d just stop falling it’d be easier to get around. I’ll try to be back mid-week or so; if the horses can take it.”

“Thank you.” Jenny couldn’t help but give him another hug before he left. He had no idea this wood possibly meant life or death for Vastra. But Jenny did, and he would forever be in her favor.

Jenny watched from the dining room window as the man pulled the empty sled around the house and out to the street. She’d ration out the wood tomorrow, but for now she needed to prepare Vastra’s supper.

Jenny went to bed that night feeling relieved. There was enough rationed meat for Vastra for three days. And there was now at least six days of firewood. Although, as she sat and thought about it, there was no guarantee the snow would be gone in three days, or four, or even six. And even if it did stop snowing, there was no way to know when all the deliveries would be back on schedule.
And the meat would only stay good for so long, no matter how she rationed it out.

Now Jenny was worried about all sorts of things. If only Vastra wasn’t sick. If only she had prepared better. But how could she? Was she even doing anything to help her madam? She had no idea how to care for a sick Silurian with an alien disease.

Perhaps Jenny’s body heat rose with all her worrying. Or perhaps, even in her deep slumber, Vastra just knew Jenny was agitated. Whatever it was, Vastra snuggled even closer into Jenny’s warm curves; and suddenly, all of Jenny’s worries melted away as she pulled Vastra close and fell asleep.

Day 5 Sunday

Fact: Jenny now hated the cold. For the past five mornings when she woke the first thing she realized was—it was cold. Vastra was practically glued to her, draining all the warmth from her body and it was cold. The sun still wasn’t out so there were no warm rays through the panes of glass. The world was just grey and cold.

None of that mattered. Cold or not, she had work to do and a Silurian to take care of. She had to get up and start a fire and soon enough Vastra’s room would be like an oven it would be so hot. Then she would prepare breakfast and wake Vastra and read case files and refill and replace the bed warmer and take care of anything that popped up.

But right now she was cold; and she hated the cold.

The fire blazed quickly. The wood that had been stored in Vastra’s room had all the moisture pulled from it with the excessively hot, dry air. Jenny would need to ration out the new delivery today and start bringing more wood up to save time and energy later. But for now, she just wanted to thaw out a bit and get the warmer ready as soon as she could.

Suddenly, a crash of broken glass pulled Jenny out of any peace she had just found in the warmth.

“Intruder,” she thought to herself.

Out of reflex she reached for a poker and then thought better of it. She remembered her training. Her body was a weapon and she was much more proficient with it than a fireplace tool.

Slowly opening the bedroom door she listened for signs of the burglar. She could hear a door rattling to her left. It sounded like it was coming from upstairs. “The greenhouse,” she whispered.

The greenhouse was the one room that was off limits to Jenny. It was Vastra’s sanctuary and the only place for quiet reflection away from work and other stressors. Positioned above the kitchen and scullery, it was originally a bedroom, but Vastra had converted it into a greenhouse by removing the plaster walls and wood ceiling and replacing them with framed panes of glass. The door was kept locked at all times and now it was being rattled from the inside. Jenny needed to get in there.

She hurried to her room and retrieved her tools. She rarely had use of them anymore, but she did stay on top of her previous craft should the need for the skill ever arise. Creeping down the hallway toward the greenhouse, the door continued to rattle with ferocity. Pausing to listen, all Jenny heard was the howling of wind. There were no voices, but then again, burglars weren’t known for their conversations while breaking and entering.

Jenny needed to confront whoever was in there. And if she could gain an upper hand by surprising them and opening the door then she’d take the advantage. She quickly selected two tools and
picked the simple lock in a matter of seconds.

As soon as she turned the knob and released the door of its latch it flew open and slammed against the wall inside. A burst of icy wind chilled Jenny to the bone once again and she cursed loudly. “Bloody hell! Daft lizard and her stupid glass room!”

The glass ceiling could no longer withstand the weight of the snow and had collapsed. The room was covered in snow and glass and soon to be dead plants. Snow was still falling so the gaping hole would just collect more and more as the day went on.

“I can’t deal with this right now!” Jenny closed and relocked the door and wedged a tool in the gap to keep it tight in the frame and prevent the incessant rattling with the wind. “I hate the bloody cold!”

Leaving the greenhouse to clean up later and walking past Vastra’s bathroom, Jenny thought how nice it would be to take a long hot soak in Vastra’s claw foot tub. Then the reality of heating and lifting all the hot water to the second floor sounded more like work when her plate was suddenly getting very full today.

She returned her tools to her room and popped her head in to check on Vastra. The Silurian was still cocooned under the blankets and Jenny wondered why she thought for one second Vastra would have heard any of the preceding commotion.

First things first, Jenny got a fire started in the stove. It was as much to heat her and the room as it was to heat breakfast. Next she took the kettle to the faucet to fill with water. Turning the handle, nothing came out. “Oi! Bloody pipes.” She smacked the faucet as if the trauma would make it work. “Ugh!” she screamed.

The pipes were frozen solid.

“Well isn’t that just perfect! Exactly what I needed right now.” Jenny was ready to throw the kettle through the wall. She could hear the wind above her in the greenhouse, or what was left of it and the occasional breaking of glass and toppling plant. “I hate the snow!”

Lacing up her warmest boots, Jenny went outside to gather snow to melt into water. She was regretting not designating a particular spot in the back yard to dump the fireplace ashes as they were now scattered about, making much of the snow particularly unusable for water. She trekked to the back of the yard and hoped she didn’t find any nasty surprises while filling up the cooking pot.

Placing the large pot full of snow on the stovetop to melt, she headed up to Vastra’s room to warm up. Vastra was still cocooned under the covers and Jenny filled the bed warmer with hot coals and slipped it into bed between the blankets. Vastra immediately drew herself into the warmth.

Feeling very lonely today, Jenny just sat on the edge of the bed and spoke to Vastra. It didn’t matter that the Silurian was sound asleep and couldn’t hear her; Jenny just needed a bit of companionship. She placed her hand on the mound of covers and she swore she heard Vastra purring beneath the pile. This was the first good thing to happen today. But soon it would be time to wake the sleeping lizard and she was not looking forward to the hisses and threats that came with it.

Jenny sat the tray on the table and prepared herself for waking Vastra. She had a variety of organ meats and a bit of lamb but the blood was all gone. Hot tea would be all Vastra had to drink to warm her insides.
Removing the warmer and sitting on the edge of the bed, Jenny now had a cold Silurian curled up around her. She felt so bad that there wasn’t more she could do to help Vastra. But the simple fact was there was no doctor she could call, no one she could turn to for help, and not even Vastra seemed to know what to do except sleep it away.

“Wake up, Vastra,” Jenny softly cooed. She rubbed Vastra’s shoulder beneath the blankets. “I need you to wake up and eat now, dear. I have some hot tea that will warm up your insides.”

The usual barrage of hisses and threats ensued but eventually Vastra woke enough to sit up with Jenny’s help.

“Will you open the curtains and let some sun in please?” Vastra managed to ask.

“Sorry, ma’am,” Jenny said. “There’s no sun today. Perhaps tomorrow.”

“What a pity,” Vastra said lazily as she swallowed pieces of raw meat whole. Chewing was simply too exhausting. “Is it still snowing?”

“There’s a bit of the white fluff about,” Jenny said. There was no need to worry Vastra with any of the details of the storm. Especially not the collapsed greenhouse or the frozen pipes or the fact that raw meat and firewood were now more precious than gold. “How are you feeling, love?”

“I am tired. More tired than I have ever been in my life. And I am so cold. I keep having the dream that there is a fire in my bed. It is warm and welcoming and it is the only thing that seems to keep me from freezing to death.”

“I’m sure it’s just the warmer, ma’am. I try to keep it in with you as long as I’m here to keep an eye on things.”

“What day is it?” Vastra asked, suddenly realizing she had lost all track of time.

“It’s Sunday, ma’am,” Jenny smiled.

“I suppose it does not matter,” Vastra smiled weakly. “I must rest now.”

Jenny removed the tray and helped Vastra back down and into the bed. She filled the warmer once again and put more fuel on the fire. She sat and studied case files until the warmer had gone cold then began the arduous task of ridding the greenhouse of all that snow.

Day 6 Monday

As had become common place over the past few days, Jenny woke up to a cold Silurian snuggled up to her for warmth. She got up and built a fire and peeked outside. To her utter happiness it was not snowing. It had stopped falling yesterday afternoon while she had been cleaning out the greenhouse; and as far as she could tell there hadn’t been any more overnight. Perhaps the storm was finally lifting. Now if she could just get Vastra well.

After setting the breakfast tray on the table, she started her routine of waking Vastra.

“Time for breakfast, Vastra.” She reached beneath the covers to rub Vastra’s shoulder. The contact had seemed to help. “Vastra, don’t let your breakfast get cold. I need you to wake up and eat.”

Vastra didn’t stir. There was no hissing, no threats of bodily harm, no Silurian curses.

“Vastra,” Jenny said a bit louder.
She shook Vastra by the shoulder, but still nothing.

“Vastra, wake up!” Jenny was practically screaming at this point. There was no sound and no movement at all coming from Vastra.

“Oh God!” Jenny was panicked. She threw the covers off and exposed Vastra’s head and torso. “Vastra, this isn’t funny. I need you to wake up right now.”

Still nothing.

Jenny rolled Vastra over onto her back. Placing her head onto Vastra’s chest, she listened. She could hear a faint heartbeat. It was slow. Very slow. Vastra’s breathing was shallow and she only took one breath about every ten seconds.

“You’re alive. That’s all that matters. But I don’t know what to do.” Jenny caressed the sleeping Silurian’s face. “Vastra I don’t know what to do to make you better.”

Jenny began to pace back and forth across the room. Should she try to warm Vastra up some way? Should she just let her sleep? Did she need some sort of medication? If so, what? Jenny was at an utter loss and felt helpless as a kitten.

Warming the Silurian up seemed like a good idea, but how? Last time Vastra was cold and unconscious Jenny used towels soaked in hot water until Vastra could get herself over into a tub. She could do that again, but this was different. This wasn’t an issue of getting too cold; this was an illness. She didn’t even know if it would work.

She opted for another approach. Taking the top quilt off the bed, she wrapped it around the newly filled bed warmer until it was toasty warm. Then she placed the warmed blanket under the rest and over Vastra. She repeated the process with the next blanket on top, then the next, then the next and so on until she cycled through them all.

It was a lot of work and it didn’t seem have any effect on Vastra’s state. The blankets were getting cold as soon as they touched Vastra. The warmer was more use.

“Maybe there’s a book in her study.”

Jenny went to the study and began frantically looking through titles. There was a section on biology and anatomy; but it was all human. There was nothing specific to Silurians. She found a zoology book that contained chapters on all types of animals; including one on reptiles. And although Vastra wasn’t really a lizard, maybe there was something to be gleaned from the pages. She took the book back up to the warm bedroom to read.

She read about hibernation and how reptiles would slow their breathing and heart rate when they were cold. She also read about how reptiles were cold blooded. Of course she had heard Vastra refer to herself as “cold blooded” but she never really knew what that meant. She had taken it very literally and thought that Vastra’s blood was just colder than humans’ and that is why she always felt cold. But she now read that it meant the reptile was only as warm as the air around them. And that soaking up sun rays was the best way to warm up. But there was no sun. She then read how lizards and snakes would lay on hot surfaces like rocks to warm. This gave her an idea.

In the back garden there was a series of paving stones from the scullery door around to the front gate. The stones were irregularly shaped, but most were roughly one foot by one foot. She wondered if she could dig them up, then heat them by the fire, and use them to warm Vastra. But then again, this was the same purpose the bed warmer served; and it wasn’t buried under two feet
of snow! She quickly nixed the idea.

Jenny refused to leave Vastra’s room all day. She kept the fire burning, the warmer filled, and even crawled in bed and held Vastra to keep her warm. She just hoped it would all be enough.

Day 7 Tuesday

Vastra still didn’t wake. Jenny checked her breathing and heartrate, and although slow and shallow, they were still there. She couldn’t spend another day cooped up in the room just worrying. She needed to do something to occupy her body and mind. There was still no new snow, but nothing was melting either. As far as Jenny could see no one was out and about other than the occasional children throwing snowballs and making snowmen.

She decided to do a proper cleanup of the greenhouse. All she had done on Saturday was get as much of the snow out as she could. Now she needed to deal with the broken glass, dead plants, and other rubble. The chore worked to keep her body busy but her mind was always on Vastra. She went back to refresh the bed warmer and check Vastra’s breathing every half hour or so. There was no improvement.

The sound of the brass knocker on the front door echoed through the cold house.

“Who is it?” Jenny asked through the door.

“Telegram for a Madam Vastra,” a voice replied.

Jenny opened the door. A young man stood, bundled in a wool coat, scarf, hat, gloves and heavy boots. His outstretched hand held a piece of paper.

“Thank you.” Jenny took the telegram and quickly read it. “Can you deliver a reply?”

“Of course, Miss. Just jot it down and give it to me,” the young man smiled.

“Come in, please.” Jenny stepped aside and let him in. “Sorry it’s so cold. We’re running low on firewood. We can only keep a few rooms heated.”

“You and everyone else,” the man smiled. “Lucky you have any at all.”

“I suppose that’s truer than you know,” Jenny said.

“I’ll be right back.” Jenny retreated into Vastra’s office and returned shortly with a letter and two shillings. “Please see that this gets to Detective Chief Inspector Lang at Scotland Yard.

“Will do, Miss.” The man nodded and smiled at the tip. “And thank you.”

Jenny locked the door and went to check on Vastra.

Day 8 Wednesday

There was still no new snow, but there also wasn’t any sun. And it wasn’t any warmer. Jenny could see a few people out and about; but for the most part, everything was still just white and cold.

This was the third day Vastra wouldn’t wake and Jenny was at her wit’s end. All she could do was her very best to keep Vastra warm and hope she recovered soon.
Jenny stirred awake. It felt a bit warmer than it had in days. She opened her eyes enough to see sunlight shining in through the window. She smiled. She rolled over to check on Vastra and to her utter surprise and excitement two cerulean blue eyes were looking back at her.

“Jenny Flint, you cheeky monkey,” Vastra quipped. “Have you been sneaking into my bed and taking advantage of me in my weakened condition?”

“Oh, Vastra.” Jenny immediately closed the gap between them, cupped her hands on Vastra’s cheeks, and pulled her into a kiss. “Don’t you ever do that again,” she said between kisses. “I was so scared.” A single tear fell down Jenny’s cheek as she looked into Vastra’s eyes.

At the same time, both women realized the moment for what it was. Vastra pulled herself up on her elbow and gently turned Jenny over onto her back. She looked into Jenny’s warm brown eyes. “I love you, Jenny Flint.” She leaned in and kissed her. Jenny wrapped her arms around Vastra and pulled her down tight. The kiss deepened and grew more passionate as Jenny held her closer.

Vastra pulled away from Jenny to speak again. Before she could say anything, Jenny spoke.

“I love you, Vastra. I have loved you for so long. I didn’t think you could ever be attracted to an ape, much less love one.”

“Believe me, Jenny,” Vastra smiled. “No one is more surprised than I. Yet here I am, utterly in love.”

Vastra went back in for a kiss, but Jenny put up her hand.

“As much as I don’t want to stop,” Jenny sighed, “I have to.”

Vastra started to protest. But a stern look from Jenny made her reconsider.

“I have to build you a fire and make your breakfast. And I’m drawing you a hot bath and you are going to soak in it and warm up and enjoy it.”

Vastra didn’t protest, but she did steal one last kiss. “Yes, love.”

Taking every bit of her resolve, Jenny got up from Vastra’s bed, stoked the fire, and went downstairs. She started breakfast and put as many pots of water on to boil as possible. She wasn’t kidding about making Vastra take that bath.

Jenny sent up pot after pot of hot water to Vastra via the dumbwaiter. While she was at it she heated water for herself and took her bath in the kitchen in the copper tub like always. The effort of gathering so much snow to melt was worth it just knowing that Vastra was awake and well.

She hurried her bath so that she could finish readying Vastra’s office. She knew her Madam would be anxious to get back to her cases so she needed to get a fire going and tidy up the room.

She didn’t hear the Silurian come downstairs and started slightly when she noticed Vastra standing in the doorway watching her dust. “How long have you been standing there?” Jenny asked.

“Long enough,” Vastra flirted.

“Long enough for what?” Jenny flirted back.

“Long enough to see that I have a mountain of cases to get back to,” she winked at Jenny.
“That you do,” Jenny smiled. “But you probably shouldn’t overdo it on your first day back.”

“Speaking of days,” Vastra looked puzzled, “what day is it?”

“It’s Thursday,” Jenny replied. “You’ve been sick for a week. And for the past three days you wouldn’t wake up. I was so scared.”

Vastra walked across the room and took Jenny’s hands in hers. “I am so sorry, Jenny. I never meant to put you through that.”

“You couldn’t help it,” Jenny squeezed Vastra’s hands. “You were sick. Any idea what it was that you had?”

“No,” Vastra thought for a moment. “I do not know what that was.”

“Well, you’re better now,” Jenny smiled. “Hopefully you’ll never catch it again. But if you do, I’ll be right here to take care of you all over again.”

“Jenny I…” Vastra paused.

Jenny pulled her hands from Vastra’s and crossed her arms. “Don’t you dare apologize for what happened upstairs or say it was inappropriate. I can’t take it again.”

Vastra cupped Jenny’s face with her hands and pulled her in for a kiss.

“I meant what I said. I am utterly in love with you, Jenny. I just. Ape society,” she quickly caught herself, “human society hardly approves of relationships between women. I can only imagine what anyone would think of a relationship between a Silurian and a human; much less a female Silurian and a female human. Are you sure about this?”

“I’m more sure of this than I have been of anything ever in my whole life,” Jenny assured her and put her arms around Vastra’s waist. “I am no stranger to ape society’s thoughts on relationships between women.”

She winked at Vastra.

“That’s what landed me on the streets in the first place. I was kicked out of my home when I got caught holding hands with another girl. I’ve always kept it discreet but sometimes you just get caught. And I don’t care who knows I’m with you, Vastra. I have never felt this way about anyone. Ever.”

“Oh Jenny,” Vastra leaned in and kissed Jenny again. “When I was sick. I would dream of a fire. An invisible fire in my bed. But it never burned me, only kept me warm. That was you, was it not?”

“It was.” Jenny blushed. “Don’t worry. I didn’t take advantage of you, you old lizard.” Jenny smiled. “I had to conserve firewood. So there was no use building a fire in both our rooms. Besides, I didn’t want to leave you for a second. I spent all day and night up there with you.”

“My Jenny,” Vastra kissed her again. “And what about now?”

“What about now, what?” Jenny was confused.

“Where shall you sleep now that I am well and the storm has passed?”

Jenny paused as if searching for the words to say what she wanted to say next. “I don’t want to rush
things between us. I think we have a lot to learn about each other, human and Silurian; and I’d like to take time to figure things out slowly.”

“You are right. Of course,” Vastra admitted. “I too want to learn what it means to be with you, Jenny Flint. But I am perhaps less patient. Silurians do not place the same stigma on courtship that Victorian humans do. I must remember this.”

“How about for now we just have breakfast.” Jenny looked sheepishly at Vastra. “And I have some news about your greenhouse.”

Chapter End Notes

As always, feedback/reviews encouraged and appreciated. Thank you.

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Chapter 18: Moving On

Trigger warning: referenced domestic violence

The days following the blizzard were as unforgiving as the storm itself. All low lying areas were flooded as the temperatures rose above freezing and the snow started to melt. Most inhabitants of the impoverished East Side who survived the snow lost their homes, as building after building was condemned. Soup kitchens and shelters were overrun and the crime rate shot up. Most of the crimes were petty theft, nothing to trouble the Great Detective with; her services were needed elsewhere.

Along with her current caseload, which was backlogged due to her illness and the weather, Vastra was still trying to find tangible evidence in the Mason case to formally name the wife as the prime suspect. Unsolved cases were the bane of Vastra’s existence, and this one in particular had her fuming as it was solved, just not to human law enforcement standards. All the “proof” she had to present was one word scribbled onto an autopsy diagram—“short.”

She interviewed the medical examiner and all he recalled was suspecting, due to the angle, that the wounds were inflicted by someone of short stature. But he couldn’t produce a height range more precise than five to five and a half feet. This didn’t rule out a couple of the men who had signed the ledger that night; and it certainly didn’t rule out any of the boys.

But Vastra knew the perpetrator wasn’t any of the men nor any of the boys. She knew it was the wife who had killed the victim. She knew this because the wife was the only person whose scent was on the victim, who hadn’t been interviewed as a suspect, and who had possible motive. None of the men could have done it, not even the short ones, Vastra knew this because she had interviewed them and they had not lied. And Vastra’s tongue could spot a lie better than any test the Yard could offer.

And she knew exactly which humans had come into enough bodily contact with the victim to be a suspect. None of the boys had. They may have shaken his hand or he may have patted them on the back; but their scent was not on him in sufficient amounts to be the murderer. But of course this wouldn’t be admissible evidence in court. She couldn’t even tell DCI Lang how she, or more to the point Jenny, had solved the murder. But she knew it to be true.

Vastra would interview the wife again, this time asking specific questions to illicit a pheromone response. And she needed to figure out what the motive was for killing her husband. It was time to put the wife under surveillance. But still not time to tell DCI Lang of her suspicions.

Meanwhile, Vastra also had to deal with the house. The basement was flooded from the melting snow so training had to be temporarily suspended. The greenhouse was wrecked and after the inspection for new construction she was told of even more damage that had occurred to other parts of the roof and the chimney.

The house had one main chimney that vented all four fireboxes. The parlor and the office on the
ground floor, as well as the two bedrooms upstairs shared the wall with the one fireplace. The constant fires in one chimney had gone on for way too long and combined with faulty original construction it had finally had enough and cracks had formed creating a hazardous, albeit not urgent, situation. Vastra convinced the inspector to let her keep using it until spring arrived; but she had to have it repaired as soon as the weather was warm enough for her to go without a fire for a few days.

The only bright spot for Vastra right now was the change in her relationship with Jenny. The blizzard combined with her illness had created a perfect storm to finally get them to confess their love for one another. And the days since had been wonderful as they slowly got to know each other and spend more and more time together, not working or training. Evenings spent snuggled by the fire in the parlor had become a favorite pastime of both women.

Jenny rounded the corner of the house into the back garden headed for the scullery when she was almost struck with a falling board.

“Sorry, Miss. Don’t come through here,” the carpenter called from inside the greenhouse; which was now enclosed with a skeletal frame of boards. “We’re just about to put up the walls.”

She saw the boards and nails and other supplies, but no glass. She turned around with her bags of food and headed to the front door.

“What’s going on up top?” she asked stopping by Vastra’s office on her way through to the kitchen.

“I told you the builders would be here to make the repairs by the time you got back,” Vastra said.

“But where’s the glass? They’re putting up walls.”

“The greenhouse was impractical,” Vastra said. “It was foolish of me to ever have it built in the first place.”

“But, Vastra, you loved that greenhouse,” Jenny said. “It was your sanctuary.”

“I shall have to make a different sanctuary more practical to London’s climate.” Vastra’s tone was curt. She had been under tremendous stress since recovering from the illness. Between the regular cases, the home repairs, and the frustration with the Mason case, Vastra’s mood had been short tempered and tense the past weeks.

Jenny was sad for Vastra that it had come to this, but she was probably right about the greenhouse. It was impractical. “I have food to put away. The market hasn’t fully recovered but most of the shops are up and running like normal.”

Vastra did not respond and didn’t look up from her work.

Jenny shook her head then closed Vastra’s door leaving her to her work.

The workers were gone for the night. The “greenhouse” now had four walls and a roof. They would return tomorrow to finish the interior and paint.

Jenny avoided Vastra’s office all day other than the brief encounter after the market and Vastra
hadn’t left it all day. But now it was time for supper and Jenny went to get her favorite Silurian away from her desk.

“Supper’s ready, love,” Jenny said, opening the door and coming into the office.

“In a minute, dear.” Vastra didn’t look up. Her response was more automatic than sincere. She was intently reading a page of notes from a casefile.

Jenny watched for one minute as Vastra flipped from paper to paper and scribbled notes. Realizing Vastra had no intention of stopping her work, Jenny approached the desk. Leaning over, she put her hand on the paperwork and held it down.

Vastra looked up. Jenny’s deep brown eyes stared relentlessly into her. “Supper’s ready. And you will join me at the table if you want to eat.”

“Just because we are,” Vastra searched for the right word, “together, does not mean that you may speak to me like that. I am still your…”

Jenny cut her off. “My what? Employer?”

“Well I suppose I am not. But still I deserve your respect.”

“Oi! And I deserve yours. I work very hard around here to take care of you and this home and I help with those cases. I know you are under pressure from work and I know you are upset about the greenhouse and the Mason case; but don’t take it out on me. You’ve been ignoring me all week and taking your supper in here, not the table. I’ve hardly seen you. If something is wrong tell me now so we can suss it out.”

Vastra placed her hand on Jenny’s. God how she loved Jenny’s warm skin and could not get enough of it. “I am sorry, love. There is nothing we need to discuss. All of my negative emotions are with work and not you. And you are right; I should not take anything out on you.”

For the first time all week they ate supper at the table together. “So what will you make the new room into?” Jenny finally broke the silence.

“I do not know,” Vastra said, trying her hardest to be sociable. “We certainly do not need an additional bedroom, but without the glass it will not be suitable for plants. I shall have to think on it.” Vastra continued eating, offering no further conversation.

“If you need any help with your cases all you have to do is ask,” Jenny offered. “I’m happy to help.”

“I know, Jenny.” Vastra smiled. “You did an exceptional job of compiling notes and organizing the files while I was under the weather. I appreciate all of your work.”

“What about the Mason case?” Jenny asked. She suspected this was the main reason Vastra had been in a foul mood all week after finally meeting with the medical examiner. If there was one thing Vastra hated, it was unresolved cases. And this one was almost one year old. The frustration was compounded by the fact that Vastra knew who the killer was, thanks to Jenny, yet there was absolutely no evidence to prove it at the moment.

Vastra let out a sigh. “The Mason case is very frustrating. I have resumed surveillance of the wife. However her actions today may or may not hold little bearing on motives a year ago. I will interview her, if she is willing, within a week or two; but again, all this will accomplish, at best, is to reaffirm what we already know. I will still have no tangible evidence I can take to Scotland Yard
to name her as the prime suspect.”

Jenny didn’t have Vastra’s tongue to pick up elevated pheromones; but she could sense Vastra’s escalating emotions. “How about you take the night off.” It wasn’t a question. It was a strong suggestion.

“There is too much work,” Vastra started.

“And every bit of it will be there tomorrow. We haven’t trained in days. I’m sure the physical activity would do you good. Or we could sit in the parlor and read. For fun, not case files!” she could see that Vastra was about to interject. “I’ll cuddle next to you and keep you warm.” Jenny flirted.

Vastra smiled. She could not resist close quarters with her Jenny. “The basement is still too damp from flooding, but I would love to sit with you in the parlor after supper.”

Vastra sat on the settee leaned back against the arm. Jenny sat in front of her, her back snuggled against Vastra’s chest, reading a book. Vastra had no desire to read for pleasure. She never had. She did, however, derive a great deal of pleasure from this closeness with Jenny. This was as far as their relationship had progressed, physically. With the exception of a few kisses here and there, they were taking things very slowly.

As of late, after her chores were done for the day, Jenny would let her hair out of its restrictive bun and let it flow down her shoulders. Vastra had always scoffed at humans’ ridiculous excuse for fur. It wasn’t enough to provide a warm coat like other mammals, yet so many of them fussed about it so much. But her opinion on the matter changed the first time Jenny’s long locks fell across her skin creating a sensation the Silurian had never felt before. Now she longed for the moments after supper when Jenny would free her mane, even if was only to observe it from across the room. She was currently lost in thought, running her fingers through Jenny’s hair and hadn’t noticed that Jenny had not turned a page in her book for some time now.

“What sort of evidence do you need for the Mason case?” Jenny asked out of the blue and pulling Vastra from her musing.

“Pardon?”

“What sort of evidence do you need for the Mason case?” Jenny repeated.

“Jenny, I thought the purpose of sitting in the parlor was to get away from the cases and be together,” Vastra said. “And it was your idea.”

“I know,” Jenny said. “I’m just curious. The case is causing you all sorts of fits and I just want to help.”

“I do not know specifically what evidence I need,” Vastra said. “Certainly knowing her motive would help; but it still will not be enough to formally charge her. Short of a confession at this point, I am afraid she has gotten away with murder.”

“Is there anything I can do to help?” Jenny asked.

“You are the one who solved the case, Jenny,” Vastra smiled. “You have helped quite a lot.”

“I only solved it based on your keen detective work,” she snuggled back closer into Vastra’s chest. “I want to help you catch her. But we can talk about it tomorrow. I’m sorry I brought it up.”
Jenny picked her book back up and began reading.

Vastra smiled and continued to run her fingers through Jenny’s hair letting the silken strands fall. She quickly fell back into her daydream.

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The workers returned to finish the new room and Vastra retreated to her office to work on cases. Jenny cleaned the parlor, but wanted to avoid the second floor, so she joined Vastra.

“How can I help with the Mason case?” Jenny asked as she sat down in one of the chairs in front of Vastra’s desk.

“I am not sure,” Vastra said. “I have contacted the wife by telegram requesting an interview, if she agrees I will meet her and we will discuss some things. I am not sure how you can assist with this.”

“You said you needed to know her motive,” Jenny said. “What if I took a look around the house while she was out meeting with you?”

Vastra was taken aback at the suggestion. That was not the sort of “help” she expected Jenny to offer. But the idea wasn’t half bad. “I suppose it would be interesting. But anything you found would not be admissible as evidence. It would have been obtained illegally.”

“May be,” she smiled, “but you’ve already said short of a confession she’s gotten away with murder. At least if I found something there may be some way to investigate it legally.”

“True. There may an insurance policy or a will,” Vastra thought. “Something that would show she would benefit financially upon her husband’s demise. If you found that then I could go directly to her insurance company or lawyer and make inquiries.”

“Women are sentimental, Vastra,” Jenny said. “When I burgled for a living I’d find all manner of things women had stashed in hat boxes—receipts, legal documents, money, old love letters.” Jenny raised her eyebrows.

“So you think the motive was based on infidelity?” Vastra asked.

“I don’t know. But I’d like to find out.” Jenny smiled a particularly mischievous smile.

“Jenny Flint,” Vastra said. “If I were better at reading human facial expressions I would swear you were excited about dusting off your picks and doing a bit of breaking and entering.

“You’d be right,” Jenny smiled. “Sounds like a right bit o’ fun.”

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It took two weeks of planning and negotiating but the meeting between Vastra and the wife was set —tea at the Rose Kettle Tea Room at two in the afternoon on Thursday. The night before, Vastra and Jenny finalized their plans.

“What are you sure about this?” Vastra asked. “If you are caught, I will be unable to assist you getting out of the charges.”

“I’m more than sure,” Jenny smiled.

“She has servants,” Vastra said. “Just because she is out of the house, does not mean the house will be vacant.”
“Oi!” Jenny said, annoyed and slightly insulted. “This isn’t my first breaking and entering, Vastra. Besides, you’re not the only one who’s been doing some surveillance and research.”

Vastra cocked her head to one side. “Oh? And what have you discovered?”

“There’s one housemaid,” Jenny started, “a young girl named Margaret about my age or a little younger. I’ve been talking to her at the market, housemaid to housemaid, and she’s not been there long. She was hired, in fact, shortly after the husband met his untimely end. Says the wife is a right bear to work for—unpleasant and short tempered. She’s at home all day barking orders and doesn’t give Margaret a day off. So, she says any time the lady of the house is out she takes the opportunity to go out and take a breather. I reckon she’ll be about ten minutes behind the wife tomorrow.”

“Well that is fortuitous news,” Vastra said.

“All I need is one hour and I’ll have the place searched, barring any combination safes that require breaking into.” Jenny smiled remembering how much trouble she had with Vastra’s combination safe so many years ago. “But most women use hat boxes, like I said.”

“Do you have any?” Vastra asked.

“Do I have any what?” Jenny needed some clarification.

“Love letters. Are you the sentimental sort? You said ape women are sentimental and keep letters from old lovers.” Vastra was always blunt, it was just part of her Silurian personality.

“I’m not sure it’s any of your business. But no, I don’t have any love letters.”

“I should not have pried. It is not my place,” Vastra said.

“Truth is, I haven’t courted a lot of people who could write. Where I grew up reading and writing weren’t needed given the sort of work we were meant for. I know how to do it because my father insisted I know. He wanted better for his children than he had; and he figured if we could read and write, we’d be better off. I was able to learn a little. That’s why I wasn’t very good at it when I first came here.”

“I am sorry, Jenny. I know you do not speak of your family. I was being insensitive.”

“It’s alright. I don’t mind talking to you about my family. About my upbringing. I’m going to have questions for you, about your family. About Silurians. I think this is what couples do,” Jenny smiled. “This is how we learn about each other.”

“Is that what we are? A couple?” Vastra asked.

“Well, we’re courting,” Jenny said. “I mean, if things were normal, that’s what it’d be called.”

“I am familiar with human courtship rituals. But only from books.”

“Well you’re ahead of me then,” Jenny smiled. “I don’t have any books on Silurian courtship rituals.”

“They are brutal,” Vastra said matter-of-factly.

“Oh,” Jenny suddenly looked worried.

Vastra sensed Jenny’s apprehension as her fear heightened and pheromones permeated the air
around her. “I mean human courtship rituals are brutal,” Vastra clarified. “Silurian courtship is just a lot of fighting until you convince your chosen mate you are suitable. But with you humans it is all… emotional.”

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Vastra had the most confused look on her Silurian face that Jenny had ever seen.

Jenny stood in the doorway of Vastra’s office. She was wearing men’s shoes, grey trousers, a navy blue vest, a white undershirt, a tie, a bowler hat, and a tan coat that went down just past her knees. The ensemble was complete with a pocket watch and newspaper. Her hair was tucked completely beneath the bowler hat and subtle makeup had been applied to shade her face and make it appear a bit more angular. Jenny was almost unrecognizable. But her pheromones were unmistakable to Vastra.

Vastra just stared.

“My friend taught me how to do the makeup.”

Vastra was still speechless.

“People ignore men for the most part. I won’t have the cover of darkness. I had to find another way to hide.”

Vastra was still speechless.

“No one will question a man in an alley or knocking on a door. But they would immediately be suspicious of a woman.”

“You look,” Vastra had found a couple of words, but was at a loss for more.

“Like a man?” Jenny tried to help Vastra out a bit.

“Stunning.”

Jenny blushed. “Thought this might put you off.”

“What? The clothes? Clothes are not you. You are you. You exude confidence.”

“I wasn’t sure I could be convincing. But I think it turned out alright. I’ll keep my head down and won’t speak unless I absolutely have to.”

“You have your tools?” Vastra asked.

Jenny tilted her head to the side and looked at Vastra more than slightly annoyed. Vastra may be a professional detective, but Jenny was a professional burglar. Albeit retired. Semi-retired.

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Jenny sat on the bench and read the paper. Actually, she wasn’t reading at all, rather she was using the paper to help hide her face and keep an eye out for the wife. Finally the wife left; and as predicted Margaret was right behind her. Jenny held to her old rules and gave the wife a half hour
to change her mind and return. When she didn’t, Jenny made her move. She was in the front door before anyone could notice. The lock was simple and Jenny was a pro.

“Delivery,” Jenny said aloud, just in case anyone was home. No one answered. It was time to get to work.

First things first, Jenny made sure her alternative exits were accessible. She knew from her previous surveillance there was a door leading to the alley; but there was no guarantee it was usable until she got inside. It was chained on the inside and had a key lock, but nothing so elaborate she couldn’t make a quick getaway if need be. There were windows on the second floor, not the best escape option, but usable in a pinch. She made sure they were unlocked and would open.

With escape routes scouted she began her search.

*****

Vastra sat alone at a table for two in at the Rose Kettle Tea Room. It was a quarter past two and she was afraid the wife was not going to show. But she was more worried about Jenny. She couldn’t bear the thought of her getting caught and arrested.

A familiar scent drifted onto Vastra’s tongue. It was the wife. She had arrived.

“Madam Vastra,” a female voice said.

Vastra stood and greeted her guest. “Please, sit.”

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By the time Vastra got home Jenny had changed and washed the off her makeup. She looked like herself again and was going on about her day.

Vastra didn’t bother removing her coat, hat, or gloves until she was sure Jenny was home safely.

“Jenny,” Vastra called as soon as she came through the door.

“In the kitchen,” Jenny answered.

They met in the dining room.

“Were there any complications?” Vastra asked.

“No. It went smoothly. No interruptions or close calls.”

“Good,” Vastra released a sigh of relief. “Let us discuss things in my office. Will you bring tea?”

“Kettle’s already on,” Jenny smiled.

“That woman is guilty,” Vastra said between sips of Earl Grey, “of that I am certain. What did you find?”
“Nothing,” Jenny said. “There were no safes, no hidden panels. There were no love letters, no insurance policies, and no legal documents of any sort hidden away that would explain her motive. She’s either very clever at hiding evidence or there is none in her home.”

“There must be evidence,” Vastra said. “Perhaps a safety deposit box at central bank.”

“Maybe,” Jenny said, “but that’s beyond my skill. I can’t break into a safety deposit box.”

“There must be some way she profited,” Vastra said. “One does not simply kill their mate without gaining something.”

“Maybe he was unfaithful,” Jenny said. “Maybe she didn’t gain anything; maybe she got rid of something.”

“Then she should have divorced him, not killed him,” Vastra said. “Whatever it was, she hated him. I could taste contempt and hatred thick upon her. She had absolutely no remorse.”

“Maybe the affair was going on right under her nose,” Jenny said. “Perhaps with the previous housemaid. Margaret was hired soon after his death.”

“That could explain why the husband is dead, the housemaid is gone, and there are no documents to show proof of motive.”

“I can inquire about the previous housemaid. I know Margaret’s schedule, I can find her at market next week.”

“That would be most helpful,” Vastra said. “Still, infidelity is no excuse for murder.”

Jenny began to gather up the tea service.

“I intend to interview some of the husband’s business and social acquaintances. I shall let you know if anything turns up.”

*****

Sundays were Jenny’s “lazy day.” Ever since hiring the laundry service, she used Sundays to catch up on loose ends from the week. This week the new room was finished and there was a bit to clean up there; but other than that, everything was caught up since training had been temporarily suspended due to the flooded basement. So she was looking forward to a day of rest and relaxation. Of course for Jenny, “rest and relaxation” still meant cooking, cleaning, and reading casefiles.

Vastra joined Jenny for breakfast. “Good morning, Jenny.”

“Good morning, dear,” Jenny greeted her favorite Silurian with a kiss on the cheek.

Vastra smiled. She loved the new way Jenny started her day.

Jenny brought the food and tea to the table and the two ate in relative silence, like most mornings.

“I would like for you to accompany me out this afternoon,” Vastra said out of the blue.

“Of course,” Jenny said. “Is there a new case?”

“No,” Vastra said, but didn’t offer any further information.
Jenny knew Vastra well enough not to ask further. If there was more information Jenny needed, Vastra would provide it. She didn’t always appreciate the Silurian’s methods, but she was used to them.

Vastra hailed a hansom cab. “Thirteen Paternoster Row,” she directed the driver.

Jenny thought about what was located at the address Vastra had given the driver. As far as she knew Paternoster Row was populated mostly with publishing companies; but she wasn’t horribly familiar with the area. If the outing didn’t have to do with a new case, perhaps Vastra was turning her new room into a proper library and needed books? Perhaps Vastra was writing a book? Either way, Vastra had her reasons to make the trip and Jenny was happy to accompany her.

Pulling to a stop, Vastra and Jenny exited the cab. “Please remain here,” Vastra instructed the driver. “We may be a while.”

Vastra went to the front door of the residence labeled “13” and pulled out a key and inserted it into the front door lock.

Stepping into the foyer Jenny took in the room. It was much grander than their entry hall and devoid of furnishings. The home was clearly vacant at the moment.

“What do you think?” Vastra asked.

“It’s huge,” Jenny said. She was still unsure what their purpose was in visiting the residence. “And empty.”

“Yes,” Vastra said. “I want to buy all new furnishings. Most of what we already own will remain at the old house; except my desk. I shall bring my desk.”

Jenny’s head snapped around to look at Vastra, who was still surveying the foyer. “I’m sorry, Vastra. What?”

“This is our new home,” Vastra said. “I thought you would approve.”

“I don’t disapprove,” Jenny said, still a little taken aback. “But I don’t understand. What’s wrong with the home we have?”

“There are many inadequacies with the old home,” Vastra started. “Most notable as we have seen, or more to the point felt, is lack of sufficient heating. This home has a gas powered radiator system throughout as well as solidly constructed fireplaces and chimneys in all the main rooms.”

“But it’s huge,” Jenny said. “It will take me twice as long or more to clean. I’m not sure I will have time for anything else.”

“Then I shall hire a kitchen maid,” Vastra said. “That will relieve you of your kitchen duties.”

“Really?” Jenny tilted her head and looked at Vastra. “And who do you think is going to be alright warming up blood and raw meat twice a day without questioning what sort of person eats that and only that?”

“A housemaid then,” Vastra said.

“Absolutely not,” Jenny protested.
“Then what?” Vastra asked. “I thought you would be happy. This house has every modern convenience you apes have invented.”

Suddenly, Jenny was very interested. “Such as?”

“Hot and cold water from the tap,” Vastra started. “Gas lighting in every room. No more carrying lamps about. Hot and cold running water in each water closet. No more sending water from the kitchen up a dumbwaiter for baths. And no more taking a bath in the kitchen for you; you will have your own water closet and claw foot tub.”

“Really?”

Vastra closed the space between them and took Jenny’s hands. “Yes. This is for you. I thought you would be pleased. I searched for a home with all these conveniences to make your life easier so that you could spend more time training and working cases.”

“Well when you put it that way,” Jenny leaned in and kissed Vastra. This was their first kiss in their new home. “How ‘bout you give me a tour.”

The house was exquisite. All of the built in architecture was ornate. There was more than enough space for the two women. It would allow for their separate bedrooms, separate baths, an office for Vastra, drawing room, library, dining room, kitchen, larder, scullery, training area, and more.

“And this will be my conservatory,” Vastra said opening the door to a room with large windows and plenty of open space.

“I’m sorry,” Jenny said, “I don’t know what a conservatory is.”

“A greenhouse,” Vastra explained. “Only this one is properly built. And with the gas heating, it will remain heated, even in the drearier of winter days.”

“That’s terrific,” Jenny smiled. She knew a great source of Vastra’s unhappiness after the blizzard had been the loss of her greenhouse; including all of the plants she had lovingly cared for over the years. The loss hit Vastra hard. It was the one thing that reminded her of “home.”

“Yes, I should think I can make a grand room indeed.” Vastra beamed as she looked around the room.

Out back, they examined the garage. “I will purchase a carriage and hire a driver,” Vastra said. “There will be no need for him to live here; he should be able to use his own residence provided he has a telephone such that we may reach him when needed. He must be available twenty-four hours a day, every day. And he must be able to tend to the horse. Make sure you explain these requirements when conducting interviews.”

“Me?” Jenny asked. “I’ll be interviewing the driver?”

“You shall be handling the entire move, Jenny. You can better coordinate with the shops for the furnishings and the movers for the things we wish to bring over. Then there will be the matter of finding tenants for the old house. I will write the lease contract once we are moved in here.”

“This place will need a thorough cleaning before we move in, and the old place will need a thorough cleaning after we are out,” Jenny insisted. “I’ll have to schedule that too. And I’ll have to inform the butcher, the fire wood delivery, and the laundry service.”

“I have no doubt you will handle it exceptionally,” Vastra smiled.
“So when should I start?”

“Tomorrow,” Vastra said. “This house is ours as of yesterday.”

Jenny wasted no time beginning the moving preparations. After breakfast was finished on Monday morning she went immediately to the new house and began cleaning. She didn’t return home until time to start supper.

“How did things go at Thirteen Paternoster Row?” Vastra asked. “Did you get everything cleaned?”

“Hardly,” Jenny said between bites. She was eagerly scarfing down a double portion of supper as she hadn’t stopped today for lunch. “I got a good deal of the downstairs sorted, but didn’t make it upstairs. I ran out of almost all my cleaning supplies and had to stop by the store on the way home. They’ll deliver more soap and oil tomorrow morning. And while I was at it I bought new mops, brooms, buckets, and the lot to keep there. I brought the old ones back here. No need in hauling them back and forth.”

“It seems you have everything under control,” Vastra smiled.

“Oi! You doubted me?” Jenny smiled playfully at Vastra. “Did you find out any more about the Mason case?”

Vastra let out a sigh. “No. I inquired at the central bank about safety deposit boxes in her name and there were none. Few of the late husband’s acquaintances will grant me an interview. Though I do have a couple lined up for later this week.”

“You’ll get your evidence,” Jenny reassured her. “I know you won’t leave the case unsolved.”

“The case is solved,” Vastra corrected Jenny. “However the murderer is yet to be arrested.”

“You’ll get her,” Jenny said. “She slipped up somewhere, somehow, and I know you won’t let it go until you get her.”

“I would like justice for the victim. If Scotland Yard cannot convict her, perhaps it is time I take matters into my own hands.”

Jenny looked at Vastra with skepticism. “What do you mean ‘take matters into your own hands?’”

“Come now, Jenny,” Vastra said. “It would not be the first time.”

Jenny had never asked, and Vastra had never told her, about what happened to the men who had kidnapped her and killed Simon. Any inquiry was met with a stern look from Vastra and a reassurance that they would never hurt her again. Jenny had always taken this to mean that Vastra had killed them. But again, she knew no details.

“The human system of justice is fraught with inadequacies,” Vastra said. “It is not enough to know the guilt of a person; so much more is required for conviction. I know she is guilty; but she will never see her day in court if there is not proof that the humans at Scotland Yard can identify. I have my proof. I have all the proof I need.”

“But you aren’t above the law,” Jenny said. “You don’t know her reasons. Or if she’s a danger and likely to kill again.”
“She is guilty,” Vastra repeated. “Of that, I am certain.”

“I’m going to talk to Margaret this week,” Jenny insisted. “Please don’t do anything until I can at least get more information.”

Vastra neither argued nor agreed. She simply dropped the topic.

“Would you like to train tonight?” Vastra asked. “I believe the basement is finally back to normal.”

“I don’t think I can. I’m knackered,” Jenny yawned. “I would like to curl up with you in the parlor after supper if you’re not too busy.”

Jenny got two pages into her book before she was completely asleep.

Vastra carefully picked her up and carried her upstairs. This was not the first time the Silurian tucked a sleeping Jenny into bed; and it would not be the last. And like last time, Vastra ran her fingers through the mammal’s long locks. But this time she didn’t flinch when Jenny snuggled down into the bed.

Moving preparations were going smoothly. Jenny had the new house cleaned and was ready to get the new furniture moved in. “I’m going to the furniture store today to order furnishings for the drawing room, library, both bedrooms, parlor, and dining room. If there’s anything you want please let me know now.”

“No, dear,” Vastra said hardly looking up. “I have faith you have it all handled.”

“And I’ll speak with Margaret today at the market,” Jenny said. This got Vastra’s attention. “I’ll see if she knows anything about the previous housemaid. If there’s a way I can contact her.”

“I will be anxious to hear what you learn,” Vastra said. “I have a meeting today with one of the husband’s business acquaintances. And I have some feelers out regarding the wife. Someone must know something. And I will maintain my surveillance for a few more days, at least.”

“Do you think she suspects that you are on to her?” Jenny asked.

“I do not believe she does. When we met I crafted my questions very thoughtfully so as not to raise her suspicions,” Vastra said.

“But you can be quite insensitive,” Jenny said. “Are you sure?”

“Yes.” The tone in Vastra’s voice was somewhere between a question and a statement. She now had the tiniest bit of doubt. The wife was anxious to end the interview last week; but Vastra assumed it was just her guilty conscience getting the best of her.

Jenny finally found Margaret in late afternoon. She was having tea at a sidewalk café looking rather not herself.

“Margaret,” Jenny said approaching the girl. “Margaret dear, what’s wrong?”

Margaret shook her head lifting herself from the fog of whatever she was thinking about. “Hello Jenny. Please sit.”
“You look a thousand miles away,” Jenny said. “Is everything alright?”

“I’m not sure at the moment,” Margaret said, a bit nervously. “Is your madam perhaps hiring for an additional maid?”

“Oh, Margaret, what happened?” Jenny asked, completely ignoring whether or not Margaret’s question was an actual request for employment.

“I don’t know,” she said. “This morning when I served breakfast she just handed me an envelope with this month’s pay and said my services were no longer needed.”

“Just out of the blue?” Jenny asked. “You don’t remember doing anything that would make her let you go?”

“No!” Margaret sounded insulted at the insinuation. “I do everything that woman tells me to do. And then some!”

“I’m sorry,” Jenny quickly apologized. “I didn’t mean to insult you.”

“I just don’t understand,” Margaret said. “She wasn’t the nicest woman to work for; but at least she paid me on time. And without a man around I didn’t have to worry about anything inappropriate, like some maids.”

“Do you think her late husband was inappropriate with the maids?” Jenny asked.

“I wouldn’t know, would I?” Margaret said. “I never met him. You’d have to ask Gretchen, their previous maid. Although I doubt he would have been inappropriate with her.”

“Why do you say that?” Jenny asked.

“She’s quite older,” Margaret said. “I would think if he was going to mess around with a maid, he would have insisted on hiring someone younger.”

“Wasn’t Gretchen fired?” Jenny asked. She was trying to keep the conversation going in a direction that would gain her some information. “Maybe your madam has a habit of firing maids out of the blue.”

“I don’t know why Gretchen was fired,” Margaret said. “All I know is that she sent an address for her last month’s wages to be sent to. I remember because my madam was so mad. She told me to take care of it because she couldn’t stand to look at that woman one more time.”

“Sounds like something bad happened between them,” Jenny said hoping for more information, and if possible, an address. She wanted to speak with this Gretchen. “What did you do?”

“I took her last month’s wages to her. She had moved into a room in a boarding house on Wentworth Street. Russell Boarding House I think it was. She was a right bitter old maid. Didn’t have a kind word for me, I’ll tell you that. Oh, Jenny, I don’t want to end up in a boarding house.”

Jenny committed the information about Gretchen to memory. “I’m sure you won’t, Margaret. There’s lots of households out there looking for housemaids.”

“I hope so,” Margaret said.

After a bit more time of trying to comfort Margaret, Jenny made her excuses and left for a trip to Wentworth Street.
Jenny knocked on the door of the small apartment—if you could even call it an apartment, it was a single room. An older, white-haired woman answered the door.

“Yes? What do you want?” she snapped at Jenny. Her tone was smug and Jenny could tell right away that she did not appreciate the disruption of her evening.

“Hello, ma’am,” Jenny smiled. “You don’t know me, but I’m trying to gather a bit of information. About your former employer.”

“Hrmph,” the woman grunted. “Good riddance! And good day to you. I don’t care to discuss neither the dead husband nor the living wife. Now if you will excuse me.” She began to close the door.

Jenny quickly placed her foot inside the doorframe to keep it from closing. “Please, ma’am,” she pleaded. “It’s important I ask you a few questions. It’ll only take a minute.”

The woman looked Jenny up and down. “Is this about the murder? It’s been a year. And why are you asking? You look like a maid, not a detective.”

“I am a maid,” Jenny said. “I’m a friend of Margret, the new housemaid, and I just want to make sure she hasn’t gotten mixed up in anything. I just want to make sure the wife is a decent person.”

“Ppft,” Gretchen scoffed. “The whole lot of ‘em were rotten. He had a temper and was loose with a whiskey bottle. And she was as hateful as a hornet. No wonder he hit her so much.”

“He hit her?” Jenny asked.

“All the time,” Gretchen said.

“And you think that was alright?” Jenny asked.

“Wasn’t my place to think anything. He was the husband. He made the money. He made the rules. I just cleaned the house and made dinner and went to bed at the end of the day. Now, since she fired me and wouldn’t give me a favorable letter of recommendation, I’m back working as a kitchen maid. Twice the work for half the pay. That’s why I live in this dump.”

“Do you know why she fired you?” Jenny asked.

“Because she’s a heartless woman, that’s why. After her husband got himself murdered she said she couldn’t stand to look at me anymore. Said every time she did all she could think about was how I just sat back and watched and never said a thing.” She scoffed again. “Like I said. Wasn’t my place to say anything. I did my job and I did it well and now I’ll work ‘til the day I die on this meager wage. Now if you’ll please leave I have to get to bed.”

With that, Gretchen closed the door in Jenny’s face.

“That’s why she murdered him,” Jenny said to herself. “It wasn’t to profit, it was to get away from him, the only way she knew how. I have to tell Vastra before she does anything rash.”

Surveillance on the wife continued. Vastra sat and watched as case after case was loaded onto the carriage. Finally, she caught the driver on a cigarette break.
“Tell me, sir, where might the lady be heading?” Vastra asked.

“You neighbors are a nosey lot,” the driver asked. “You’re the third one to ask. And I’ll tell you what I told them. I don’t work for you, I work for her, so get bent.”

Vastra extended her gloved hand with a two pound banknote. “Perhaps this will be adequate compensation for your time?”

The driver looked around to make sure the wife wasn’t watching and took the money. “I’m taking her things to the docks tonight to be loaded. Then first thing tomorrow I’m to pick her up and take her to catch a ship bound for France.”

“I see,” Vastra said. “And is she traveling alone?”

“Can’t say,” the driver said. “I’m only loading her things.”

“Thank you for your time.” Vastra quickly turned on her heel and headed home to prepare.

Jenny ran home as fast as she could. It would be dark soon. She had to tell Vastra about what she had learned. She knew Vastra was gathering information on her own; and Vastra had already alluded to “taking matters into her own hands.”

“Vastra,” Jenny called out upon entering the house. But there was no answer. She ran to Vastra’s office. “Vastra.” Opening the door she saw that the office was empty.

“Check the basement,” Jenny said aloud. “Maybe she’s training.”

The basement was empty, no Vastra and no swords.

“Bloody hell! What did she find out?” Jenny cursed and ran out the door assuming the worst.

Jenny reached the wife’s house just as it was getting dark. She searched frantically for Vastra. If the Silurian was here looking for justice, she would be hiding in the shadows until the cover of darkness when she would begin the hunt.

She found Vastra’s wool cape in the alley. No doubt she shed it here as it would hinder her ability to sneak into the house. She searched for Vastra’s point of entry. An open window on the second floor was the obvious choice.

Jenny thought quickly. She ran around to the front of the house and banged frantically on the door.

Throwing the door open in a huff the wife yelled at Jenny. “What is all this racket? I have a good mind to call the police.”

Jenny quickly assessed the situation. She saw a few small suitcases stacked near the door, and what furniture she could see was covered in sheets. “She’s running.” Jenny thought to herself.

“You’re making a terrible mistake, ma’am,” Jenny said.

“I beg your pardon?”

“Leaving. Not taking responsibility for your actions, ma’am,” Jenny said.
The wife went to slam the door, but Jenny caught it.

Jenny stepped just inside the doorway, entering the woman’s home. She knew Vastra was upstairs, probably lying in wait for the unsuspecting wife to come up for the night where she would pounce and get justice for the slain husband. She knew Vastra could hear her.

“I know why you did it, ma’am,” Jenny said. “I dare say any woman in your position would have considered doing the same thing. But you can’t kill a man just because…”

She cut Jenny off. “Get out!”

“No.” Jenny stood her ground. “I have all the evidence I need to take to the Yard for your conviction. And if you run your punishment will be far worse. You won’t escape justice, I can guarantee that. The Yard has its best detective on it.”

“You mean that veiled monstrosity?” the wife scoffed. “If she’s the best why hasn’t she arrested me in the year since my husband’s murder? You have nothing.”

Motion behind the wife caught Jenny’s eye. It was Vastra. She was sneaking down the stairs.

“No,” Jenny thought in her mind, making eye contact with Vastra for a split second. “Go back upstairs.”

As if hearing her loud and clear, Vastra snuck back up the two steps she had descended and hid out of sight.

Jenny refocused on the wife. “I know he beat you. I know you hated him. I understand. Any woman in your situation would have thought about doing exactly what you did. But you can’t just kill another human being like that.”

“You have no idea,” the woman shouted at Jenny.

Jenny stepped further inside and closed the door behind her. “I know he hurt you and you wanted to hurt him.”

“He was a monster,” the woman said, trembling.

“You could have left him,” Jenny said.

“No,” the woman said, still shaking with anger. “You don’t just leave a man like that. He was powerful, important, and had all the right friends. There was no escape other than death. Either mine or his.”

“You could have reported him,” Jenny offered.

“He had the police on his side. The important ones. And judges. Anything I would have reported would have been dismissed as false accusation and I would have paid for my betrayal dearly.”

“You need to confess,” Jenny said. “You will get caught and if you turn yourself in and confess it will be better.”

“No,” the woman had stopped shaking. She was numb and her eyes were far away. “I don’t think you understand. He was powerful. I don’t say that lightly. I will be hanged for his murder, no matter how I am brought to justice. That is why I took over a year to plan the perfect murder. I don’t know how you solved it, I don’t even know who you are, but I thought it was perfect.”
“It was,” Jenny said. “I told you, the detective assigned to it is the best. She is called in when the case is unsolvable. But mark my words, she has solved it. I heard about your motives, why you did it, and I came to offer you a chance to confess before she brings you to justice.”

“Are you married?” the woman asked Jenny.

“No, ma’am.”

“Courting anyone?”

“Yes, ma’am.” Jenny felt herself blush knowing that Vastra could hear the conversation.

“Is he good to you?”

“Extremely,” Jenny beamed.

“Does he hit you?”

“Never.”

“Neither did Daniel, until we were married,” the woman said. “No woman should have to endure what I went through in my marriage. I shall spare you the details, but it did not stop with simple punches and slaps. I do not regret my actions and if I did confess, I would say as much. Either way I will be hanged. One does not murder a man like that and not face death herself.”

“I see,” Jenny said. “Then I have done all I can do. I have warned you. I suppose the rest is up to you. But do know you are caught. Do know that even if you run you will be found. I will leave you now and let your conscience speak to you. I dare say you should listen.”

“You won’t arrest me?” the woman said, almost disappointed in her tone. Perhaps she just wanted it all to be over.

“I’m not a police officer, ma’am,” Jenny said. “Just an assistant trying to help a woman who was as much a victim as the man she murdered. I have no authority. I just wanted to warn you and give you options.”

The woman looked tired. As if she had carried this burden far beyond her capacity.

“Good evening, ma’am.” And with that Jenny let herself out and began her walk home.

Jenny sat on the settee in front of a fire reading a book when she heard the front door open and close. She heard Vastra hang her cape and remove her swords, then make her way into the parlor

“How did you find out about the husband?” Vastra asked.

“I talked to the housemaid, Gretchen, who worked there before Margaret. She told me he beat her, hit her, all the time. The wife fired Gretchen after her husband’s death because she couldn’t stand to look at her. Said Gretchen just watched and let it happen without saying a word.”

“I am positive there was nothing Gretchen could have done to stop it. She would have put herself in harm’s way had she tried.” Vastra paused. “You knew what I was about to do so you came to the house to tell me what you had learned, did you not? So that I would weigh it in my decision to seek justice for the murdered husband?”
“That’s right,” Jenny said. “I wanted you to know her motives before you simply killed her to get justice for a man who had beaten and terrorized her. What did you do?”

“I did not kill her,” Vastra said. “I tasted a sense of remorse in the air. Maybe not remorse for killing the man who hurt her; but perhaps remorse for taking a life. I do not know. But I left it in her hands. She will run and live with what she has done or she will turn herself in. Either way, it is her decision to make.”

“You’re becoming a little more human every day with your sympathies.”

Vastra scoffed, “Nonsense! Silurians are capable of sympathy and compassion.”

Jenny got up from the settee and came over to Vastra. She put her hand on Vastra’s face and stroked her cheek with her thumb. “You’re freezing, love. Come sit with me by the fire.”

Vastra didn’t hesitate. She grabbed Jenny and pulled her close into a kiss.

Jenny threw her arms around Vastra and pulled her closer.

They finally parted. Vastra looked into Jenny’s deep, warm, brown eyes. “I would never strike you.”

“Bloody hell right you wouldn’t,” Jenny said.

Vastra pulled the pins from Jenny’s bun and let her hair fall. “Now we can sit by the fire.”

Chapter End Notes

Follow me on Twitter @masters_jd
Or Facebook https://www.facebook.com/jessie.masters.31
If you follow me on social media, make sure to let me know it’s you!
With Jenny at the helm, the move had been seamless. It had taken several weeks to get everything picked out, ordered, shipped, moved in, and ready; but by mid-March 1888 the Madam Vastra/Jenny Flint household at 13 Paternoster Row was finally settled.

Vastra fretted about her office and insisted on using it at the old address until everything else was in place. Because of this, it was the last full room to be moved. But all was well when she arrived home from the Yard late Wednesday evening to find her cherry wood desk and all her belongings waiting on her.

Every book was on the new built in shelves in the exact order as they had been in the old house. Every pencil, every piece of paper, every everything in each desk drawer was exactly as it was prior to being packed and moved. Even the dark velvet curtains were in place. There were new chairs, new tables, a new sofa, and new decorations in her office; but it immediately felt like home.

“Jenny, dear,” Vastra gushed, “this is simply amazing.” She looked around her office and inside her desk.

“Oi! You doubted me?” Jenny smiled at Vastra. “You’ve been gone for over twelve hours today. I had plenty of time to get things set up. And, you have more space for books on the shelves. I got you a bigger sofa. And this.” Jenny removed the sheet covering the rolling board.

“What pray tell is that?” Vastra asked.

“It’s a cork board on one side.” Jenny flipped the large board over. “And a chalk board on the other. It’s for organizing notes and whatnot on your cases.”


“Do you really like it?” Jenny asked, not entirely convinced Vastra’s enthusiasm was sincere.

“It will take a moment to get used to it,” Vastra confessed, “but I cannot wait to try it.” Little did she know it would soon become one of her most used tools in her detective work.

“How did your meeting with DCI Lang go?” Jenny asked.

“Interesting,” Vastra paused.

“Interesting how?” Jenny said, sitting on the new sofa.

Vastra joined her.

“Detective Chief Inspector Lang has been promoted to Detective Superintendent,” Vastra said. “I am to report directly to his replacement, a Detective Chief Inspector Abberline, once he arrives from Manchester next month.”
“How do you think he’ll take to a female detective?” Jenny asked.

“I do not know. But Detective Chief Inspector Lang,” Vastra caught herself, “Detective Superintendent Lang informed me that he will make sure Detective Chief Inspector Abberline knows how invaluable I have been to the Yard.”

“Then let’s hope he listens,” Jenny said. “Did you turn in the Mason case?”

Vastra sighed. “As much as it pained me to do so, yes.”

“What did you tell him?”

“I told him the truth. That I had no evidence I could present to name a perpetrator and that according to the medical examiner’s report the stab wounds were inflicted by someone five to five and a half feet tall.”

“You didn’t mention the wife? And her motive?” Jenny asked.

“No,” Vastra said. “I will keep tabs on her, and if she kills again I will pay her a visit. But I do not think she is a danger to society as a whole.”

“How will you keep up with her now that she’s in France?”

“I have my ways,” Vastra assured Jenny. “But I still have not gotten to the interesting thing that happened while meeting with Detective Superintendent Lang.”

“Oh?” Jenny was very interested.

“I have accepted a rather interesting case,” Vastra said.

“That’s saying a lot considering some of the cases we’ve dealt with,” Jenny said. “What is it?”

“Well, it is not a case so much as it is a favor. Detective Superintendent Lang’s wife paid a medium to help her communicate with their late child,” Vastra scoffed. “A silly notion in the first place; she should have known better.”

“Not the point, Vastra,” Jenny said, obviously irritated. “What happened?”

“Clearly séances are not legitimate and she was scammed out of her money. Not once, but several times,” Vastra scoffed again. “I could have saved her the coin if she had come to me before she embarked on such a foolish endeavor.”

“Still not the point, dear.” Jenny was getting frustrated.

“Right,” Vastra continued, “the practice of séances is not illegal so the Yard will not investigate. And even if it would, I’m not sure Detective Superintendent Lang would want to admit to them how his wife was scammed. Nonetheless, his wife has been inconsolable since the incident.”

“What does he want us to do?” Jenny asked.

“Expose them, put them out of business, or run them out of town.” Vastra smiled. “By any means necessary.”

“Well that is interesting,” Jenny smiled.

*****
“Thank you, Jenny.” Vastra blotted a small amount of blood from the corner of her mouth. “That lamb was delicious.”

“You’re welcome, dear,” Jenny said. “But it’s hard for me to take credit for the taste given that all I did was warm it up a bit.”

“Either way, it was delicious,” Vastra sighed. “I have had a rather long day and I am tired. I think I will turn in early tonight.”

“When you go up, I’d like to accompany you,” Jenny said.

Vastra looked at Jenny unsure of how to react to the request.

“I have a surprise for you. In your bedroom. Something I had made for you.”

“Made?” Vastra was keenly interested.

“Yes,” Jenny said sheepishly. “And I do hope it works.”

Jenny took Vastra’s hand and led her upstairs to her bedroom. She hesitated before opening the door.

“If it doesn’t work, or if you don’t like it, I’ll have them back out tomorrow to undo it,” Jenny said. Vastra wasn’t one for surprises, but she could sense Jenny’s hesitation and anxiety and thought it best to “play along.” This was remarkably thoughtful given her usual tendency of utter insensitivity. She simply nodded to Jenny and Jenny opened the door.

What Vastra told Jenny on the day she showed her the house at 13 Paternoster Row was true; she chose a house for Jenny with all the modern conveniences to make her life easier. But what was equally true is that she chose this house in particular for herself—over the other one with all the bells and whistles—because of the fireplace in the master bedroom. The firebox was five feet across and the mantle was a deep rich mahogany, intricately carved and breathtaking to look upon. Given the Silurian’s dependency on fire for warmth, fireplaces were of particular interest to her. More so than any of the art or furnishings apes put so much stock in.

As the door opened, Jenny held her breath. Vastra walked past, immediately noticing the changes to her favorite feature in the house. She didn’t say a word, she simply took it in. Her eyes surveyed the addition, her tongue flicked out to smell and taste the air around it, and finally, as she took a knee, her fingertips glided over the smooth black stone that now lay around the edges of the firebox and extended out into the room some four or more feet.

As she looked closer, she saw that stones weren’t simply added to the front extending the hearth outward; no, the floor of the firebox was one solid piece of black stone and that was the same piece of stone that extended out into the room. It was enormous. It must have taken ten humans or more to lift it up the stairs and into the room.

The construction into the existing fireplace was seamless. She knew a great deal of the original fire place—mantle, hearth, wall, brick, and mortar—had to have been removed in order to make this work; but if it had, you couldn’t tell. The mahogany mantle was perfectly oiled and shined like new. There was not a single tool mark in the wood. In a word, it was flawless.

“Jenny, I…” Vastra trailed off, her hand still grazing over the smooth cool stone.
Jenny hadn’t left the doorway. “I asked if there was a stone that would warm up when there was a fire. Something that a hearth could be made from. I’ve been working with a stone mason and a master carpenter for weeks, ever since the first day I set to cleaning. I read in that book you have about all the animals that reptiles like to lay on warm stones to heat up. I thought you’d,” Jenny quietened down to a mere whisper as Vastra slowly stood, “like it.”

Vastra approached Jenny. Without a word she put her arm around Jenny’s waist and pulled her close, kissing her deeply. With her other hand, she began to pull the pins from Jenny’s bun letting her hair fall and the pins drop to the floor.

Jenny threw her arms around Vastra. Her left hand traced its way up Vastra’s back and onto the back of her head and up to her crests. The last time she tried this, the night Vastra had her pinned to the wall in the old house, Vastra stopped her. Tonight Vastra made no effort to restrict Jenny’s caresses and began to make a noise, deep in her throat. A noise Jenny had heard only once before—the same night she was pinned against the wall. The sound was a mixture of a deep purr and a low growl.

Vastra pulled back, only slightly, but enough to break the kiss. She looked into Jenny’s deep brown eyes; her own eyes now a swirling, milky storm of grey. Her tongue slowly snaked out of her mouth tasting the air, tasting Jenny.

Jenny’s pheromones spiked and her body heat rose.

Vastra’s tongue flicked Jenny’s neck, tasting her skin.

Jenny gasped.

Vastra kissed her neck and gently bit down.

Another gasp escaped Jenny’s lips. Then, realizing her vantage point, she began kissing Vastra’s head crests.

The sound from Vastra’s throat increased and she could feel the mammal’s body heat rise even more. With the arm around Jenny’s waist, she pulled her closer. Her other hand moved Jenny’s hair out of the way to expose her neck and shoulder. Vastra’s tongue snaked its way down Jenny’s neck to her shoulder, under her shirt, and down her chest almost to her breasts.

“Stop,” Jenny pulled back, but didn’t break her contact with Vastra.

Vastra immediately stopped, retracted her tongue, and pulled back to look into Jenny’s eyes. Her own eyes now a familiar cerulean. “Jenny, I am sorry. I.”

Jenny playfully slapped her hand on Vastra’s shoulder and leaned back to look into her eyes. “I have the kissing part down. I’m talking about the rest of it.”

“Stop,” Jenny pulled back, but didn’t break her contact with Vastra.

Jenny pulled Vastra’s forehead down to hers. “I’m the one who should be sorry,” she said. “I just. I don’t know what to do.”

“If it is any consolation, Jenny, you were doing just fine,” Vastra said.

Jenny pulled Vastra’s forehead down to hers. “I think I have the kissing part down. I’m talking about the rest of it.”

“I believe we figure it out as we go,” Vastra said. “It is not like I have any experience with humans. If you recall our first encounter I did not even know how to kiss you.”

“But you are around humans all the time. And you have all those books about medical things. I have nothing. I don’t even know,” Jenny paused. She wasn’t embarrassed, she had simply never
spoken this freely with anyone before. “I don’t know how Silurians have sex. I don’t even know what you look like under that dress.”

“Would you like to know?” Vastra asked.

“Very much,” Jenny smiled.

“Go change into your night clothes and come back,” Vastra instructed.

Jenny went back to her room and changed into her night gown and pulled a robe around her. She hurried downstairs, stacked the dirty dishes in the wash sink and turned off the gas lamps on the ground floor. Returning upstairs, she knocked lightly on Vastra’s door.

“Come in, Jenny,” Vastra called. She had donned a night dress and a robe and built a small fire in the fireplace. She was sitting on the new stone hearth with a folded quilt in front of her for Jenny. “Come. Sit.”

Jenny sat cross-legged on the quilt in front of Vastra, facing her.

“If this is not comfortable for you, we can sit on the bed,” Vastra offered.

“No, this is fine.”

“Did you consult the reptile chapter of my zoology book to learn about reptile reproduction?” Vastra asked Jenny.

“Yes,” Jenny said, shyly.

“No wonder you have concerns,” Vastra said. “I am sorry, Jenny. It never dawned on me how truly devoid of information you are on the subject. I know I am the only Silurian you have ever seen, but I assumed everything would come naturally. But as you said, I have books on human anatomy, physiology, and behavior.”

“I don’t think I said all those words,” Jenny smiled.

“No,” Vastra smiled back. “But it is what you meant. While some of what you may have read is somewhat similar for Silurians—we are reptiles after all--most of it is not. Silurian anatomy is quite different than generic reptiles. And because Silurians are a very advanced species, we have capabilities beyond most humans, not to mention most reptiles. In order for a Silurian pair to bond, they must develop a link. A psychic connection that they share, that they do not simply communicate through, but that they also exchange feelings and emotions through.”

“I don’t think that’s possible with me,” Jenny said. “I don’t think humans can do that.”

“I think you are capable of more than you can imagine, Jenny Flint,” Vastra smiled. “Do you remember some weeks ago, at the wife’s house? I was sneaking down the stairs and you told me ‘no’ to ‘go back upstairs.’”

“I didn’t say it,” Jenny said. “I thought it.”

“Yes,” Vastra said. “And I heard you, loud and clear, in my mind.”

“You can hear my thoughts?” Jenny looked somewhat terrified at the notion.

“No, not all the time,” Vastra explained. “I did then because you desperately wanted me to hear them. You felt you needed me to hear them. And I did. It also helped that we could see each other.
That the distance between us was short.”

“We can speak to each other without talking?” Jenny asked.

“In time, perhaps; but that is not the purpose the connection serves. It is about conveying feelings, emotions, sensations, and when needed, words,” Vastra said. “It is about sharing something so intimate, that you reserve it for only for your chosen mate.”

Jenny smiled. She loved this side of Vastra. It was the same care and attention to detail that she showed when instructing her in hand to hand combat or swords; but this was decidedly different.

“Humans put more emphasis on physical contact with sex,” Vastra said. “Emotions do play a role, that is true; but if the physical stimulation is there, the emotion is not completely necessary. Silurians rely on a mental connection between partners. A connection that goes beyond simple physical attraction. This is partly due to the fact that we lack certain,” Vastra chose her words carefully, “body parts and sensitive areas that you mammals possess.”

“Oh,” Jenny said in both a sad and surprised tone.

“Do not feel sorry for me,” Vastra said. “Just as I can use my tongue for both smell and taste, I can use all my senses to find pleasure in intimate situations. It may be different from humans, but I assure you it is not less than.”

“I’m not sure this is easing my concerns, Vastra,” Jenny said.

“Give me your hands,” Vastra said.

Without hesitation Jenny offered her hands to Vastra. The juxtaposition of cool and warm when their skin touched was always enough to raise both women’s pheromone levels.

“I am going to share something with you,” Vastra began. “I will not speak; rather I will concentrate on a memory from my past. I want you to tell me if you feel anything.”

“Alright,” Jenny agreed.

“Close your eyes and let your mind go blank. Try not to think about anything and do not force anything to happen. Either it will or it will not.”

They sat in silence for several minutes as Vastra gently caressed the backs of Jenny’s hands with her thumbs.

Jenny concentrated on the crackling fire, until gradually the sound disappeared and Jenny heard nothing but her own heartbeat and the inhale and exhale of her breath.

Suddenly, a sensation washed over her. There was an audible hitch in her breathing.

“Excitement,” Jenny said aloud without prompting.

“Anticipation.” She was conveying what she was feeling to Vastra.

Her heartbeat increased. Her breathing became more rapid.

“Running. So fast.”

Jenny’s eyes darted back and forth under her closed lids.
“Chasing. Closer.”

Jenny’s heartbeat was rapid. Beads of sweat began to form on her skin.

“Escaping. Hurry.”

She inhaled sharply and held her breath. “Jump.”

She exhaled slowly.

“Success. Pride.”

Her breathing and heart rate began to slow to normal. A drop of sweat rolled down her back. She licked her lips and let out one final cleansing breath.

Jenny’s eyes flew open. Cerulean eyes looked back at her.

The fire in the firebox had died; a few red embers glowed on the new stone. How long had this lasted?

“What was that?” Jenny asked.

“That was the memory of my first solo hunt. A rite of passage for all Silurian warriors.”

“I couldn’t see what was happening, but I felt your emotions,” Jenny said. “I felt the sensation of your body moving—running and then jumping.”

“Yes.” Vastra was all smiles.

Perhaps Jenny didn’t grasp the full meaning of this, but Vastra certainly did. This link was only possible between two individuals who were meant to be life mates. And only capable of being established after long courting rituals and gaining each other’s sincere trust.

“That was incredible,” Jenny barely had words to express the experience.

“That is the link established among Silurian life mates,” Vastra said.

“Is,” Jenny started. She wasn’t quite sure how to ask. “Is that how Silurians have sex? Do you hold hands and...”

“No,” Vastra couldn’t help but smile, “that was to show you how feelings and emotions are shared from individual to individual—to teach you about the psychic link. I needed to make sure you were capable of feeling what I felt. I have been able to feel you since our first kiss. I did not know how to tell you about the link.”

“So you can feel what I feel when you kiss me?” Jenny asked.

“Yes,” Vastra admitted. “I feel your emotions every time you touch me. That is the primary way I derive pleasure from our time together.”

“You don’t feel pleasure when I kiss you?” Jenny asked, concerned.

“Oh I do, very much,” Vastra said, “but like I said, our bodies are quite different. Our nerves and the way we receive and define sensations are different.”

Jenny was trying to understand.
Vastra grabbed the quilt that Jenny was sitting on and pulled it—and Jenny—toward her.

“Do you trust me?” Vastra asked.

“Yes.” Jenny said.

“Do you love me?”

“Oh, yes.”

Vastra leaned in and kissed Jenny.

Jenny instinctively put her hand on Vastra’s cheek and then up to the crest on the side of Vastra’s crown. As she lightly brushed her finger tips along the crest, she felt a new sensation wash through her body and settle between her legs. She pulled away from Vastra.

“Was that?” Jenny asked

“Yes,” Vastra said.

“But your crests,” Jenny started, “they aren’t where you.”

“No.” Vastra smiled. “Just as you have areas on your body that are sensitive to touch, so do I; just not the same areas.”

“This is all a bit much,” Jenny says. “I had no idea when I touched you there it was like touching my…” Jenny blushed.

“That is why I stopped you when we first kissed. Why I would not let you touch my crests. As for the link, if you were Silurian you would have known of the psychic connection when you became of age. But since you are human you had no way of knowing.” Vastra paused as she assessed Jenny’s current state. “We should stop now. We can continue this another time. It is quite a lot for you to…”

“Can I sleep in here with you tonight?” Jenny cut her off.

“Yes.”

“I’m still not ready,” Jenny hesitated. “I just want to be near you.”

Vastra pulled Jenny close, attempting to make full contact along the length of her long body. Her arm wrapped around Jenny’s waist and her tongue flicked out to taste Jenny’s pheromones. Even through their night dresses she could feel the mammal’s body heat as it transferred from Jenny’s back to the Silurian’s front. It was both comforting and sensual. Vastra tried to sleep—she had been so tired just two hours ago—but now all she could think about was Jenny and what they had just shared. More importantly, she thought about what it meant. This mammal was her life mate.

“Is it normal for two Silurian women to be together?” Jenny asked, pulling Vastra from her thoughts. Apparently she couldn’t sleep either.

“It is quite normal, and perfectly acceptable for Silurian females to mate for life. It is less common for two males; but it is almost equal for two females as it is for a female and a male.”

“Why do you think that is?” Jenny asked, mindlessly running the tip of her warm fingers along
Vastra’s cool arm.

“I suppose because Silurians do not have the social stigmas that ape cultures have. And Silurians do not need a male to reproduce.”

Jenny couldn’t turn over fast enough. “What?” She propped up on her elbow looking to Vastra to clarify what she had just said.

“This trait is not uncommon to some reptiles of today,” Vastra said.

“How?” Jenny asked.

“That is a biology lesson I am not prepared to get into at the moment, Jenny,” Vastra said. “Not even your scientists fully understand this process.”

“Well I think if you expect us to have sex, ever, you better figure out a way to explain it to me,” Jenny insisted.

Vastra sighed. “It is not a product of sexual reproduction. It cannot happen with us. Silurians can reproduce by sexual reproduction between a male and a female; but females can also alter their eggs to produce viable embryos without a male.” Vastra couldn’t get into chromosomes and DNA recombination with Jenny. It wasn’t a subject she was horribly versed in other than the rudimentary information that all Silurians were taught when they came of age.

“What you’re saying is that you and I can’t produce a child, together; but you could, by yourself?” Jenny asked.

“Yes.”

“And is this something you want to do?” Jenny asked.

“No.” Vastra was blunt.

“You don’t want children?” Jenny asked.

“Not here. Not in this world, in this time. I cannot imagine bringing another Silurian here. It is a difficult life to remain cloaked from the public eye. Always hiding. Never being allowed to show yourself for fear of death. Or worse,” Vastra said.

“I’m sorry for that.” Jenny leaned over and gently kissed Vastra’s cheek. “I can’t imagine.”

“Do you want children?” Vastra asked Jenny.

“I don’t think so. Once I figured out I didn’t want to be with men I just set myself to believe I’d never have children because I would never get pregnant. Haven’t thought about it much beyond that.”

“I think maybe this is a conversation for another time,” Vastra suggested.

“I agree,” Jenny said. She kissed Vastra once more and then turned over to be held once again.

As if by internal alarm clock, Jenny woke at five a.m. like always. It took a moment to remember where she was, and why there was a cold mass pressed against her back. She smiled as the events of last night flooded back to her mind and then stealthily slid out of bed so she wouldn’t wake
Vastra.

She giggled when she looked back. Vastra had no longer been holding her—pressing the length of her long Silurian body to hers—like she was when they fell asleep. No, Vastra was positioned like she was every morning—curled up in a tight little ball completely concealed beneath the covers.

Jenny rebuilt the fire in Vastra’s room, went to her room to change, and then went to the kitchen to start her day. She was still getting used to the gas stove, but it was nice not to have to build a fire to boil water or heat breakfast. She also loved waking up to a warm house. The radiator system was a godsend. But perhaps her favorite convenience in the new home was hot water directly from the tap. With all the added heating and lighting granted by the gas system, she had loads of extra time in the mornings.

As she stood at the wash sink cleaning last night’s dishes and daydreaming about whether she’d rather start sleeping in or simply get a head start on her day with her extra time, two cool arms wrapped around her waist from behind. Her bare neck was tickled with a flick of Vastra’s tongue followed by a trail of cool kisses—the bun hairstyle was not without its perks.

“Mmmm,” Jenny involuntarily hummed. She leaned back into Vastra as her hands left the dishes and each found their way to the Silurian’s crown. Warm fingers lightly ran along the crests.

Vastra purred.

Then a familiar sensation washed through Jenny’s body, from her fingertips, down her arms, through her torso, and settled between her legs.

Jenny quickly removed her hands from Vastra’s crown and braced herself on the edge of the sink. “Vastra, is there a way to turn that off, or down, or something? That cannot happen every time I touch you.”

“Then avoid touching me in sensitive areas,” Vastra purred in Jenny’s ear.

Jenny spun around, still encircled by Vastra’s arms. “I don’t know all your sensitive areas,” she retorted.

“It seems you have found a very effective method for finding them.” Vastra kissed Jenny on the forehead.

“Vastra,” Jenny lightly slapped her open palm onto Vastra’s shoulder. “I’m serious.”

Vastra stepped back and made her way to the small kitchen table. “In time you will have more control over it. Until then you will need to limit when and where you touch me.” Vastra smiled at Jenny. “It is all part of learning about each other. And you have a new thing to learn about yourself as well. For now, do not touch my crests unless you are prepared for what you will receive in return.”

“Noted,” Jenny smiled. “Tea’s on the table whenever you want a cuppa.”

Vastra poured and sipped her tea as Jenny finished preparing breakfast. “Today we will begin surveillance on the home where the séance occurred that Detective Superintendent Lang told me about. We will work together today, but in order to cover more time, we will take different shifts starting tomorrow. We need to get an idea of how the house operates.”

*****
The house at 16 Galt Street looked like any other from the outside. However, during the week of surveillance Vastra and Jenny noticed many unusual things about the comings and goings of the occupants, as well as the occupants themselves.

They noted three men and two women resided in the two-story free standing home. One woman was particularly small framed, perhaps less than five feet tall and less than one hundred pounds, while the other was average weight and height. None of the men were particularly brawny, but they looked healthy enough. All three were average height, weight, and appearance.

There were never any visitors other than when a séance was taking place or when someone stopped by to inquire about attending a séance. A reversible sign on the front door alerted the public when the house was and was not receiving clients for scheduling. Typically, these times coincided with when the average size female was home. Vastra surmised that she was the leader.

The yard, small as it was, was well kept but went largely unused by the occupants. A low brick fence separated the back yard from the rear neighbor and tall, dense hedgerows separated the home from the occupants on either side. A cellar door was on the south side of the house but it was obscured from sight at street level by shrubs. A rear door was hardly used and most of the comings and goings of the house were done through the front door.

On two occasions musical instruments were brought into the home; first a violin and later a tambourine. And on three occasions someone returned with other uncommon items such as tubing, rope, large mirrors, garishly framed art, and even a tailor’s mannequin to name a few. To the casual observer, nothing was of note at 16 Galt Street; but to the detectives of Paternoster Row, something was definitely afoot.

“Best I can tell,” Jenny said, “most of what’s brought in is probably used during the séances. I don’t hear anyone practicing musical instruments during the day even though I’ve seen a couple go in. So I think they use them to make sounds during the séances. Honestly I don’t hear a lot of anything during the day unless someone stops by. Seems they make appointments during the day for a séance at a later date.”

“I agree,” Vastra said. “There have been two séances this week. This is certainly when most of the activity takes place.”

“I can’t detect a noticeable pattern to their comings and goings,” Jenny said. She was meticulous with recording times when out on surveillance. “But there are a few times they are all out. Probably more by chance than planned.”

“So far the house has never been empty at night. The average sized woman is almost always home. But the smaller woman and the men do go out a bit at night unless there is work to be done.”

“We need to get inside that house,” Jenny said.

“One of us must attend a séance,” Vastra said.

“I think I’d rather like to attend,” Jenny smiled.

*****
The reversible sign on the door of 16 Galt Street simply read “please knock for service.” Jenny smoothed her skirt, straightened her veil, and lightly rapped on the front door. She heard hurried footsteps of people scurrying away inside the house. Quickly, she cut her eyes to the shaded hiding spot Vastra was hunkered down in and immediately felt more secure knowing she was right there.

The door opened. The average sized woman greeted Jenny. “Come in, dear, come in.” She put her hand out for Jenny.

Jenny extended her gloved hand and uttered a meek, “Thank you.”

“May I take your coat and bag?” the woman asked.

“Yes, please,” Jenny said and handed her bag and coat to the woman. She retained her hat, veil, and gloves. Understanding the social etiquette of grieving widows, the woman did not protest.

“Right this way, dear,” the woman said and led Jenny toward a small room just off the foyer to the right—south side—of the house.

Jenny looked around for anything of interest, but couldn’t see much. Even in the daytime, the house was closed up tight with heavy curtains pulled shut on all windows. All interior doors were closed, eliminating Jenny’s ability to see into other rooms. And the only light was soft flamed beeswax candles.

The one thing Jenny couldn’t help but notice was all the art, knickknacks, and decoration. It was everywhere. On every wall and every surface in the house. The walls were covered in the foyer, hallway, and small room. There seemed to be no rhyme or reason to the décor; it was just haphazardly placed. There was no theme Jenny could discern, other than perhaps it all appeared cheaply made.

The other occupants were nowhere to be seen, though she knew they were home. This gave Jenny an odd feeling and she wondered what they were doing. She couldn’t help but think they must be spying on her.

Once in the small room, the woman directed Jenny to sit in the chair by the window, while she took the one closest to the door. Jenny felt cornered and immediately uneasy. The only way out was through the window or through the woman. She had nothing to be afraid of really, but the rogue in her detested being trapped.

“Now tell me dear,” the woman cooed, “what’s your name?”

“Lily,” Jenny said. “Lily Cooper.” Lily was a name she used when she and Emma used to hustle folks back in the day.

“What a lovely name, Lily” the woman said. “And who do you wish to contact, dear?”

Jenny began to sob. She blotted imaginary tears from her eyes beneath the veil using one of the black handkerchiefs she had gotten Vastra last fall. The emerald “V” was prominently displayed for the woman to see. “Victor,” Jenny said. “His name was Victor.” She began to sob again.

“There, there dear,” the woman reached out and patted Jenny on the arm. “Tell me about Victor. Tell me of happy times, dear; of favorite times together. And of what he did in life; how he made his money.”

Luckily, Jenny was adept at acting. In her street days, she had duped a many of Londoner out of their coin simply by telling a tale of woe.
“My poor departed husband, Victor, was taken too soon. We were only just married. Not even long enough to have children.” Jenny’s voice quivered as she spoke. “He was a writer. An aspiring novelist. He was always typing on his stories. We would sit for hours in the warmth of the parlor, nothing but the sound of crackling fire and his typewriter.” Jenny began to cry—fake cry. The veil hid any proof of tears. “I’m sorry, it is too painful, I can’t continue.”

The woman was content. She had gotten what she needed—a reproducible sound, a name, and a profession. “That’s fine, Lily,” she cooed in a soothing tone. “You don’t have to speak further. I know how hard it is, dear. I too am a widow, left to tend this home, alone, without my Arthur.” She paused just long enough to seem polite. “Now, about my fee.”

The cab ride home was used to fill Vastra in on the details of the meeting. “She asked me to tell her all about poor Victor, my dearly departed husband.”

“What did you do?” asked Vastra.

“What any grieving widow would do—began sobbing,” Jenny said.

Vastra smiled. It was a wise decision sending Jenny in, Vastra would not have been able to go along with the charade.

“I told her my late husband was a writer, always typing away in the parlor in front of the fire. And I bet you anything I’ll hear a typewriter at the séance.”

“That was clever,” Vastra smiled at Jenny.

“You always underestimate me,” Jenny smiled back. “Am I so surprising to you?”

Vastra smiled. That was a loaded question. “When is your séance scheduled?”

“Tomorrow night,” Jenny said. “Tonight’s session is filled.”

“We should both surveil tonight’s activities. I do not want to send you in before you have had a chance to see for yourself what happens there during a séance.”

“Good idea.” Jenny smiled at Vastra and placed her hand on Vastra’s knee.

Vastra smiled and enjoyed the warm touch in silence for the rest of the ride home.

****

Night surveillance during a séance was exciting. Vastra relied on her sense of smell and her night vision for information, while Jenny carefully recorded times certain things took place, like the arrival and departure of clients and any activity she could see.

Vastra and Jenny’s vantage point allowed them to watch one of the men entering and exiting the cellar before, during, and after the session. Jenny noted how much time expired between his entering the cellar and the arrival of clients; as well as the departure of the clients and him exiting the basement. He was in place fifteen minutes before the clients were scheduled to arrive and left the cellar once everyone was gone. They suspected he received a cue from inside the house when it
was safe to exit. He exited the cellar only once during the session for a hurried cigarette just outside the entrance.

“He has done that for each séance I have surveilled,” Vastra pointed to the man as he lit his match. “It is typically within a few minutes of the last guest arriving. He is always hurried and seems anxious.”

“Perhaps he has been warned against it but does it anyway,” Jenny offered. “He’s like a child disobeying his parents.”

“Yes,” Vastra agreed. “He is clearly not the one in charge.”

Jenny and Vastra made their way to the north side of the house. Dim light could be seen shining around the border of the curtains in two rooms on the ground floor. The second floor was completely dark.

“I didn’t see into either of those rooms,” Jenny said. “I was taken to a small room on the south side of the house to meet with the woman. It was the room above the entrance to the basement. It’s been dark all night.”

After a few minutes, the lights in the front room went out. After another five or so minutes, the lights in the second room went out.

“I bet they gather in the front room,” Jenny said. “Then move to the next room after everyone has arrived. It was roughly fifteen minutes after the last guest arrived that the light in that front room went out. My guess is the séance takes place in that second room.”

“This is typical of a night a séance takes place,” Vastra said. “Once the ground floor goes dark it stays dark until just before everyone leaves. Of particular note, however, are the lights upstairs that seem to be lit for only a moment here and there before being extinguished. It is like that for each séance I have witnessed. There is light for only a few seconds, then dark.”

“What do you suppose is going on up there?” Jenny asked.

“I do not know, but undoubtedly it is all part of the show.” Vastra had no tolerance for silly superstition and no respect for either the perpetrators of the nonsense or the believers.

“I don’t think there is much information to gather out here,” Jenny said. “I think we’ll have a much better idea of things after my session.”

“I agree,” Vastra said. “Are you ready?”

“Quite,” Jenny smiled.

*****

Jenny arrived on the scheduled night promptly at seven p.m. convincingly playing the part of the grieving widow.

Like all guests, she was asked to hang her coat, bag, hat, and other items on hooks by the door before being escorted to the sitting room. In Jenny’s case, they allowed her to keep her hat and veil in place. In the sitting room they were offered tea and cake while they waited. And they were encouraged to visit as all scheduled clients arrived one at a time or in pairs. This was the front
room on the north side of the house; as Jenny had guessed, they would all wait here for everyone to arrive.

The only light was the soft glow of beeswax candles which cast ominous, dancing shadows throughout the room. The scent of fresh flowers and lavender permeated the home. Jenny made her way to the curtain to slightly pull it aside and signal her location to Vastra.

Jenny attempted to commit every detail to memory, but soon realized she would have to focus on more general details as the sheer amount of photos, paintings, books, nick-knacks, and decorations overwhelmed both her and the room. Suddenly, her keen eyes detected the slightest change in light that revealed a peep hole in the interior wall. They were being watched.

Soon all the guests arrived and within fifteen minutes they were escorted en masse down the hallway to the adjoining room. Jenny took careful measure of her footsteps calculating the distance down the hall to the next door. Once inside the room she made her way across the floor again counting steps and estimated the room was some three to four feet shy of touching the sitting room they had just left. She surmised that a hidden room lay between the two. There was a wardrobe along the wall, perhaps this was the doorway inside.

The guests were seated at a round table which was empty save for one beeswax candle, the only light source in the room, and a bowl of talc in the center of the table. Each guest was asked to tell the room who they were there to communicate with and share some intimate detail of a favorite time together, sparing no detail. They were told to “paint a picture with words so that they may all be transported to the very spot.”

Jenny volunteered to go first. She wanted to get it over and done with so she could spend the rest of her time surveying the séance room. “My name is Lily,” Jenny began. She recited her tale to the others of how she and her late husband would spend their evenings in the warmth of the parlor as he typed away and she proof read his manuscripts. She was careful to wipe away imaginary tears with the black handkerchief beneath her veil.

Jenny assumed this exercise was done to convince the clients that what they would witness during the course of the evening was authentic. If the client said it, and it happened, then it must be their dearly departed communicating with them from beyond the dead.

“Who would like to go next?” the woman asked after Jenny was done.

One by one the guests divulged information about their departed loved ones. Jenny was saddened by the true stories and the real tears of the men and women who sat around the table. She noticed that the host would ask questions if she had not received enough information from the guest. And would not be satisfied, it seemed, until there was something mentioned that could be reproduced or used in some way. Something to prove to everyone that all the loved ones had been reached.

As Jenny sat and listened to the stories, she also attempted to take in more details of the dimly lit room, but it was difficult. Obvious things included a bowl of talc in the middle of the table, the fact that the host sat with her back to the wardrobe, the aforementioned dim lighting, and a gramophone among other things. She guessed there were most likely more peep holes and perhaps even more secret passages and rooms; but she was unable to detect any if there were.

After all the tales had been told and details divulged, it was time to begin. The host spoke. “Please, everyone grasp the right wrist of the person to your left. This will include myself to ensure that whatever is seen or heard will not be the result of me or anyone else in the room. So do not let go.” Once everyone had clasped their hands around their neighbor’s wrist, the host blew out the candle.
From her perch on a nearby rooftop, Vastra inhaled sharply as the house went dark. This wasn’t uncommon as they had witnessed this time and time again over the week. Only this time, her Jenny sat inside that house. For several minutes the house remained dark and Vastra advanced her position into the yard, careful to keep to the shadows.

Over the next hour Vastra witnessed several things from her various vantage points; some of which they had surveilled over the past week. At random times dim candlelight shown in the second floor, but for only mere seconds at a time. At one point the man from the cellar made his way to the window on the other side of the house and stood and smoked a pipe for a few minutes. This had not been witnessed in the past week.

Finally the candles were lit along the bottom floor and the clients left the home. Some were sobbing and some were crying uncontrollably. Only two were exhibiting no emotion.

Jenny walked few blocks down the street and was quickly joined by Vastra. They loaded into their awaiting cab and Parker took them back to 13 Paternoster Row.

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Jenny recounted the night’s events to Vastra.

“There is a secret room between the sitting room and the séance room. I saw someone peeping in on the sitting room while waiting for everyone to arrive. There’s a wardrobe in the séance room along the wall, and I believe that is the way in and out. I’m almost certain someone came into the room via that route and began playing the gramophone. They keep the room pitch dark so it’s impossible to see. And it had to be the small framed woman as the steps were virtually silent.” Jenny paused and looked to Vastra.

“What else happened?” Vastra asked, quickly writing down as many details as she could.

“Remember I told her that my late husband was a writer? Well, sure enough, at one point while attempting to summon him the sound of a typewriter could be heard.”

“Where was the sound coming from?” Vastra asked.

“It was hard to tell. But I believe from within the secret room,” Jenny said. “There were other sounds that were produced for the other people in the room. I don’t understand how anyone thinks this is real. It’s so obviously faked.”

“Apparently you apes are desperate to believe in some life beyond death,” Vastra said.

“Oi!” Jenny scowled at Vastra. “You’ll find yourself without your heater tonight if you call me ape again, you daft lizard.” Jenny smiled.

Vastra smiled back knowing it was an empty threat.

“Did you see anything outside?” Jenny asked. “I believe someone was smoking a pipe outside the window. I could smell the tobacco right after the medium ‘summoned’ the spirit of Mrs. Biddle’s husband, a long time pipe smoker.”

“As a matter of fact,” Vastra began, “the man from the cellar exited at one point and walked around the house and smoked a bit.”

“What else did you see from the outside?” Jenny asked.
The usual. Dim lights coming on for brief seconds in the second story. Not much else.”

“I think there was someone up there lowering things from the ceiling,” Jenny said. “On more than one occasion glowing lights danced about above us and every now and again someone would feel a tap on the shoulder, or a tickle on their ear.”

“Would that not be rather obvious?” Vastra asked for clarification. “Holes in the ceiling.”

“I think the ceiling was painted black. It was so dark you couldn’t see up there,” Jenny said. “The dim candlelight was casting about strange shadows. And afterwards my eyes were trying to adjust to the light as we were rushed out of the room.”

“Interesting,” Vastra said. “Anything else?”

“There was a bowl of talc in the center of the table,” Jenny continued, “and when the candle was relit there was a hand print. It was small, the size of a child’s. I suspect it was the work of the small framed woman hiding in the secret room. She would have had no problem reaching across the table if she leaned in beside the medium.”

“I suppose that’s further proof that a ghost materialized in the pitch black room?” Vastra scoffed.

“At one point the table began shaking and jumping about,” Jenny said. “But I just assumed the medium was kicking it with her foot or something.”

Vastra pondered the logistics of their next step. “One in the cellar, one obvious in the room, one hidden in a secret room, and one or two upstairs.”

“That would account for the five people we’ve seen coming and going,” Jenny offered.

“Indeed,” Vastra agreed. “They are rather dispersed. It will take some ingenuity to take care of them all and do what must be done.”

“Nothing we can’t figure out, love,” Jenny smiled. “A quick look at the place while they aren’t home will help.”

“They have irregular patterns. You will have to be quick. Are you up for the challenge?” Vastra asked.

Jenny scoffed at Vastra. “Did you forget I used to break into houses for a living?”

“No, dear, I did not.” Vastra smiled.

****

Surveillance resumed on 16 Galt Street. This time the goal was to get Jenny inside during the light of day to have a look around and discover all the hidden rooms, passages, and peep holes. They had to be certain that their final plan would result in the desired outcome and not endanger their lives. They didn’t know what these criminals were capable of, but make no mistake, they were criminals. They didn’t pick pockets or break into houses, but they preyed on and stole from people nonetheless.

There was no set schedule for the occupants; but they were out a lot during the day as their
“business” was only active at night. Finally, on the third day, all occupants were out and Jenny wasted no time getting in the house as Vastra sat as lookout nearby.

Jenny was able to climb a drain pipe and make her way into an upstairs window. A quick scan of upstairs revealed three bedrooms—two on the north side of the house and one on the south. Based on the size of the beds two were shared and one was single occupancy.

Of particular note was the lack of decoration, art, and knickknacks on the second floor. Upstairs was dull and scantily decorated. Only the essential furnishings adorned each room and it was far messier up here.

It didn’t take long for her to find the spot above the séance room and sure enough, there were holes cut through the ceiling and plenty of evidence laying around for her to deduce that things were lowered from here during the sessions. Among other things, there were fake hands and feathers that were probably used to touch the clients in the dark.

The holes were large enough to get the items down, but were covered with thick pieces of carpet painted black. It seemed the carpet covered the holes until needed. That is why they were able to use some light to get set, then extinguish the flame, lift the carpet, and lower the items. Jenny could tell it probably took two people to work the props from here so that they didn’t have to move around and make noise.

Also of note up here was a container of incandescent paint and several objects that had been painted with it. This would explain the “floating spirits” above their heads.

Downstairs Jenny headed straight to the wardrobe in the séance room. It proved to be the doorway into the secret room. Inside was a typewriter, an accordion, a bell, wind chimes, and various other noise making devices. There were also pillows and heavy blankets. Jenny assumed they were used to mute the sound so it would be hard to pinpoint in the dark. The space was cramped with all the items giving further proof that it was most likely the small framed woman who operated this room. The wardrobe was the only way in or out.

Leaving the secret room Jenny studied the dark painted ceiling, and in the light of day she could now see the holes covered by the carpet. She cursed herself for not noticing the night she was there. She also studied the area beneath the table. After moving the chairs and lifting the carpet, she found that there were small holes in the floor. Although she didn’t feel anything on her feet when she was there, she imagined this was a way to poke the clients and distract them with another form of “contact.” Additionally, lifting the table slightly, she saw that one of the table legs went clean through the floor!

“Well that’s odd,” she said aloud.

After her hurried inspection of the séance room she went to the other room that shared a wall. Not the sitting room in front, but the room behind. There she found several other peep holes, but she didn’t think they had been used during her session. Additional peep holes were in the kitchen which looked into the small room Jenny was in to set up the séance.

Counting steps and mapping out the entire house in her head, Jenny quickly exited through the window she had entered not twenty minutes prior. Now in the yard, she explored the final room, the cellar. The cellar was standard with dirt floors and shelving for canned foods and seldom used items. There were two wooden chairs situated in the center of the room directly below the holes positioned beneath the table. There were several small poles presumably used to tap on the floor and poke through the holes. There was also a pole that was affixed to the table leg that Jenny saw upstairs that seemed to run through the floor. This was how the table was able to rise up and buck
during the séance. Other than that, the cellar was empty.

As Jenny exited the cellar and closed the door, Vastra made a call that she recognized right away and Jenny skillfully jumped the short fence in the back yard and circled back around to meet up with Vastra.

They continued their surveillance through lunch and Jenny filled Vastra in on what she had found.

“So nothing surprising,” Jenny said between bites of sandwich. “I’m certain the small framed woman occupies the hidden room while two men operate the holes in the ceiling from upstairs. We already know the other man is in the cellar and of course the other woman serves as the medium and conducts the session.”

Vastra considered the logistics. “It will be tricky to pull off the final stage just the two of us.” Vastra paused. “And you are sure the wardrobe was the only entrance into the secret room?”

“Quite sure,” Jenny nodded. “They’ve removed the back of the wardrobe and busted a hole in the wall. Then they secured the wardrobe right to the wall with nails. I’m assuming so it won’t tip over while she’s going in and out.”

“We will formulate a plan tonight and gather what we need tomorrow. I want to be ready the next time there is a séance,” Vastra said.

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“It is almost time,” Vastra said. “Are you ready?”

“I have the easy part,” Jenny said.

“Yes,” Vastra smiled, “but I have the fun part.”

Vastra and Jenny slipped from shadow to shadow around the house, careful not to be seen. They had counted six guests to arrive.

“That’s it then,” Jenny said. “There were only six seats at the table, plus one for the host.”

“Then you better get in now,” Vastra urged.

Jenny went to the window of the séance room and carefully lifted the glass and climbed inside. The room was dark save the lone beeswax candle on the table. The door to the hallway was closed. Approaching the wardrobe along the wall of the secret room, Jenny took out the loop of twine from her pocket and secured it in a figure eight pattern around both knobs.

As quietly as she entered, the rogue slipped out the window and closed it behind her. She joined Vastra in the shadows across the yard. “It’s done,” Jenny said. “It’ll take a bit of effort for her to get out, but she’ll manage eventually.”

“Good,” Vastra said. “Now to the cellar.”

Creeping around the house, hiding in the shadows, they waited for the man to come out for his hurried cigarette. Sure enough, right on cue, the cellar door opened. As the man’s head became visible, Vastra readied her weapon. As soon as she saw his neck, she struck. Her long tongue lashed out striking the man. He clutched his throat and stumbled back down the stairs haphazardly.
Then the women heard a ‘thud’ as he collapsed.

“Wait here,” Vastra ordered and descended into the basement.

Within seconds she was back out in the yard.

“He is unconscious,” Vastra said. “The venom will wear off in an hour or so.”

“Now for the hard part,” Jenny said. “Remember, let me draw one of them out or else we’ll make a lot of noise.”

“I know the plan, Jenny,” Vastra scoffed.

“Of course, dear,” she smiled.

Both women stealthily scaled the drain pipe and crawled in through the second story window—the same route Jenny had used to gain access before. Vastra had no problems seeing in the low light, Jenny on the other hand needed a few seconds to adjust. Finally, Jenny pointed to the second door on the right indicating the location of the two men and the secret holes in the ceiling above the séance room. There was no room now for any noise that would alert the occupants to their presence.

Jenny tiptoed down the hallway, completely silent, and lightly rapped on the bedroom door. “Excuse me, is this the séance room?” she said in a low voice without opening the door. Then, with steps as light as a cat, she slid into the shadowy corner of the hallway.

Vastra’s hearing was keen. She heard the immediate low volume chatter of the two men then the footsteps of one of them coming to check out the intrusion. The door opened and the man stepped out into the hallway. Looking this way and that he saw no one. Stepping further down the hall to investigate he peered down the stairwell then turned to find himself face to face with the Silurian. Before he could scream Vastra lashed her tongue out and then caught the man as he passed out where he stood. She could see the smile on Jenny’s face at the other end of the hallway. She smiled back knowing the mammal’s vision may or may not allow her to see the gesture. She then laid the man down in the hallway, up against the wall.

One more to deal with.

Vastra entered the room with the other man and closed the distance between them quickly and stealthily. Her tongue struck him from six feet away and she was there to catch him before he fell. She laid him onto the floor and retrieved Jenny.

Jenny lifted the carpet covering the holes in the floor then quickly returned it. “Candle’s still lit,” Jenny whispered. “That means everyone is still telling their stories. Time for you to get dressed.”

Vastra retrieved her Silurian warrior mask from her bag. She gingerly ran her finger tips across it and gazed upon it as though it were sacred and what she was about to use it for was blasphemous. She then pulled out a black cloak Jenny had specially tailored such that it would give the appearance of wings in the darkness when Vastra raised her arms.

Jenny handed her the bottle, matches, and pouch of powder. “Are you sure about the pyrotechnics?”

“Quite,” Vastra said.
“Well if this doesn’t scare them out of business, I don’t know what will,” Jenny whispered. She lifted the carpet and checked the room below again. “Candle’s out.”

Vastra headed down stairs and readied herself to burst into the room upon Jenny’s cue.

Jenny took the bag with their things and went out the second floor window. It was time for the real show.

Now in the cellar, Jenny grabbed the pole that was attached to the table leg. She took in a deep breath and let it out forcefully. She began moving the pole up and down in irregular patterns banging the table violently.

Vastra heard the commotion. She poured the ethanol in her hand and set it on fire. Kicking the door open she burst into the room. The table continued to buck and jump.

“How dare you summon the dead,” Vastra bellowed. The mask distorting her voice to a demonic tone. Reaching her non flaming hand into her pocket, she grabbed a fistful of powdered metal she had secured from the alchemy shop and threw it across the flame in her left hand. Blues, greens, and oranges burst forth from the metallic concoction sending sparks across the room and a flash of light in front of Vastra.

The clients squealed and jumped from their chairs upon seeing the Silurian in her warrior mask. They huddled against the outer wall, trapped in the room.

“James, Charles, help,” the medium yelled. Vastra assumed these were the names of the two men upstairs.

The table continued to bounce around.

“Robert stop that and get up here, help,” the medium yelled and stamped the floor. The table continued to jump.

“The dead are mine and you shall not speak with them,” Vastra said, spreading her arms wide to appear to have demonic wings.

The doors to the wardrobe began to shake. The woman was trying to get out to see what all the commotion was about. This of course lent to more confusion and screams from the patrons.

“Demon.”

“Devil.”

“Satan.”

The patrons pointed at Vastra. Some made crosses with their fingers.

“Leave this place now. It is mine!” Vastra jumped up and onto the table spreading her arms once more.

Jenny was now unable to move the table. This was her cue to flee the basement and seek a hiding place in the shadows of the back yard.

The flame in Vastra’s hand had died out. Pale moonlight lit the room seeping in through the curtains as they were tossed about by frantic onlookers.

“Leave!” Vastra yelled.
The patrons and the medium fled out of the room and out the front door.

Vastra quickly left the room and escaped out the window from the second floor.

Both women jumped the low fence and disappeared into the shadows of the neighboring yard before heading further down the street.

Finally stopping to laugh and catch their breath, Vastra put the mask and the costume into the bag and quickly donned her normal hooded cloak to hide her face.

“They scattered like frightened children,” Vastra laughed.

“I wish I could have seen them,” Jenny said. “But I heard their screams well enough. Do you think the small woman has yet to make it out of the wardrobe?”

“I don’t know,” Vastra laughed. “But the men will be waking up rather confused within the next half an hour.”

“Either way,” Jenny said. “I think we did it. I don’t think the woman will be summoning any more dead spirits.”

Reaching the waiting cab, Parker took them home for the evening.

*****

Vastra returned home from the Yard the next day and handed Jenny two bank notes.

“What’s this then?” Jenny asked.

“Your half of payment from Detective Superintendent Lang. Apparently there was such a commotion at 16 Galt Street last night officers were called to the scene to investigate a noise complaint. The occupants reported that fire breathing demons and spirits had ransacked their home, but they refused to file a report. They said they were leaving the house and London altogether.”

“So I guess it all worked out,” Jenny smiled.

“I suppose it did,” Vastra said.

“Vastra,” Jenny said, “will you tell me about your mask? You looked at it with such love and sorrow last night. Will you tell me about it?”

Vastra took in a deep breath. “Not now. I will tell you about it tonight after training.”

“I’ll go get changed,” Jenny said and ascended the stairs.

Vastra lingered in the study, lost in memories.

Chapter End Notes

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Monday

DCI Abberline was settling into his new position at Scotland Yard. His first day was 2 April 1888. It was Easter Monday, a bank holiday, but he insisted his entire staff come in as if it were any other day. “Criminals do not take a day off,” his memo read, much to the displeasure of the handful of men who had requested time off to be with their families.

He met all of his subordinates within the first two hours save the veiled female detective he had heard so much about. She arrived for their meeting promptly at 9:00 a.m.

“Detective Chief Inspector Abberline,” she said extending her gloved hand to greet him.

“‘Inspector’ is fine,” he said and made no effort to take her hand. “Sit.” He motioned to a chair and took his seat behind his desk.

He was gruff and to the point. The latter being a quality Vastra could admire. She wasn’t put out with his lack of manners. She thought she came off as ill-mannered in regard to ape culture and niceties. She also wasn’t intimidated if indeed his intention was to intimidate her.

“Superintendent Lang speaks highly of you,” he said. “It seems you have solved some rather difficult cases in your tenure with the Yard.”

“I have,” she said.

“Makes a man question how you achieved such results,” he said in an accusatory tone.

“I assure you, Detective Chief Inspector Abberline, it is all achieved through legal means.”

“I said ‘Inspector’ is fine,” he reminded her. “I’ll need you to set up a desk here at the Yard and begin working with the rest of the detectives. Your office hours are 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. unless a case has you on the streets. It’s time you fall in line with the team.”

Vastra cocked her head to the side. “No.”

“No?” Abberline asked, raising his eyebrows. “Do you wish to remain employed with the Yard?”

Vastra tasted the air and smiled beneath her veil. “Detective Chief Inspector Abberline, I work on my own schedule, from my own home or I do not work for the Yard at all,” she said. She wasn’t about to let this ape intimidate her. “I solve cases the rest of your *team* cannot begin to get a foothold on, much less solve or bring anyone to justice. My record is impeccable with only one unsolved case during my tenure. If you do not wish me on your payroll say the word and I shall find other means of employ. But make no mistake, Detective Chief Inspector Abberline, I do not
achieve these results by working as just another detective with a desk at Scotland Yard.”

Inspector Abberline sat back in his chair and laughed. The whole encounter reminded Vastra of her first meetings with DCI Lang so many years ago. These apes needed to establish dominancy early.

“Your record speaks for itself,” Abberline said. “I’ll allow the same leash Superintendent Lang has granted you. But heed my word, you’ll be the only one to hang if you step out of line.”

“I assure you Detective Chief Inspector Abberline,” Vastra said. “I have no intention of hanging anytime soon.”

“For the last time, it’s ‘Inspector’ Abberline. Call me that or don’t bother addressing me at all,” he snapped. “Do I make myself clear on that point?”

“Crystal,” Vastra smiled.

“How did your meeting with the new Inspector go?” Jenny asked between bites of supper.

“He tried to intimidate me from the beginning,” Vastra said. “I could smell it all over him.”

“Did he succeed?” Jenny asked.

“Hardly,” Vastra scoffed. “Although, it is easier to not be intimidated when you smell self-doubt and fear mixed with the abundance of testosterone.”

“Fear? Why would he be afraid?” Jenny asked.

“I would assume most male apes are afraid of a female who is capable of achieving what they cannot,” Vastra said. “Also, I am an unknown. Most sentient beings are afraid of the unknown. He has not figured out how to handle me. I do not fit his mold of a normal detective.”

“But do you think you’ll be able to work together?” Jenny asked.

“I believe we came to an accord,” Vastra smiled.

Tuesday

Vastra purposely didn’t go to the Yard today, if for no other reason than to show DCI Abberline that she wouldn’t kowtow to his petty requests to normalize her work schedule. She finalized notes for two cases and planned to begin surveillance on suspects that very night. This would shift her work schedule from daytime to nighttime and give her a convenient excuse to avoid DCI Abberline.

She already had a suspect for one case and hoped to have the perpetrator in custody within the week. The other case was proving to be more difficult and she would need more time to narrow her suspect list. But luckily for her, these were the only two cases assigned to her at the moment.

Around noon Vastra pulled the braided cord that rang the bell that notified Jenny she was needed in her office. Neither woman cared for this impersonal system of communication; but the new house was rather large and there was no guarantee Jenny would hear Vastra if she simply called to her—
as was their method in the old home.

“You rang, dear,” Jenny playfully said as she entered the office.

“I shall be in the conservatory for the rest of the afternoon, meditating. Please have my supper ready by four-thirty. I shall leave at six-thirty and be out all night on surveillance,” Vastra told Jenny.

“What time should I expect you back?” Jenny asked, trying to hide any apprehension she had. She was always a bit concerned when Vastra was out overnight. The warmer April temperatures didn’t ease Jenny’s worrying as much as one might think. She could still imagine a number of ways the Silurian could suffer in her line of work other than cold temperatures.

“Do not worry, love,” Vastra smiled. She detected the shift in Jenny’s pheromones immediately. “I shall be home before daylight. That is all I know. The rest will depend upon the criminal.”

“Then I’ll leave you to it,” Jenny said and turned and left. She didn’t mean to be curt with Vastra, but things had changed and she needed time to sort out her feelings.

It had been months since Vastra had been out on all-night surveillance and patrol. The last time had been before the blizzard and the illness, before confessions and revelations, and well before they had begun sharing a bed—even if only occasionally and only to be close to one another.

Supper was quiet, like most nights, but tonight was different. The mood was different and the air around them was different. Jenny didn’t need Vastra’s sensitive tongue to detect the tension. She had no right to ask Vastra not to go, nor did she want to. This was Vastra’s job, and she was good at it—built for it as a matter of fact. But now it seemed she had more to lose should something happen. And she couldn’t control how she felt and the worry now gripped her.

“What are your plans for the evening?” Vastra asked Jenny as she secured her black cape around her neck before departing.

“I’m goin’ to train for a bit,” Jenny said, “then I reckon I’ll go to bed. There don’t seem to be any casefiles to work on.” Her tone was terse and her speech was slipping to its East End roots.

“When I arrive home I shall go straight to bed. Please have my morning meal warmed when I wake tomorrow,” Vastra said.

“I’ll make sure it’s ready, love,” Jenny said, her tone softened. She was no longer Vastra’s maid, but she did take care of her—a responsibility she had willingly and lovingly taken on.

Jenny’s solo training session was brutal. After her usual warmups she set herself to repeat all of her forms—hand to hand and sword—three times each. She longed for something to strike or tackle to take her frustrations out on. She knew she’d have to get over this sense of protection and let Vastra do her job; but for tonight she worked through her feelings with pure physical determination. Her aikidogi and hair were drenched with sweat when the front door bell rang.

Jenny bolted from the training room to the front door. She didn’t care what she looked like; all she could think of was the night a hansom cab driver brought home an unconscious Silurian.
“Yes?” she said hurriedly as she flung the door open.

The delivery boy just stood for a moment taking in the bizarre sight of the sweat-soaked brunette in a strange outfit, holding a sword. “Telegram for Madam Vastra,” he said, suddenly unsure of the address.

“Thank you.” She took the telegram and closed the door in the boy’s face. “Bollocks,” she said after she read the short message. “She’s not going to be happy about this.”

Wednesday

Vastra arrived home at 5 a.m. and immediately smelled blood in the kitchen and heard shuffling. She went to investigate.

Jenny was in her maid uniform, as usual, preparing breakfast.

She noticed the raw meat and blood. “Jenny,” she said, “I said I would go directly to bed and have my morning meal when I rose.”

“Sorry, love,” Jenny made her way to the Silurian and kissed her scaled cheek. She pulled a piece of paper from her apron pocket. “This came for you last night.”

Vastra took the piece of paper from Jenny’s hand. The telegram simply read, “Report to my office tomorrow. 7 a.m. sharp. Inspector Abberline.”

“Pfft,” Vastra scoffed. “Insecure ape forcing me to bend to his schedule.”

“You don’t know that,” Jenny said. “There were plenty of times DCI Lang called you in via telegram. Usually meant he had a case for you.”

“Pardon me for being skeptical,” Vastra said.

“You’re tired is what you are,” Jenny said. “You’ve been up for nearly twenty four hours now. Sit there or go wash up and change. Breakfast will be warm in five minutes.”

“Madam Vastra,” Inspector Abberline said. It was more of a roll call than a greeting. “Sit.”

Again, she appreciated his directness.

“There was an assault in the Whitechapel District in the middle of the night. A prostitute was attacked by a gang of men. The hospital suggested, given the sensitive nature of the attack, that we send in a female to interview the victim. You’re the only female on my staff, so you’ll be going.”

For reasons she could not disclose to Inspector Abberline, Vastra felt no more qualified than a male ape to conduct an interview of a sensitive nature with a female victim. But it was her job and this was her order so she didn’t refuse. “Of course.”

“They said you could speak with her at eight this morning,” he said. “Get as much information as you can about the men. Push her for details.”

“What else would I do?” Vastra asked, as if she needed a tutorial on how to conduct an interview.
Inspector Abberline was a little taken aback by Vastra’s response. He expected more “feminine sensitivity” from his detective, some sort of insistence upon sympathy and treating the victim gently. It was clear he did not know this woman at all. “Very well then, you’re dismissed.”

The astringent sickly air of the hospital stung Vastra’s tongue. She was directed through overcrowded hallways of sick and dying humans to the “women’s ward” which was where all female patients were housed, regardless of infirmity.

“She slipped into a coma shortly after arrival,” said the doctor tending the patients. He seemed unconcerned and uncaring.

“Why did someone not contact the Yard?” Vastra asked.

“What would have been the point?” he asked. “You were coming to interview her. You can’t interview an unconscious woman.”

Even through the disease and the cleanser and the human waste Vastra could smell contempt all over this ape. He did not care one ounce for this woman—possibly not for any of the women or patients here. But this woman in particular, this prostitute, he loathed. Vastra was convinced he felt she only got what was coming to her.

“In your medical opinion, Doctor, will this woman regain consciousness?” she asked.

“Your guess is as good as mine,” he said. “Now if you’ll excuse me I have patients to attend.”

Vastra left instructions with a nurse to fetch her at once if the victim woke up and then retreated outdoors for some fresh air. Less than an hour later the nurse came to tell the veiled detective that the woman had died having never regained consciousness.

“So you were unable to interview her?” Inspector Abberline asked Vastra as if it were her fault the woman had slipped into a coma.

“I very well could not have interviewed an unconscious woman, Inspector Abberline,” Vastra said. A smile crossed his face. He felt a rush of victory as he had succeeded in forcing Vastra to call him “Inspector” as opposed to her usual full title salutation.

“I will get the medical officer’s report to you as soon as he’s had a chance to examine the body,” he said. “Although a prostitute is not a high priority victim. It may take a while. In the meantime, acquire the report from the officer who spoke with her last night. Get your own statements from any witnesses or associates—I believe someone brought her into the hospital—and get anything and everything from her file at the hospital. This is now a homicide and in our jurisdiction. No family has stepped up so there shouldn’t be any problems.”

“I shall begin my investigation immediately,” Vastra said. She was more than a little put out that Inspector Abberline felt he needed to tell her what evidence to gather.

“And give your other case files to Detective Morris. I want you to concentrate your effort here. Seems you have an advantage over the other detectives on this one.”

“Advantage?” Vastra asked. “What advantage?”
“You are female,” Abberline said matter-of-factly.

If looks could kill. Vastra’s veil hid her now grey, swirling pupils.

“Inspector Abberline,” she began, “I am called upon when cases are unsolvable by the standard detective here at Scotland Yard. I am not an expert in crimes committed towards women simply because I am female. The cases in my queue were assigned to me because the detectives here could not even garner a suspect. I have three suspects under surveillance and spent all night last night following one all over London. To remove me from these cases and restrict my services to this low priority murder is an insult to my talents and what I have provided Scotland Yard for years.”

Inspector Abberline looked at Vastra. “My order stands,” he said. “Turn your case files and all your notes over to Morris and fill him in on any details. He’ll resume surveillance. Now get to work.”

“He’s just testing you,” Jenny assured Vastra. “And you’ll pass any test he throws your way.”

“He is a foolish ape who does not understand what is best for Scotland Yard and London,” Vastra protested. “This is an insult to me and my capabilities.”

“I know, love,” Jenny said. “But as soon as he sees what you are capable of he’ll come ‘round.”

The bell at the front door interrupted their early supper. Jenny went to answer.

“Yes,” she said as she opened the door.

The delivery boy smiled at Jenny. She wasn’t dressed funny, dripping with sweat, nor carrying a sword tonight. She was in a simple black dress—much like any house maid would wear. This suited his expectations.

“Telegram for Madam Vastra,” he said and extended the piece of paper to the maid.

“Thank you,” Jenny smiled and closed the door.

“Telegram, dear.” Jenny handed the paper to Vastra.

A look of confusion washed across Vastra’s Silurian face as she read.

“What’s wrong?” Jenny asked.

“Detective Superintendent Lang wishes to meet with me,” Vastra handed the telegram to Jenny. It simply read. “Tea tomorrow.” This was their code to meet at the Rose Kettle Tea Room at two o’clock on the mentioned date.

“What do you think he wants?” Jenny asked.

“Surely I do not know,” Vastra said. “But there is no point in speculating about it tonight.”

After supper Vastra retired to bed. She was asleep within seconds of her head hitting the pillow.

Jenny changed and went to the training room. She put herself through another grueling session and again retired to her own room.
Thursday

After a morning of interviewing and chasing leads, Vastra arrived at the Rose Kettle Tea Room promptly at 2 p.m. She was immediately escorted to a private room Lang had reserved for their meeting. After the tea service was delivered, Lang asked that they not be disturbed for the remainder of their time.

“How are you and Inspector Abberline getting on?” Lang asked.

“He has taken away my cases and restricted me to a low priority murder of a prostitute,” Vastra said. She was still seething at the thought of it all.

“Why would he do that?” Lang asked.

“He stated that because I am female I am more suited to the case,” Vastra snapped, then added. “He is establishing dominance.”

“He’s being foolish,” Lang said. “There is a reason you were assigned those cases.”

“I informed him of that,” Vastra said, “but he insisted.”

“So you’re working on the Whitechapel assault case then?”

“Yes.”

“Well that certainly will be an almost unsolvable case,” Lang said, “and very low priority with the Yard, like you said. Simply put, no one cares about prostitutes getting murdered.”

“It is a shame that females must resort to that type of work in the first place,” Vastra said. This was an aspect of ape society she did not understand.

“While this is all very interesting, it is not why I called you here today,” Lang said. “It seems Inspector Abberline has been asking around about both you and me, specifically concerning our involvement in the Kostyantyn Bondarenko case.”

“Oh?” Vastra said and sipped her Earl Grey. “Exactly what has he been asking and whom is he asking?”

“He has requested the case files on Kostya and I believe he has questioned a few of the detectives who were involved in interrogating the witnesses you were responsible for bringing in,” Lang told her.

“Why do you believe he is doing this? What does he hope to achieve?” Vastra asked.

“I don’t know. I’m guessing he’s the ‘strait laced’ type that doesn’t put a toe over the line. He apparently found out about the Internal Affairs investigation and decided to look into it on his own.”

Vastra remembered the telegram she had received while she was unconscious during the blizzard. It simply read “IA dropped. No official record.” Jenny had no idea what it meant, but replied to Lang with a simple, “MV still ill. JF.” They hadn’t spoken about it since.

“That Internal Affairs investigation was never official. It was my understanding they dropped it based on the positive publicity they received for Scotland Yard acquiring the stolen valuables.”

“It wasn’t official,” Lang said. “He had to do some serious digging to find anything. I’m guessing
he looked into all his detectives before coming to London. And once he found this, apparently he decided to look into me as well.”

“This may explain why he has been so controlling with me. On his first day he told me I was to set up a desk at the Yard and work with the other detectives.”

“Clearly that didn’t happen,” Lang said.

“No,” Vastra smiled. “Clearly it did not.”

“I don’t believe he’ll uncover anything that will jeopardize either of us. At worst he may try to argue that the methods used to bring in the witnesses were not above board. But honestly, no one is going to care how we got those scumbags off the streets. They didn’t care then and they certainly won’t care now. The missing art was returned and a major criminal element was eliminated.”

It was the “major criminal element eliminated” part that worried Vastra. Lang didn’t know she was the one who had killed Kostya and his men, but what if there had been a witness that Vastra didn’t know about. What if Inspector Abberline had his own connections within the Tongs and he trusted them when they denied the killing. There were a lot of “what ifs” filling Vastra’s head, but she needed to stay calm and focused and figure things out.

“If that is all, Detective Superintendent Lang, I must be getting back to my case. The sooner I solve this the sooner I can convince that man to give my other cases back. I dare say Detective Morris has made any progress with them.”

“I’ll see what I can do about getting your cases back to you,” Lang offered. “I am, after all, DCI Abberline’s supervisor.”

As soon as Vastra got home she made a beeline for her office, specifically to her locked files. She pulled all of her records from the Kostya case and piled them on her desk. She had duplicated every note and report, and re-photographed every photo. Given her involvement in the case she couldn’t afford not to keep all evidence close. She scrutinized each of the witnesses she had brought in to try to turn on Kostya. She reviewed any official statement she had given Lang and any unofficial notes she had made about their unofficial meetings. Everything seemed air tight. Still though, with several murders she could be charged with, she couldn’t leave anything to chance. After she had studied the files, she moved them to her more secure wall safe, now located in her conservatory.

Supper was quiet, as usual, but Jenny could sense something wasn’t well with Vastra. “Anything the matter, love?”

“Why do you ask?”

“I don’t know. You seem like you have something on your mind. Is it the case?”

“It is a case, yes.” Vastra left it at that. There was no way Vastra would tell Jenny what was bothering her. She had purposefully kept Jenny in the dark about the Kostya case for several reasons. Chief among them was so that if charges were ever brought against Vastra, Jenny could truthfully say she had no knowledge of Kostya’s murderer.

Jenny didn’t inquire further. She knew if Vastra wanted her to know more, she would tell her.
Although she found Vastra’s response odd as she was currently only assigned one case.

Training was intense tonight. Vastra did not hold back, yet as always, maintained her composure and professionalism always understanding Jenny was still a weaker advisory and was in training.

“I’m going to go soak in a hot bath,” Jenny said as she put her bokken on the rack. Bruises already starting to stain her skin from the failed attempts to block Vastra’s attacks. “Are you going out tonight?”

“No,” Vastra said. “I will be up late going over a file.”

Jenny took the cryptic statement to mean “don’t bother me” so she wouldn’t. “I’m going to go to bed after my bath then. I’ll see you for breakfast.” Jenny kissed Vastra on the cheek and went upstairs.

Vastra retrieved the Kostya files from her safe. She wanted to go over them again and she wouldn’t sleep until she had. At midnight she decided to turn in and was disappointed to find her bed empty. Jenny had decided to sleep in her own bed tonight.

Friday

“Sit,” Inspector Abberline greeted Vastra as usual. “How are you coming on the Whitechapel case?”

“I have assembled all existing documents and yesterday I personally interviewed the officer on patrol who had interviewed the victim. He had nothing new to add to his statement. I attempted to interview the woman who brought the victim to the hospital, but I was unable to locate her. I shall try again today and every day until I locate her for a statement.”

Vastra slightly paused.

“Additionally, I have attempted to locate other prostitutes who knew or worked with the victim; however, they are all tight-lipped and none have admitted to either knowing or working with the victim.”

“Good work,” Abberline grunted. “About your last two cases. It seems Superintendent Lang has requested those cases be returned to you. But I assured him you had enough on your plate without the additional workload.”

“I see,” Vastra said. “And how is Detective Morris fairing with the suspects I named?”

“I assume he’s making headway,” Abberline said. “I don’t keep a tight leash on my detectives.”

Vastra almost hissed; but she caught herself before the urge was vocalized.

“Report back as soon as you’ve gotten any new information regarding the Whitechapel case,” Abberline said, dismissing Vastra.

“Very well.” Vastra walked to Abberline’s office door to leave.

“And don’t run to Lang every time I do something you don’t like,” Abberline jabbed as Vastra shut the door behind her.
Vastra calmed herself as she walked the long route to the Whitechapel district in an effort to track down the woman who had taken the victim to the hospital. She couldn’t afford to get paranoid about what Abberline may or may not know or suspect about Kostya and his men. His apprehension with her could just as easily, and probably was more likely the case, because she was a woman who had shown more aptitude and success with difficult cases than all the men on his staff. At the end of the day, she was a woman in a man’s world and she expected a certain amount of intolerance. A wicked smile crept across her scaled cheeks as she imagined the shock of revealing her true self to the inferior apes who questioned and doubted her.

After half a day of darting this way and that, and chasing empty leads, Vastra finally found the woman who had accompanied the victim, Sarah Smith, to the hospital.

“I didn’t see wut happened I already told the officer that.” The woman looked the veiled figure up and down. “Who are you anyway? Her mother?” She shook her head. “You walking around all veiled in mourning garb. Shouldn’t let your daughter get mixed up in prostitutin’ herself. Bad parentin’.”

“I am not her mother,” Vastra said, a bit put out. “I am a detective with Scotland Yard and I have been assigned to this case.”

“My aunt fanny you’re a detective,” the woman laughed. “You’re a woman!”

“Yes, and so are you. And so was the victim,” Vastra said, unfazed. “Now that we have established everyone’s gender, will you please just answer my questions? Then I will happily let you get on about your day.”

“I already told the officer everything I know,” she repeated. “Just ask him. I have better things to do than rehash something that don’t matter.”

Vastra sighed. She was becoming increasingly angrier. “You said you found the victim on Osborn Street, just off Whitechapel. Is this correct?”

“That’s right,” the woman agreed.

“Can you describe her condition?” Vastra asked.

“Her condition?” the woman scoffed. “She’d been beaten and assaulted. Raped. She was bleedin’ from both ends and crying. What sort of condition do you think she was in?”

“So she was conscious? You said she was crying.”

“Yeah, she was cryin’.” The woman was reaching her tolerance with Vastra.

“Did she ask you to take her to the hospital?” Vastra asked.

“No,” the woman said, “she didn’t want me to. But I could tell she’d been roughed up right proper. She needed to see a doctor.”

“Did she tell you anything about the men who attacked her?” Vastra asked.

“No. Nothin’ except there were three of ‘em. Said one was young. Didn’t say much else.”

“Did she know them? Recognize them?” Vastra asked.

“She didn’t say. Just said there were three. You listenin’?”
The woman’s story so far was exactly what she had told the officer the night of the attack. Vastra saw no need to interview her further right now.

“If you remember anything else, please tell an officer and ask him to get word to Madam Vastra. I will come back even for the smallest detail.”

The woman didn’t say good-bye, just turned and went on about her day as if Vastra had never spoken to her.

“Insolent apes!” Vastra muttered as she left the woman to her chores.

“Why are apes so reluctant to help their fellow humans?” Vastra asked Jenny.

“I don’t rightly know,” Jenny said. “Sometimes it isn’t in their best interest.”

“Is it not in the interest of all to apprehend criminals?” Vastra asked.

“Sometimes when people meddle in the affairs of others it works out poorly for them,” Jenny said.

“I will never understand your species,” Vastra said.

Jenny ignored the slight. “Do you have any suspects?” Jenny asked.

“No.” Vastra exhaled audibly. “There were no witnesses. At least none who will come forward. The victim’s clothes were discarded and the victim was bathed before I could meet her, so there are no scents for me to pursue. And the only witness to the victim after the attack acts as though it is the most terrible burden imaginable to speak with me.”

“I’m sure you’ll come up with something,” Jenny smiled at Vastra. “You always do.”

“I do not know how,” Vastra said. For the first time since working for the Yard she was at a total loss. And this was the only case she had at the moment.

“You should take a break and train or do something to clear your head,” Jenny said. “You’ve been at this nonstop all week.”

Vastra couldn’t tell Jenny that the thing most consuming her was Abberline’s interest in the Internal Affairs investigation into the Kostya case. She had pored over the case every spare minute, even when she was just working off memories.

“Are you coming to bed soon?” Jenny asked.

“No,” Vastra replied. “I have to work.”

“Alright, love.”

Jenny kissed Vastra on the cheek and once again retired to her own room while Vastra remained in her office immersed in the Kostya casefile searching for loose ends.

Saturday

Vastra spent the better part of the morning being stared at walking around the Whitechapel district.
She decided to return home for now and resume her investigation of the crime scene after dark when she had more cover and fewer prying eyes.

The Whitechapel District after dark was a hotbed of crime, prostitution, and drugs. Any decent folks of the area were shut tight in their homes trying to avoid trouble. But the streets were thick with hustlers, petty criminals, and working girls. Vastra observed it all from rooftop perches, shadowy nooks, and back alleyways. Her soft leather boots made her silent as she skulked through the darkness.

Everywhere she looked something illegal was going down. Whether it was a prostitute selling herself, a drug deal, or a game of dice, it was no wonder there were never any witness to crimes down here. They were all criminals, in one form or another. And this lot doesn’t make a habit out of ratting out their own kind.

Frustrated and tired, Vastra finally decided to head home around 1 a.m. She entered quietly through the service entrance as to not wake Jenny and headed straight for bed. To her surprise, the brunette was curled asleep in her bed. Her pillow hugged tight as if clinging to it would keep Vastra safe.

Vastra quietly changed and slipped into bed. She attempted to delicately pull the pillow from Jenny’s arms, but the effort woke the human almost instantly.

“You’re home,” Jenny smiled, barely opening her eyes.

“You’re in my bed,” Vastra answered, kissing her favorite ape on the forehead. “Let me hold you.”

Without hesitation, Jenny rolled over.

Vastra pulled her close.

Jenny sighed as the cool reptilian body pressed against her length and lulled her back to sleep.

Vastra buried her face in Jenny’s hair and took in the scent of her favorite ape. She relished the warmth of the mammal and was quickly asleep.

Sunday

Vastra protested as Jenny tried to get out of bed. She had awoken at 5 a.m. but lay in Vastra’s arms for an hour before forcing herself to attempt to break the Silurian’s hold of her. Any efforts to remove Vastra’s heater were met with hisses and constricting arms around her torso.

“You have to let me up, love,” Jenny insisted.

More hisses.

“I’ll build you a fire,” Jenny bartered.

“I do not need a fire, I have you,” Vastra replied in lazy syllables and tightened her hold even more.

Jenny turned over to face Vastra. “Let me up or there will be consequences,” she threatened.

“What consequences?” Vastra asked, still not opening her eyes.

“I haven’t decided,” Jenny said, “but I’m positive you won’t like them.”
Vastra didn’t respond. She was back asleep in an instant but her hold on Jenny had loosened just enough for the wily human to slip from her grasp and start her day.

Sunday was lazy.

Vastra spent the day in her office immersed in her case.

Jenny prepared the laundry for pick up, did some light housework, and spent time reading for pleasure.

The week crawled to an end and Vastra was no closer to solving the Whitechapel murder than she was the day she received the case. She would refocus and start anew tomorrow.

Chapter End Notes

Follow me on Twitter @masters_jd
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If you follow me on social media, make sure to let me know it's you!
Unable to secure any leads after a week with the Whitechapel case, Vastra shifted her attention to tracking down the only loose end she could think of in the Kostya case, Samuel Pines.

Samuel Pines was a petty criminal and con artist. Vastra never understood why Kostya wanted him dead. But he had been her first mark and was the only one that was both alive and likely willing to cooperate with law enforcement. She knew if he had seen her the night she poisoned him he would have sussed out that it was the famed veiled detective who turned him over. And if Inspector Abberline had gone asking questions, he certainly had no loyalty to her.

Without substantial charges, the Yard let Pines walk almost immediately after Kostya’s death. After his release he slipped under the radar for several months; but he had recently resurfaced in London. A few of Vastra’s contacts admitted to seeing him around town; however, they couldn’t, or wouldn’t, specify exact locations. So, she staked out his old haunt, the Drake, on Sweep Street.

After two weeks of unsuccessful hands-off surveillance looking for Pines, Vastra decided she needed to take matters to the next level. It was time to force some information out of Pines’ old acquaintances.

The drunkard stumbled out of the Drake to take a piss in the alley. While steadying himself on the wall, he felt the cold sharp tip of a blade poke into the back of his neck—just atop his spine.

“Where is Samuel Pines?” a female voice asked.

“Who?”

The blade pressed harder against his neck, not yet piercing skin. “Do not make me repeat myself.”

“The Hangin’ Barrel,” the man squeaked. “He ain’t been over here since he got hauled in a while back. I’ve seen him over at the Barrel a time or two. Can’t promise nothin’ though.”

The blade left the man’s neck and when he turned around the woman was gone.

“Bloody hell. I need to lay off the ale,” the man said, then stumbled into the Drake for another pint.

The Hanging Barrel was a hole-in-the-wall pub just south of Whitechapel off Commerce. It was a step down from the Drake, if that was even possible, but as good a place as any to find a petty criminal like Samuel Pines.

Vastra found a dark nook across the street to hide and wait for some sign of Pines. Around 8 p.m. a familiar scent drifted across her tongue and she knew she had her man. She couldn’t risk being seen. She wasn’t sure whether or not he noticed her the night she poisoned him; but if he did, he had surely linked her to Scotland Yard by now. And this was precisely what she needed to find out—had he named her as his captor? The culprit who poisoned him and faked his death? She waited for her opportunity.

Just after eleven bells chimed at a nearby church, Pines made a hasty exit from the Barrel. Vastra followed. They were a block away when, thanks to her sensitive Silurian hearing, she heard the ensuing shouts of “where’d the bastard go” and “cheatin’ bugger.” He had apparently swindled some poor saps out of their coin.
He wouldn’t be going back to the Hanging Barrel any time soon. And Vastra’s luck wouldn’t get any better than it had tonight. She stayed on his trail, a patient predator stalking her prey, and waited for another opportunity.

His path led north, toward Whitechapel close to where the assault had occurred on Osborn Street. Pines quickly found the company of a woman and Vastra was left once again crouched in a darkened corner waiting for him to emerge. Within fifteen minutes he was back on the street and Vastra settled into a good pace behind.

Turning this way and that, keen to shake any would-be tails, Pines led Vastra through a maze of back alleys and narrow passages. She had the luxury of not following too closely as her tongue did most of the work in trailing her suspects. Finally, he arrived at a decrepit apartment building in one of the worst parts of the Whitechapel district. Vastra watched as he disappeared through the front door and then waited for something to let her know which room he landed in. Within minutes someone lit a candle on the fourth floor, the top floor. When they came to the window to look out one last time and check for tails, she confirmed it was Pines.

“Too easy,” she smiled. She would let him sleep tonight. He was too paranoid with whatever he got caught at in the Barrel. But soon enough she would need to decipher any connection he may have to Inspector Abberline.

Vastra made her way back to the side streets off Whitechapel. And once again she was met with silence and stares when she attempted to question any of the prostitutes about the recent assault—though she was offered a two for one deal by a set of twins.

Tired and disgusted she headed home.

“How’d it go last night, love,” Jenny asked as she served Vastra’s breakfast.

“The prostitutes are still unwilling to talk to me. There were no other attacks on prostitutes. And I am sick and tired of prostitutes,” Vastra said. Her mood no better than when she had dragged herself home only 6 hours ago.

Jenny sat down at the table. She had eaten her breakfast 2 hours earlier; but she wanted to talk to Vastra.

“I was thinking,” Jenny started, cautiously. “Maybe the prostitutes would talk to someone who blended in better. Someone who, she paused not knowing if the next word would offend the Silurian or not, “looked like them.”

Vastra didn’t take hints. She preferred a more direct method of communicating. “Exactly what are you suggesting?”

“Maybe I could try to talk to them. I can dress like them, speak like them. I could ask about the assault and see if anyone knows anything. Tell them I was the victim’s cousin and I’d come to find out what happened to her.”

“Absolutely not,” Vastra snapped. This was perhaps not the best time Jenny could have brought it up.

“And why not?” Jenny snapped back.

“It is too dangerous.”
“I’ve been training for over a year. I can handle myself with my hands and with swords.”

Vastra swallowed her raw meat and dabbed a bit of blood from the corner of her mouth. “Jenny,” she began, “I never told you what happened to that woman. I did not tell you all the awful things those men did to that poor girl. It was beyond understanding and I will not allow you to put yourself in danger with those men still on the loose and likely to strike again.”

“Allow? Last time I checked you weren’t the one who allowed me to do things. If I want to do something I’ll bloody well do it. And I’m not some fragile little girl who can’t handle herself. I survived on those very streets for years without you or any proper training and now I know how to handle myself. I can help you talk to those women. I can talk to people you can’t approach. I’m not helpless. And I’m your partner not your maid, Vastra, or have you forgotten?”

Vastra sighed. She reached out to take Jenny’s hand. Her skin was hot with anger. “I know, love. I know you are not helpless. And you are right; you are my partner in all things. The whole point of your training was to make you into someone who could take care of herself and someone who could assist me. Forgive me dear, I was being insensitive.”

“So you’ll let me help you?” Jenny smiled.

“Yes, dear,” Vastra nodded. “We shall plan the outing later today. First I must report to Inspector Abberline. He is demanding daily updates, in person. The man is infuriating.”

Jenny tried to act like she wasn’t bursting at the seams with excitement from the moment Vastra got back from the Yard; but the Silurian picked up on her pheromones immediately.

“Go change into what you will wear tonight,” Vastra said.

“Now?” Jenny asked. “It’s a bit early, isn’t it?”

“Go change and then meet me in the gym.”

“The gym?” Jenny asked, now even more confused.

“Have you ever fought in a dress?” Vastra asked.

“No,” Jenny said.

“Then we will train until it is time to leave,” Vastra said.

Jenny changed into a simple dress with her hair loose and flowing to her shoulders. Vastra blushed, if that were possible, at the sight of her as she walked in. She quickly regained her composure and remembered that Jenny’s safety was at stake.

“A dress does not allow for the same range of motion as your aikidogi,” Vastra explained. “You will be limited, obviously in your lower body, but also, and more so, in your shoulders. However, there are ways to modify your movements and allow yourself enough flexibility and strength to escape a hold or throw an attacker if need be.”

Vastra ran Jenny through some simple moves modified from her usual arsenal of stances and strikes.
“Clearly you will not have your swords tonight, so you will rely on hand to hand combat should you run into any trouble,” Vastra explained.

After a few hours of light instruction, supper, and final preparations on what Jenny was to ask, the women left out for the night.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” Vastra asked in the safety of the carriage along the way.

“More than sure,” Jenny replied, a little too happy for Vastra’s liking.

“What is that for?” Vastra asked, looking down to a raggedy old bag.

“A girl right off the train from Wiltshire better have at least one change of clothes,” Jenny smiled.

“Are you sure you know what you are doing?” Vastra asked. If she had eyebrows, one would surely be raised.

“Emma and I used to pull scams on people all the time.” Jenny changed her accent. “A poor farm girl from Wiltshire who escaped abject poverty and daily beatings at the hands of her very own family was always sure to get a few copper for a bite of food.” She changed her accent back to her own. “I think I know what I’m doing, Vastra.”

Vastra watched from a distance as Jenny milled about the Whitechapel streets. For over an hour she approached groups of women, was quickly shooed off, only to try again just a few doors down. Finally she disappeared into a building with one of them.

Vastra’s body stiffened. Her heart raced. She was deciding how much time she would allow to pass before she would go in. Just then, Jenny suddenly reemerged onto the street.

Jenny smiled at the woman who had taken her inside and resumed her path down Whitechapel. Turning down a side street, Jenny waited for Vastra. Within seconds Vastra was in front of her, leading her further down a narrow alley to privacy.

“Why did you disappear?” Vastra asked Jenny before the young woman could speak on her own.

“I was gathering information. You know, like I am supposed to be doing. The woman was a madam. She brought me in and gave me a bite of bread and cheese and told me if I wanted to stay the night she would introduce me to the man who protects them.” Jenny paused. “Should I be flattered she thought me pretty enough to offer me a job as a whore?”

Vastra wasn’t amused at Jenny’s comment. “What about the assault? Did you ask about that?”

“All business then? Is there not a wee bit of humor in you, Vastra?” Jenny shook her head. “I told her I was Sarah’s cousin and I was looking to find out what happened to her so I was looking for anyone who knew her. She said she didn’t know what happened, that it could be any number of things from cheating her pimp to just a random attack. She said she didn’t know Sarah and couldn’t help me. And she wasn’t keen at all on speaking about the matter.”

“But at least they will speak to you,” Vastra said. She was more than a little put out with the lack of cooperation she had received over the past few weeks.
“Don’t take it personally, love,” Jenny cooed. “I blend in with these people. I was one of them once.”

“You were never one of these women,” Vastra quickly corrected.

“You know what I mean. These are my streets. This was my home after I got kicked out of my parents’,” Jenny smiled.

Vastra smiled as if she understood. Although Jenny was never quite sure if she truly did.

Jenny resumed her act perusing the streets, asking questions, and keeping an eye out for anything suspicious. She stopped in a couple of pubs but the night came and went without any real information about the assault.

They rode home around 3 a.m. exhausted.

“I’m going to take a bath,” Jenny said. “Then I’ll be to bed.”

“I am going back out,” Vastra told Jenny. “There is a lead I want to follow up on.”

“Why didn’t you follow up on it while we were out?” Jenny asked.

“I need to investigate this lead alone.” Vastra was curt. “I shall return shortly.”

Jenny didn’t understand what lead Vastra was following up on and she was too tired to pursue the matter further. She took her bath and retired to her own bed.

Vastra approached the dilapidated building where she saw Pines return to the night before. His room was dark. Most likely he was either in bed or not home. A quick sprint up the stairs and a pause outside his door informed Vastra he was asleep—he snored louder than a train whistle and his was the last scent on the door knob.

She wasn’t sure how she wanted to approach him, what she would ask him. Perhaps it was best just to tail him and see if he met with Abberline, but that could take weeks before she knew anything for sure. She needed to formulate a better plan. Sighing heavily she decided to give up for the night and be patient. She would follow him for a few days and see what he was up to.

Vastra sat down to a late breakfast after allowing herself only a few hours of sleep. Her movements were slow and she was exceptionally quiet. None of this escaped Jenny.

“You aren’t sleeping enough, love,” Jenny said.

Vastra didn’t respond.

“I’m just trying to look out for you. Take care of you.”

Vastra was in no mood to be coddled. She still did not respond to Jenny.

“What are your plans today?” Jenny asked as Vastra cut her raw liver.

“I have to report to Abberline, then I shall go on surveillance,” Vastra said.
“Do you have a lead then?”

“Not on the Whitechapel case.”

“So you’ve been assigned another case?” Jenny asked, smiling.

“No. This is for an old case. A loose end I need to tie up.”

“Which case?” Jenny asked. She normally did not push when Vastra was being vague. Typically she understood what this meant. But this time she pushed, to no avail.

“That is of no consequence,” Vastra answered and went about eating her liver.

“Do you want me to go out with you tonight and see if I can get any of the prostitutes to talk to me about the attack?” Jenny offered.

“It will depend on how my day goes, I will let you know.”

Jenny found this highly unusual. It wasn’t like Vastra to ignore an active case, her only active case, to investigate an older case or pursue other matters. But she dropped it and decided not to push further. “As you wish, dear.”

Vastra arrived at Pines’ home, if you could call it a home, just before noon. She confirmed he was inside and then waited for him to head out for the day. She followed him from the Whitechapel district to the docks where he looked to be doing some honest work. However she quickly figured out he was merely posing as a dockworker until he could slip off with a box of goods.

Following him to a secluded location he opened the box and seemed genuinely surprised when he saw the contents. Holding up a small dark object, Vastra couldn’t tell what it was from her vantage point, Pines smiled as he inspected it.

Looking this way and that, Pines quickly made off with the crate and headed toward the market. He found a space alongside the other vendors and quickly began to sell his stolen wares.

“Turkish figs,” he yelled. “Sweetest in London.”

Vastra watched as he sold handful after handful of the stolen fruits within a matter of hours. Pockets stuffed with coin, he was off to spend it.

Tonight Pines was drinking at the Copper Pig, another East End hole-in-the-wall pub. Vastra sat for hours with nothing to see until he finally stumbled out drunk 9 p.m. She followed him home, but nothing happened other than him stopping to piss, twice.

Frustrated and hungry she headed home.

Vastra’s keen ears picked up the sounds of training right away. She made her way to the gym to find Jenny practicing her hand-to-hand forms in a dress, modifying her techniques as needed.

“You are adjusting well to the confines of the garment,” Vastra said.

“I’m not waiting on you anymore,” Jenny said without breaking her form. “I can take care of myself and I’m going to get information on my own.”
“Jenny that is not a good idea,” Vastra said, coming further into the room.

Jenny ended her current form and stood and looked at Vastra. Sweat dripped from her forehead and tendrils of dark hair clung, wet, to her face. “I waited for you all day. Day turned into evening. And evening turned into night. I’m done staying behind while you go out on your own any time you like.”

“Jenny,” Vastra started.

“No, Vastra,” Jenny cut her off. “I’m capable and I’m willing to take the risk. Don’t think for one minute I don’t worry about you every time you leave to follow a suspect. I wait here while you’re out there in the cold, following murderers, or chasing leads. I wait here and I worry and wonder. I wonder when another hansom cab driver will bring you back unconscious or worse. Or when Lang or Abberline will knock on the door to tell me you’ve been killed, mutilated, because you were discovered. Do you think they’d just let me know like they would some grieving widow? Or do you think they’d haul me in and interrogate me about who you are and where you’re from? You aren’t keeping me safe by keeping me behind if I can help you.”

“I...”

Jenny cut her off again. “Please think about what you’re going to say before you say it.”

Vastra stepped toward Jenny. “I am sorry. I did not know you worried like that.”

“But you do know I love you, right? How could you not know how much I worry about you?”

Vastra just looked at Jenny. “Daft lizard?”

Jenny wanted to be mad, she was mad, but a smile broke across her face. “Well, we can certainly agree on that. Come up to the kitchen, I’ll warm your supper.”

Vastra closed the gap and pulled Jenny close. Parting after a long kiss, Vastra smiled at Jenny. “I can warm my supper. You finish your training.”

“I’m done here.”

“Either way,” Vastra said, “I can warm my supper. No need for you to wait on me any more tonight.”

“I’m going to take a bath then.” Jenny kissed Vastra on the cheek. “You should go to bed after your supper. You haven’t been getting enough asleep.”

“So you have mentioned.”

Jenny woke at her usual time, 5 a.m., in Vastra’s arms. She was no longer upset about yesterday. She had said her piece and she meant what she said about going out on her own. If Vastra wasn’t going to include her, she’d take the initiative.

Vastra’s arm tightened around Jenny’s waist when the brunette attempted to get out of bed. This was the first time they had shared a bed in almost two weeks and the Silurian wasn’t about to give up her heater so easily.

“I have to get up, love,” Jenny said. She wasn’t being playful, she needed to get up and get going if
she wanted to hit the streets today and work on the case.

Vastra hissed her disapproval.

“I’m getting up, one way or another,” Jenny threatened.

Vastra pulled her tighter and buried her face in Jenny’s hair.

Jenny grabbed the covers and pulled them off the bed and threw them into the floor beside her. Although it was now late April, Vastra was still a cold-blooded reptile and she needed the covers to trap Jenny’s body heat to remain warm and comfortable.

Vastra protested loudly. “Why did you do that?” She pulled herself up on her elbow.

Jenny took the opportunity and popped out of bed. “Because some of us have chores before work. Breakfast is in one hour.” She smiled and walked out the door.

Vastra was left hissing something about inconsiderate apes and their warm blood as she picked the covers up and curled beneath them. She hoped they retained some warmth from Jenny.

Around six Vastra came down for breakfast. Jenny was already wearing her plain dress, ready for investigating, with her white apron.

“Good morning, love.” Jenny kissed Vastra on the cheek as she set the kettle on the table for tea.

Vastra made to hiss, then thought better of it.

“You finally got a decent amount of sleep,” Jenny said. “Do you feel any better?”

“I would feel better if I had a lead on the Whitechapel case,” Vastra said.

“Hopefully I’ll be able to help with that,” Jenny smiled. “Are you still trying to tie up that lose end from the other case?”

“Yes,” Vastra didn’t offer anything further.

“I’m not going to ask you any more about it. It’s obvious you’ve told me all you intend to tell me.”

“Thank you.”

“But if I can be of assistance, please let me know.”

“Sorry, dear,” Vastra said as Jenny sat her plate of raw meat in front of her. “This is something I must do on my own. Hopefully it will be resolved soon.”

The day passed and Vastra and Jenny carried on with their investigations. Vastra followed Samuel Pines on a route of petty crime and drinking. He talked to a few people here and there, but certainly not Inspector Abberline or any other law enforcement. In fact, he rapidly changed course whenever he encountered a uniformed bobby out on patrol. He picked more than a few pockets to pay for food and ale and even a woman for half an hour.

This was his life. He wasn’t a mastermind or a criminal kingpin. Even the crate of figs he stole only yesterday were a total surprise. He had no idea what was in that crate, he just hoped it was something he could sell. He was an opportunist. He didn’t determine his path, he chose it, one turn
at a time. Vastra was certain if he was an informant for Abberline, it was Abberline who contacted him, not the other way around.

Jenny continued to masquerade as Sarah Smith’s cousin from Wiltshire, but again came up empty. No one seemed to know Sarah, or at least no one would admit to it. And no one seemed to know anything about who killed her or why. The most popular theory was that she angered her pimp in some way and he made an example of her. This would certainly dissuade any other prostitutes from answering questions about the incident.

Vastra didn’t get home until well after 2 a.m. She drank a glass of cold blood and swallowed a piece of cold liver whole before she collapsed from weakness. She had no business going this long without eating. The situation with Pines was consuming her.

She went to check on Jenny whom found safely asleep in her own bed. Why were she and Jenny still not fully together, she wondered? They were yet to know one another, physically. They shared a bed, on occasion, just to be close; but that was the extent of their physical relationship. She had shared with Jenny the physic connection of her people, had that been too much for the human? She cursed the misguided and misogynistic uptight morals of Victorian London. If they were in her world, in her time, she and Jenny would already be committed life mates. She fell asleep to terrible dreams.

Vastra drug herself into the kitchen for breakfast at 6 a.m. The lack of sleep compounded over the weeks was weighing heavily on the Silurian. Like most modern reptiles, Silurians were accustomed to long rests and hibernations in all but the hottest of times. And London was far from hot or even sunny most of the year. Even in the moderate April temperatures, if left to her natural habits, Vastra would not be active or even awake for much of the day.

Jenny had repeatedly asked her to get more rest. But whatever this loose end was that Vastra was working on was keeping her up and wearing her out. “Good morning, love,” Jenny greeted her with a kiss on the cheek and a kettle of hot water for tea. “Did you have any luck last night?”

“No,” Vastra said. “Did you?”

“No,” Jenny admitted. “None of the women will admit to knowing anything. And any of the men in the bars who care to comment only spew vile suggestions and repeat gossip. I don’t think we’re likely to find anyone willing to talk to us.”

“I am afraid you may be right,” Vastra said. “And I do not know what that means in regard to the larger picture. Inspector Abberline makes his displeasure and disappointment perfectly known every time I check in with him at the Yard. But, we expect the medical officer’s examination results today. I can only hope there is something there that will point to a lead.”

“At least you’ll have something new to dive in to,” Jenny said. “The same routine with no results is very frustrating.”

Vastra’s hisses and spews of “insolent ape” and “insecure male” could be heard throughout the house when she arrived home unexpectedly after her trip to the Yard to check in with Abberline.

Jenny found Vastra in her office to see what had transpired to upset the Silurian to this degree. “What are you going on about then?” Jenny asked.
“That insufferable ape Inspector Abberline refuses to release the medical officer’s report to me until he has had time to thoroughly review it.”

“Is that not standard practice?” Jenny asked.

“No, Jenny. It is not. It is not standard practice for a supervisor to constantly and with impunity reduce his most accomplished detective to nothing more than an officer in training who needs their hand held at every turn.”

Jenny didn’t respond. She let Vastra vent. She let Vastra take her frustrations out on her. She knew soon enough she would be calm and she would ask for forgiveness. This was the side of Vastra that was reserved for Jenny alone. In a way, Jenny savored it, coveted it even. It was like having a piece of the Silurian all to herself. She was always so calm, composed, and in control in public. This was her in private. This is why the ranting never started until the door closed behind her. Not even Parker, their carriage driver, heard a peep of this Vastra.

Vastra continued with a streak of Silurian profanities and four and five syllable English words that Jenny didn’t begin to know the meaning of; but she could understand the context and the intent. She stopped short of throwing things. That wasn’t her style, if she needed to physically blow off steam, that’s what the gym was for.

Finally the exhibition ended. Vastra’s volume lowered, her tone softened, and her words shortened.

“I am sorry, Jenny. Please forgive me,” Vastra said, as expected. “I do not mean to take my frustrations out on you. I am sorry you have to hear them.”

“It’s alright, dear,” Jenny smiled, content that her prediction was correct and that she was still the only human with whom Vastra could be this raw. “How ‘bout before you leave for the night I make you a nice cuppa?”

“Thank you, dear,” Vastra smiled. “That would be lovely.”

The medical officer’s report was delivered early Saturday morning to 13 Paternoster Row. And after another night of only a few hours of sleep, Vastra closed herself in her office to study it.

Jenny had asked several times over the past weeks for Vastra to take a break from her work; tonight she would insist. She could tell how stressed the Silurian was and she worried that it would cause her to lose focus during her nightly surveillance. And a loss of focus could very easily translate into getting injured, or worse.

Since the Great Blizzard and the night Vastra and Jenny had confessed their love for one another, each had learned a great deal about the other on a personal and intimate level. For instance, Jenny had learned that Vastra’s more notable weakness, when it came to her, was her long brunette mane. Whether or not Vastra realized that Jenny had figured this out was unknown. But she had figured it out and today she would use it against the Silurian for her undivided attention.

Around 4 p.m. Vastra finally emerged from her office. She needed to move around, get her blood flowing and stretch. She found Jenny in the sitting room, reading. Her hair was not in its usual bun, it was free and cascading down her shoulders onto her chest.

“What are you reading?” Vastra asked.

“Nothing you’d like,” Jenny said. “Fiction.”
Vastra smiled. She was honestly more interested in the reader, not the material.

“Did you learn anything from the report?” Jenny asked.

“No. It was slightly more detailed than the report from the hospital. But there was nothing new, no obvious leads or clues. I am not sure it will help at all.”

Jenny put her book on the settee and walked over to Vastra. She put her hands on each side of Vastra’s waist.

“You’ve been at this case night and day for weeks. I’ve hardly seen you all month. And I think you need a break. How about tonight you take me out on the town,” Jenny suggested.

Vastra pushed a tendril of Jenny’s hair back behind her ear. “Do you have something in mind?” She already knew the answer.

“There’s an act at the Higgins Music Hall I think you’ll like. I hear the show is quite entertaining.”

“I see,” she said. “Is this why your hair is down? Do you want to ensure a ‘yes’ from me?”

“Really! Am I this easy to read?” Jenny seemed almost offended that Vastra figured out her game. She had to appear put out and she tried to move away; but Vastra grabbed her wrist and pulled her back.

“You forget that with my superior intellect and keen sense of smell I can solve most any case, even one where you attempt to distract me with that lush hair and soft warm skin of yours.” Vastra leaned down and kissed Jenny’s soft lips.

“Don’t think you can ‘superior intellect’ me and get away with it with a kiss!” Jenny teased and put her hand on Vastra’s face and gently pushed her away.

Jenny attempted to pull away again, and this time Vastra didn’t protest. “So we’ll need to leave by six to make the show.” Jenny walked out of the sitting room and disappeared up stairs.

Vastra was left completely unable to concentrate. Jenny’s pheromones were thick in the room. Jenny was excited and Vastra could not help herself but taste the air again and again.

Jenny was right. She did need a break from both the Whitechapel case as well as her constant worry about the Kostya case and Abberline’s meddling. She would return her focus to the medical report tonight after the show.

Just before six Vastra was at the front door placing her hat and veil just so on her crests and brushing the lint from her cape. She heard a door close but didn’t look up until Jenny was about half way down the stairs. Jenny, in a word, was stunning.

Vastra stood, dumbfounded and watched as Jenny descended the last of the steps. She was wearing an emerald green satin dress trimmed in gold stitched ivy. The bodice was matching green satin with a gold ribbon laced up the front. Jenny’s white, milky flesh was exposed above a low bustline. A human may have noticed right away she needed a grand necklace to fill the space above her breasts; but Vastra was not an expert on human fashion and for the life of her she couldn’t take her eyes off Jenny’s face and hair. Goddess that hair. The majority of the brunet mane fell about her shoulders but the sides had been pulled back and clipped behind her head so that her face was unobstructed.
Jenny was radiant.

And Vastra was speechless.

“So you like the dress?” Jenny teased.

Still nothing from Vastra.

“Vastra.”

“You are beyond words, my love,” was all Vastra could utter. She lifted her veil and stepped toward Jenny.

“No,” Jenny said, her voice airy. She took Vastra’s hand and stopped her. “I’m afraid if you do what I think you are about to do we won’t make it to the show.”

“Would that be so bad?” Vastra asked.

Jenny put Vastra’s hand to her lips and kissed it. “Later, love,” Jenny whispered.

“Two tickets please,” Vastra said to the box office attendant.

The young man looked at Vastra and over to Jenny who had her arm linked with Vastra’s. “Workin’ gals don’t have to pay.” The man smiled at Jenny who was showing a little more skin on her chest than Vastra was comfortable with in public.

“I beg your pardon, young man, we are not ‘working gals’ as you so put it,” she was furious. “We are here to see the performance and you would do well to sell me tickets for the two best seats you have.”

The young man was dumbstruck at Vastra’s forcefulness. “Yes ma’am, table for two, close to the stage.”

Vastra paid the man and they were escorted to their table.

The seats were indeed close to the stage. Vastra looked around the hall. The majority of patrons were men. In fact, the only women Vastra could see looked like what the box office attendant had spoken of, prostitutes. She suddenly wondered where Jenny had brought them and just what sort of show this was.

Scantily clad women with trays of items walked amongst the tables. They were peddling cigarettes, cigars, matches, roses, handkerchiefs, and other things a man may need either for himself or for a lady friend.

Other women doted on the men going from table to table until one offered a suitable amount of money to entice them to take a seat. The whole place stank of arousal pheromones. Vastra was not having a good time.

Soon, the show started. The house lights went down and a spotlight lit up the stage. Out walked the night’s emcee. He was a large rosy cheeked man wearing vertically stripped pants that alternated red and black; and a long tailed black jacket decorated with golden chords and epaulettes, and large brass buttons. He took off his top hat and bowed deeply to the audience.

“Gentlemen,” he scanned the audience and stopped his gaze on Vastra and Jenny’s table, “and
ladies. Prepare yourselves for a night of pure auditory and visual ecstasy. Our beautiful ladies will
dance and dazzle their way into your hearts, sing and sizzle their way into your minds, and shake
and sparkle into your… well, let’s just say our lovely ladies will definitely leave you wanting
more.”

Loud, uproarious applause and hoots filled the hall. The men whistled and catcalled and Vastra
was beginning to worry whether or not Jenny knew what she had gotten them into and whether or
not she could keep them safe should anything go awry.

“Please save some of those applause for our first act, the Bailey sisters.”

Applause erupted and two women took the stage. A man began playing a fast number on the piano
and the sisters tap danced and smiled to a full house of loud and exuberant men. Their act was tame
for the most part—a teaser for the audience.

“Weren’t they lovely?” the emcee said above the crowd. “Now open your eyes and your ears for
the pure delight of the beautiful Eleanor Cummins.”

Eleanor’s act was a bit more risqué than the Bailey Sisters, but still not explicit. She wore a red silk
dress with a slit up the leg that drove the men wild. Her hair was perfectly coiffed and she was
adorned with elaborate costumed jewelry that sparkled and shined in the spotlight.

“Yes!” the emcee urged the men on. “We could all do with a little more sparkle in our lives. Now
please welcome Cirque de Bohemia!”

A troupe of five women took the stage. They juggled and rode unicycles and breathed fire. They
were clad in short puffy skirts and corset style bodices. The crowd was getting drunker and little
more rowdy, but they were all still happily sitting in their seats.

Next came a line of can-can dancers and the men went crazy. Their frilled skirts, lifted high in the
air, exposed garters with fishnet hosiery and silk underthings. The petticoats were suggestive in
hues of pinks and reds. The men loved it, even if they didn’t consciously realize what was implied.

Next was a troupe of gymnasts who could contort their bodies all sorts of ways and incorporate
flips and tumbles. The men howled with excitement as the women twisted themselves into all
manner of deliberately sexual and compromising positions.

Vastra was more interested in this act than she had been in any all night. She saw the strategic
value of the evasive tumbles. But it was apparent she was the only one in the hall who was
thinking of combat with these limber ladies on stage.

Finally, it was time for the main act.

Stage hands quickly brought four tables, each with two chairs, and arranged them in a staggered
single row across the stage. Then four lovely ladies in beautiful dresses walked out, each taking a
seat at a different table. They tilted their heads down and away from the audience and sat
motionless, as if they were waiting. Whistles and catcalls did not distract them from their roles.

Jenny had been cheering and clapping all night, but when they introduced the star she sat up
straight and paid attention. “Ladies and gentlemen, put your hands together for our feature
performer. Our headliner extraordinaire. The incomparable, the beautiful, the unmistakable, the
one and only, Frances Devereux.”

The hall erupted in applause, hoots, and whistles. The music started and the spotlight shone
brightly at stage left. A woman started singing, but had not yet made her way onto the stage. Her
voice was lovely. It was deep, sultry and sent chills up Vastra’s spine and into her crests. Vastra looked at Jenny who was transfixed on the area the spotlight was focused on.

Finally, a figure emerged dressed in trousers and a long-tailed coat jacket, hair slicked back, and a smile that would open doors. It was a man—no, a woman. It looked like a man; but the voice was definitely female.

Vastra typically did not have a difficult time telling female humans from male humans as long as they were dressed to social norms or if she could pick up their pheromones on her tongue. But this human was too far away to pick up a scent. Besides, the whole place still reeked of male sweat and arousal.

Jenny didn’t take her eyes of the singer. She watched as the spotlight followed Frances across the stage, as she sang a seductive song as she went from table to table on stage touching and serenading the women. She pulled their face towards her making sure she was all each saw when it was their turn. The women seemed to melt with desire into the hands of their suitor.

Vastra watched Jenny watch Frances. A pang of jealousy hit her like a bolt of electricity. Is this why she wanted to come here tonight? Vastra watched the woman on stage.

Frances had made her way to each of the four woman and now made her way to the edge of the stage. She sang to the audience; scanning the tables in the hall first left, then right. Then it happened. She stopped her gaze on Jenny. She sang right to her as if they were the only two people in London. Vastra was beside herself with jealousy.

Miss Devereux finally made her way back to the tables on stage and shifted her attention from woman to woman, touching each of them delicately, seductively across exposed backs and shoulders until the song was over. She bowed and walked off stage with all four women clinging to her in various ways. The house erupted! The house lights brightened a bit and the emcee took the stage.

“Finally,” Vastra thought to herself, “it’s over and we can go home.” But no one was getting up to leave. In fact, the crowd started to chant “encore” “encore” and the emcee did his best to stall while, as it would turn out, the star of the show had a costume change.

The lights dimmed again and the music started up. Miss Devereux came back out, this time in a dapper vest, white shirt, and bowler hat. The burst of applause was almost deafening and Vastra swore that most of the noise was coming from Jenny.

You wouldn’t think that men would react so to a woman dressed as a man; but part of her act was to dance and romance the ladies, and this did get the men all riled up. It was the only way men would tolerate two women being romantic with one another Vastra supposed.

One by one the same four women took the stage and simply stood at various places scattered about.

And one by one, Miss Devereux, while singing, would take them in her arms and dance them to a new spot on the stage. Each time she would take care to touch them on their exposed skin. While Jenny was transfixed on the star, a man walked up to their table and handed Jenny a folded piece of paper. Jenny startled, smiled, and took the note. She quickly read it and instantly lit up. She had a death grip on the paper preventing Vastra from reading it.

The number was finally over and the audience once again erupted. The emcee did his best to calm the men so he could let them know the time and date of the next show and who the performers
would be.

Attendants worked to pick up the spent matches and empty glasses left by the men and herd them out the door and into the night.

Vastra took Jenny by the arm so she wouldn’t lose her in the exodus.

“Wasn’t that just wonderful?” Asked Jenny. But it may as well have been rhetorical. She didn’t wait for Vastra to answer. “Wasn’t she just divine?” Again, she wasn’t really looking for an answer.

“Come Jenny,” Vastra said, “it is time to leave.”

“We can’t leave yet,” Jenny said, very excited.

“The show is over Jenny. I have work to do.”

“But Frankie is coming to say hello,” Jenny beamed.

“Frankie?” Vastra just looked surprised.

“Frances Devereux,” Jenny smiled. “The star of the show!”

Then it hit her. That’s what the note was. She had seen Jenny in the crowd and sent a note to her table to meet her after the show.

Vastra didn’t know what to do. Did Jenny know this woman? Did Jenny have romantic feelings for this woman? Did she like that she dressed as a man? Vastra took inventory of her own garment. She always wore dresses. That is what women of London wore in this day and age. And she hated it; but she did it to fit in and intermingle with the population undetected. The dresses were lovely, no doubt; but they were so cumbersome and they severely restricted her fighting style. But was this what Jenny preferred? A woman that was more like a man in dress and mannerism? Is this why their relationship had gone no further? She was thoroughly confused and now very paranoid.

Perhaps you would like to spend time with your,” Vastra thought carefully for her next word, “friend, by yourself.”

“Don’t be daft,” Jenny playfully swatted Vastra’s arm. “I can’t wait for you to meet Frankie and her to meet you.”

“Jenny Flint,” a voice said, “it’s not nice to talk about people when they aren’t around to defend themselves. I heard my name.” Frankie approached Jenny, arms wide. They fell into an embrace that lasted way too long for Vastra to be comfortable with. Finally they parted. “And who do we have here?”

Frankie strode over to Vastra and when the veiled woman did not present a hand either for a handshake or a kiss, she stopped in her tracks. This must be the infamous Vastra Jenny always talked about. And the last thing she wanted to do was offend her. But perhaps she already had.

Jenny saved the day. She stepped up and introduced the women. “Frankie, this is Vastra. Vastra, this is Frankie.”

“Pleasure to meet you, Ma’am,” Frankie bowed to Vastra.

Still Vastra did not produce a hand. While Frankie was bowed, Jenny shot Vastra a look. She tried
to communicate with her eyes that Vastra was being rude and she needed to lighten up and be pleasant to Frankie. But Vastra was still learning the subtleties of human facial expressions. She could tell Jenny was trying to tell her something. But honestly she just had to guess. And she guessed that she was indeed being rude.

“Your musical numbers were quite entertaining,” Vastra finally said, albeit a little wooden. “How do you know Jenny?” Vastra did not have tact. And she wasn’t just making conversation, she wanted to know.

Jenny shot Vastra a look of pure daggers.

“Jenny and I go back a ways,” Frankie said. “She used to watch me at the Vanguard when I was singing for peanuts.” Frankie looked at Jenny and smiled.

“I see.” Vastra was trying to be pleasant. But her Silurian directness mixed with her genuine jealousy was not doing her any favors in the politeness department. To make matters worse, she recognized Frankie’s scent. Jenny would often come home smelling of this ape. In fact, this is the very ape she stank of the night they first kissed.

“But that’s ancient history,” Frankie said. “Let’s have a drink and we can catch up.”

She went to Jenny and offered her arm. If Vastra was going to act like this, she was done trying not to offend her. Jenny didn’t hesitate to take Frankie’s arm and they made their way to the bar.

“You look absolutely radiant, Jenny.” Frankie couldn’t take her eyes off Jenny and Vastra couldn’t take her eyes off Frankie.

They had a few drinks, at least Frankie and Jenny did, and they talked about the days at the Vanguard and Jenny congratulated her on her recent success with her new gig here at the Higgins Music Hall.

Vastra sat, studying their body language and counting the number of times Frankie touched Jenny or Jenny touched Frankie. It was never really intimate, just a touch of a knee here or a hand on the shoulder there. But to Vastra, it may have well of been hugs and kisses.

Finally, Vastra interrupted them, “Jenny, dear,” she said pointedly, “I do have work to attend at home. I really must be going.”

Jenny reluctantly conceded that she too must go. “It’s been lovely to see you, Frankie. We’ll be sure to come back. When is your next billing?”

“A few weeks,” she said. “I’ll be traveling for a bit, but I’m back in London in late May.”

“We will see you then,” Jenny assured her.

“I look forward to it.” Frankie took Jenny’s hand and kissed the back of it. She turned to Vastra. “It was lovely to meet you, Vastra. I hope next time Jenny and I don’t yammer on so much that I am able to get to know you a little better.”

Again Vastra made no move to offer her hand to Frankie. “Indeed.”

“Well, goodnight it is then.” Frankie walked the women to the street where Parker was waiting. They climbed inside their carriage and were off.

“Wasn’t she just lovely?” Jenny started in again. “She really does have a unique act. And so
dapper.”

Vastra remained silent as Jenny beamed on about Frankie the entire ride back home.

Once they were safely inside their home, coats on the rack and boots along the wall, Vastra could not contain her emotions any longer. “Is she an old lover of yours?” Vastra blurted out.

“Pardon?” Jenny said as she whirled around to meet Vastra’s gaze. “Wut the bleedin’ ‘ell kind o’ question is that?” Jenny’s accent was thick, as it got when she was riled.

“Just a question, Jenny,” Vastra said. “I would appreciate an honest answer.”

“You cou’dn’ be more jealous,” Jenny shouted. “You insecure, daft lizard!”

“There is no need to resort to name calling,” Vastra said.

“I can’t believe you!” Jenny was furious. “No. I can believe you. Because you are you. Wut difference does it make anyway if she is or if she isn’t? Wut business is it of yours?”

“Because I have smelled her on you before,” Vastra shouted. “How am I supposed to know, Jenny? How am I supposed to compete with someone like her? She is human, your species. Perhaps you would prefer her to me. Perhaps it would be easier to be with...”

“Easier?” Jenny interrupted. “Easier than what?” Her accent was fading and she was speaking more like the Jenny of today. “You think it would be easy for me to be with her? You think she could dress like that and fool people into believing she was a man and I could be on her arm and we could dupe all of London?”

“Perhaps.”

“And you think it’s about EASY?” Jenny yelled. “Love, Vastra, is not easy! I don’t love her. I love you, you daft, stupid lizard. I love you and you are making it very much not easy at the moment.”

Vastra was silent. She had really stepped in it. But what was she supposed to think? “Jenny, I..”

“You know what,” Jenny said. “Loving you IS easy. Because no matter how much I tried to fight it at first, no matter how mad I get at you and your Silurian insensitivities, no matter what, I love you. There is nothing I can do to change that. I see that now. Being in love with you is the easiest, most natural thing I have ever done in my life. It just happens and there is nothing I can do to stop it or prevent it or change it in any way.” She stood, stoic. She was a whole new kind of mad.

“I am sorry, Jenny,” Vastra pleaded. “I thought...” She paused and looked away. She hoped that Jenny would rescue her and not make her finish her sentence, but no, Jenny would not save her.

Jenny stood and waited.

“You do not belong to me, Jenny. And I do not know human courting rituals and rites. I saw the way you looked at her on that stage and how she looked at you. And, Jenny, you are breathtakingly beautiful. Not just tonight, but always. And I thought that I would lose you. That I would lose you before I even had you.”

Vastra approached Jenny.

“I love you, Jenny,” Vastra reached out her hand to touch Jenny’s face.
Jenny did not break her stare on Vastra.

Vastra cupped her face and caressed her cheekbone with her thumb. “I love you, Jenny. I want you to be mine. Unmistakably mine.”

Jenny inhaled deeply and shifted her body weight and leaned into Vastra’s hand. She closed her eyes for a long blink, then met Vastra’s cerulean blue orbs. “Then take me upstairs and make me yours.”
Vastra’s eyes darkened to a storm of deep, swirling grey. Without hesitation she scooped Jenny up in her arms and headed up the stairs.

Jenny threw her arms around Vastra and kissed her neck, cheeks, and crests.

Vastra made her way into her bedroom, but didn’t want to put Jenny down. Jenny didn’t seem to mind. She kissed Vastra and explored her back, shoulders, and crests with her hands. Then she began fumbling to unbutton Vastra’s bodice. She had helped Vastra with this a hundred times; but this was the first time to attempt it from this angle or for this purpose. Slowly, she made progress.

Finally, Vastra put Jenny down; and immediately Jenny slammed her against the wall. The Silurian could have stopped the “attack” if she had wanted, but why would she?

As Jenny kissed Vastra and made efforts to pull her now loosened bodice from her torso, Vastra made an attempt to untie and unlace the gold silk ribbon in the front of Jenny’s dress. But Jenny was pressed in too close for her to get enough purchase on the knot. Vastra was getting frustrated.

Jenny sensed her agitation and pulled away. “If you rip this dress I’ll skin ya.”

“Then let me at it,” Vastra quipped back. Her words were airy and her breathing quick.

Jenny just smiled and threw herself into Vastra again with passionate kisses returning to her mission of undoing the few remaining buttons and removing Vastra’s bodice.

Vastra grabbed Jenny by the arms and spun them both around and into the wall. She began to untie and unlace Jenny’s dress. Vastra’s bodice was loose and gaping open in front, her chest peeking through.

Jenny stared, captivated by the scales.

“There,” Vastra said triumphantly as the ribbon was untied and loosened enough to remove Jenny’s bodice.

The words jarred Jenny from her stupor and she met Vastra’s eyes.

Both women paused for the span of a breath. This was further than they had gone before. There would be no turning back.

Jenny reached out and slowly pulled Vastra’s bodice open and guided her arms out of the sleeves. She tossed it to the floor.

Vastra stood before her, bare from the waist up. She was a proud Silurian and as such she knew no shame in her naked form. But what if Jenny didn’t like what she saw? What if her reptilian differences were just too much for the mammal?

Jenny took her in. Vastra didn’t have breasts, but rather pectoral muscles more akin to what a human male would have. And she certainly didn’t have nipples. Her chest was armored with thick, dark green scales that faded to yellow as they covered her stomach. Her exposed arms, chest, and shoulders were solid muscle and Jenny had to touch them.

She laid her palms flat on either side of Vastra’s chest. The heat from the touch made Vastra gasp.
Jenny slid her hands up and over Vastra’s shoulders and down her arms all the way to her hands. Then she repeated the process in reverse, watching the path her hands traced with determined focus. When her hands rested again on Vastra’s chest, she said in a breathy tone, “So beautiful,” and leaned in to kiss her.

Vastra pulled her close into a deep passionate kiss. Her eyes had almost calmed to their normal cerulean; but were once more a milky grey tempest with scattered flashes of white like lightning.

Vastra pulled away and put her hands on Jenny’s dress. She carefully pulled Jenny’s bodice down, slipping her arms out of the sleeves—very mindful of the request not to damage it. The top of her dress now rested on her hips. It was Jenny’s turn to stand exposed.

Vastra gently placed her right hand on Jenny’s side at the small of her waist. The soft milky white skin was hot against Vastra’s touch. The cool hand made Jenny gasp and Vastra immediately tasted the spike in Jenny’s pheromones which lingered thick in the air around them. It was intoxicating. She wrapped her arm around Jenny’s waist and pulled her into her. The contrasting warm and cool skin on skin of their bare chests was intense. The reaction was instantaneous. Vastra felt Jenny’s nipples harden against the contact. Jenny gently moaned into Vastra’s kiss.

With her left hand, Vastra touched Jenny’s side and moved up toward her breast, running her thumb between their bodies. Jenny gasped and Vastra kissed her hard. She kissed down Jenny’s neck, across her collar bone, and onto her chest. She kissed above her breasts then between them. Then, snaking her tongue out slowly, Vastra tasted her skin.

Jenny moaned at the feel of the cool, soft tongue on her breast. Her pheromones shot up and this only excited and encouraged Vastra. She retracted her tongue and put her mouth over Jenny’s breast, sucking gently.

Jenny moaned, louder this time. “Take me to bed.”

Vastra obeyed. She scooped Jenny up and laid her on the bed and immediately went to pull her dress completely off.

Jenny didn’t protest. She raised her hips and allowed Vastra full control to strip her bare. Vastra quickly shed her own skirt and crawled onto the bed. She inched her way up Jenny’s frame, kissing as she went and letting her tongue explore Jenny’s flesh until she lay beside the human.

Their bodies touched along their length. Cool hands explored Jenny’s warm body. Warm hands caressed and grabbed at Vastra’s shoulders and crests. Their kisses gave way to soft moans as the psychic link between them began to form. They could feel one another’s wants, needs, and sensations. The signal was coming and going like a radio just out of tune.

Jenny’s body heat rose. Her pheromone level soared as the connection grew. This was unlike anything she had ever felt—and she had no idea what was to come.

Vastra licked the light sheen of sweat from Jenny’s skin that was forming on her breasts and sides. The cool tongue excited Jenny even more.

She grabbed Vastra’s shoulders and gripped hard. “Inside,” she thought.

“Are you sure?” Vastra asked, aloud.

For a moment Jenny was taken aback; Vastra had heard her thoughts. “Yes,” she said aloud, no longer surprised.
Vastra slowly moved her hand down Jenny’s side, over her stomach, and to her thigh. The heat coming off Jenny here seduced Vastra. She had craved this heat since the first time their hands had brushed against one another so long ago. She pushed one of Jenny’s thighs aside and caressed and squeezed the tender flesh as she kissed Jenny harder.

Jenny dug her fingertips into Vastra’s back.

Vastra slid down slightly and Jenny took the advantage, kissing and licking Vastra’s crests. Vastra’s fingers slid into Jenny and the psychic link between them connected like a bolt of lightning. Each felt the other’s pleasure, as well as their own. Every emotion, feeling, want, desire, and need was swirling in their brains. It was intense, carnal, and raw. And it was just the beginning.

Finally, Jenny’s back arched, her hips thrust upward, and her thighs closed like a vice on Vastra’s hand. She collapsed, sweat covered and gasping for breath beneath her lover.

Vastra kissed Jenny’s chest and up to her neck as she removed her hand and came back up to meet Jenny’s lips.

“I love you, Jenny.”

“I love you, Vastra.”

They lay on top of the covers, nowhere to hide—both fully exposed, for better or worse. Vastra lay on her back and Jenny rested her head on Vastra’s shoulder. She traced her fingertips along Vastra’s scales creating warm trails that quickly faded. She loved the way they varied in color and hardness along her sleek muscular body. Her touches were soft on the lighter scales of her stomach but firmer on the thicker scales of her chest and shoulders. She had never seen these scales. She had only ever seen Vastra’s arms or legs if she was tending a wound or treating hypothermia. And even then she had kept Vastra covered as much as possible.

Jenny was developing a love for Vastra’s shoulders—muscular and toned. Vastra’s whole body was lean and muscular. She was a predator by nature—strong and powerful. She could have dominated Jenny. She could have forced herself upon Jenny at any time if she had desired. Even with all her training, Jenny was no match for Vastra physically. But Vastra was gentle, tender, even now Jenny barely noticed the cool fingers lightly touching her skin.

Vastra caressed Jenny’s back as she watched Jenny explore her scales. She paid attention to Jenny’s breathing, noting each breath, warm upon her chest. And she eased her tongue out to taste Jenny’s pheromones.

“Would you be so gentle if I were a Silurian?” Jenny broke the silence in a whispered tone.

Vastra didn’t take her fingers off Jenny’s skin. “Do not take my light touch as an offense, my love. I am merely learning your body. And it is magnificent.”

“Have you,” Jenny paused, “have you had Silurian lovers?”

“No.” Vastra said bluntly. “I never found a Silurian I wanted to bond with. But you have had human lovers?”

“No.”

The word took Vastra aback. She almost removed her hand from Jenny’s skin, but didn’t want her
to think what she had said mattered.

Jenny propped up on her elbow and looked at Vastra. “I mean, I’ve done… things. Drunken fumblings, sure; but I’ve never had a proper lover. Most women around here aren’t really keen on other women. But they will kiss another woman to excite a man; or let a woman do things to them that their men won’t do. But never a proper lover.”

Vastra eased into Jenny, pressing the full length of her body into her. She gently rolled them both over as she kissed Jenny tenderly but passionately. She got onto her hands and knees and positioned herself over Jenny’s body. Leaning down she kissed Jenny on the lips, then her neck. She let her tongue snake out and taste Jenny’s skin. Jenny moaned as the cool tongue explored her neck and shoulder.

She moved further down to Jenny’s chest, kissing and tasting the soft flesh of Jenny’s breasts and stomach. Jenny gasped and arched her back, her fingers dug into the pillow above her head, and her pheromones spiked. Again, this fed Vastra’s desire. Sounds and body movements could be faked, but those pheromones were not within her control. She knew Jenny was enjoying this and that is the reaction she was hoping for.

She kissed Jenny’s side and across her stomach and continued exploring with her tongue. Jenny was moving under her, allowing her body to just react. Vastra’s hands moved along Jenny’s sides and she grabbed at her hips as she lay a trail of kisses up and down her chest and abdomen. Vastra looked up every so often as she ran her tongue across Jenny’s body. Jenny’s head was back and her eyes were closed. She was letting herself enjoy everything Vastra was doing to her. She had surrendered her body completely to her lover.

But Jenny wasn’t ready for Vastra quite yet. The connection and the physical touch had taken its toll on her for now. She reached down and placed a hand on Vastra’s crest. “Come back to me,” Jenny insisted.

A bit disappointed, Vastra obediently kissed and licked a trail back up Jenny’s torso, neck, and to her lips. Jenny wrapped her arms around Vastra’s cool body as they sank into the bed in passionate kisses.

“On your back,” Jenny ordered.

Again, Vastra obeyed and laid on her back and let Jenny straddle her on all fours. A curtain of dark hair enclosed them. Jenny leaned in and kissed Vastra’s lips, then cheeks, then neck. She used her tongue to trace a path down Vastra’s neck to her shoulder and her collar bone.

Vastra loved Jenny’s tongue. It was so unlike her own and it fascinated her. It was thick and muscular and most of all warm. She loved the way Jenny licked and bit at her scales. Jenny moved down Vastra’s chest to the soft yellow scales on her stomach. Her hands explored all over Vastra’s body: her arms, shoulders, chest, sides, and stomach. Vastra was letting herself get lost in the kisses, the touches. Jenny’s mouth and hands felt magnificent on Vastra’s skin, leaving sensual trails of heat that slowly cooled and left Vastra wanting more. She had to touch Jenny.

In a smooth, agile motion Vastra leaned up, wrapped one arm around Jenny’s small frame, and pulled herself up. They were now on their knees facing each other. They embraced and kissed and let their hands move freely over one another.

“I love you,” Jenny gasped.
“I love you,” Vastra moaned.

The psychic connection was building again.

Jenny’s hands caressed Vastra’s crests and the back of her head. Vastra’s hands explored every inch of Jenny she could reach, eventually down the outside of her thigh, then across the soft hair between her legs. She loved Jenny’s hair, all of it. She loved the things that made them different: Jenny’s body heat, her soft skin, her hair, and her sweat. It was all so exotic, so erotic to Vastra. She moved her hand between Jenny’s legs and felt how warm and wet Jenny was. Jenny gasped and tightened her embrace on Vastra. She began to breathe, heavy and warm, into Vastra’s ear.

The psychic connection was once again complete between them and they shared every emotion, every sensation of touch, and the contrasting heat and cool of their bodies. It was intoxicating.

Jenny whispered into Vastra’s ear. “What would you do to me if I were Silurian?” Her hips moved in rhythm with Vastra’s hand.

“You are not Silurian.”

Jenny pulled back and looked into Vastra, her eyes pleading, her hips moving. She wanted Vastra to be free to do anything she wanted to do. Anything a Silurian would do.

Vastra gave in. “I would mark you to let others know you were mine.”

“You are not Silurian.”

Jenny gasped at the sight of her and her pheromones spiked.

Vastra tasted the air then slid down Jenny’s body and placed her mouth on her inner thigh and bit. Hard. Jenny bucked and let out a scream. The bite hurt; but was also pleasurable. She gasped and let out a moan as Vastra licked the wound.

Vastra began to make a noise that Jenny had heard only one time before. It was the deep rumble that sounded like a combination of a growl and a purr. It was more primal than when she had heard it so long ago—when they first kissed. Jenny quickly forgot about the pain in her thigh.

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Vastra tasted the air. She didn’t touch Jenny but she tasted her all the same. The pheromones made her drunk with desire. She lowered her mouth onto Jenny. Jenny arched her back and dug her fingers into the sheets and clinched her fists. She rocked her hips in rhythm with her desires. There was no slowing down now for Vastra, her growling got louder and deeper she devoured Jenny like a hungry animal until finally, Jenny stopped moving her hips, arched her back and yelled for Vastra to stop. Vastra obeyed.

She kissed a trail up Jenny’s body. Jenny was sweating proper now and her salty skin was delicious. Vastra licked Jenny’s abdomen and chest and looked back at Jenny’s thigh. It was already bruising and a small amount of blood had seeped up from where her teeth had broken the
skin. She climbed up to meet Jenny’s eyes.

“You are mine, Jenny Flint.”

“Always,” Jenny panted and pulled her lover to her and enveloped her in her arms.

Jenny’s breathing returned to normal. She once again lay with her head on Vastra’s shoulder.

“I want to touch you,” she said. “I want to do to you what you did to me. But I don’t know...” she paused. “Are you the same as me?”

“No.”

“What do I do?”

“You do not have to do anything,” Vastra said. “Everything you felt, I felt, through the psychic link.”

“But I want to,” Jenny said. “Will you enjoy it? If you aren’t like me, will it give you pleasure?”

“Yes.”

“Then stop me if I do something wrong,” Jenny said.

Jenny straddled Vastra’s hips. She leaned down and kissed and licked Vastra’s neck and shoulders while her hands explored Vastra’s chest and abdomen. Her long hair fell across Vastra’s body and the Silurian let out a low rumbling purr.

She kissed further down to Vastra’s chest making warm dots along the paths of scales. Her hand caressed her abdomen and explored further as she swept her hair along the sensitive skin. The scales became softer, like cool silk, and almost white as they disappeared between Vastra’s legs. Jenny’s hand followed the soft trail and Vastra’s breathing and body reacted to this new touch.

Jenny shifted and was no longer straddling Vastra, she was now beside her. She knew all she had to do was listen to her lover’s body for direction. No words were necessary. She watched Vastra’s breathing and she listened to her purr. As her hand moved farther down the psychic connection began again to form in bursts of sensation.

She slipped her hand between Vastra’s legs and onto her thighs. Here the scales were smooth and soft. She let her thumb brush against Vastra. Vastra reacted with deeper, more primal purrs and growls. Jenny did not feel familiar anatomy. Vastra was unfamiliar, but she knew what she was doing was wanted. She could hear it and feel it through the connection.

“Inside,” Vastra thought and Jenny heard it in her mind as plain as day.

She didn’t need to ask if Vastra was sure. Not like Vastra had done with her. Carefully she slipped the tip of her finger just inside and the psychic connection formed fully. Jenny knew what to do, how to move. She could feel what Vastra felt and it was intense. It wasn’t just the physical pleasure that Vastra felt, it was the emotions, the desire, everything flooded into Jenny. Even the detail that Vastra loved the warmth of Jenny’s fingers inside her. It was unlike anything she had ever experienced and it was almost overwhelming.

Vastra’s purring had become a growl so deep it was barely audible to her human ears. These
reactions were feeding Jenny’s own desires; but she was patient and worked at the pace that Vastra set with her body. Finally, Vastra’s hips rocked. Inside, her muscles tightened around Jenny’s fingers. She arched her back and both women released in an orgasm that sent shockwaves through their bodies.

Jenny kissed her way back to her lover’s lips careful to let her hair brush gently against Vastra’s entire torso on her way up. Looking her in the eyes she watched as the grey tempest settled to the familiar cerulean blue.

“You are mine,” Jenny said with a smile. “And what a proper lover I have.”

“Always,” Vastra smiled back and embraced her lover.

Sunlight filtered into the bedroom waking Jenny from her slumber. Startled for a moment for sleeping so late, she quickly remembered the night before and realized the cool embrace of her lover’s skin on hers. She smiled and let out a content sigh. But there were things to do and she tried to get up. Cool muscular arms wrapped tighter around her and the Silurian embracing her let out a lazy hiss.

“I have to get up,” Jenny said quietly.

Vastra growled. “Not today.”

“Yes, today,” Jenny insisted. “There are things that must be done.”

Vastra tightened her embrace. “We have the day off.”

“Day off?” Jenny laughed. “When have you ever taken a day off?”

“Since I have a reason to stay in bed all day,” she purred into Jenny’s warm back.

“Well neither of us will be up for another row like last night if we don’t get some food.”

Vastra growled. She couldn’t argue with logic.

“Besides, I have to visit the loo. So you better let me up an’ stop squeezing,” Jenny insisted.

Vastra growled again in protest but loosened her embrace enough for Jenny to get up out of bed.

“I’ll go downstairs and get us some breakfast,” Jenny said.

Vastra opened her eyes. Jenny stood beside the bed naked, beautiful. Her hair was wild and had never looked lovelier. Cerulean eyes scanned down the human’s body, stopping at the bite mark on her inner thigh. It was bruised and speckled with dried blood. Vastra smiled.

Jenny saw where her eyes were and she smiled too. It was painful, but she didn’t complain.

Jenny grabbed a gown from Vastra’s dresser and slipped it on. She left the bedroom and returned shortly with a tray of food, tea, and blood. They sat at the small table in Vastra’s room and quietly ate their morning meal.

“Did I hurt you last night?” Vastra asked breaking the silence.
“No. I told you I’m not fragile.”

“I meant the bite,” Vastra asked.

“Oh. Yes, but,” Jenny paused, “I like that you marked me. I want you to feel free to be your Silurian self when we are together.”

“Silurians can be quite violent in the throes of passion. I will have to be careful.”

“I’m not a china doll.” Jenny reached out and put her hand on top of Vastra’s. “You can be rough with me. If there is something I can’t handle I’ll tell you. You just have to be able to stop when I say so.”

“Always.”

They finished their breakfast in silence.

“I need to take a bath,” Jenny said as they both sat their tea cups on the tray.

“A bath? No,” Vastra protested.

“I smell awful. I smell of sweat and…” Jenny blushed.

“I love the smell of you,” Vastra said as she let her tongue taste the air around Jenny.

“Stop,” Jenny said.

Vastra obeyed. She slowly retracted her tongue back into her mouth.

“You don’t sweat, Vastra. You always smell lovely unless you have gotten something foreign on you.” Jenny looked into her lover’s eyes. “I reek of last night.”

“Jenny, I love your scent. Your sweat, your pheromones, all of you. I much prefer it to the rose water or the lavender you use on your hair and skin. I only want to smell you.”

“Why didn’t you say something earlier,” Jenny caressed Vastra’s cheek. “I would have stopped using that straight away.”

“I didn’t want to offend.”

“I was the one who was offending,” Jenny smiled. “I don’t realize how sensitive your tongue is—your sense of smell.”

“Its fine, love,” Vastra smiled. “It is solved. Now, let us go back to bed.

“I’m going to take a bath. If not for your sake then for my own.” She kissed her Silurian lover then removed the gown and let it drop to the floor.

Vastra watched as Jenny left the room and closed the door behind her. She was covered in Jenny’s scent and it was intoxicating. She had no desire to wash it from her scales, but she thought it only right. She retrieved a cast iron kettle from atop the radiator and poured warm water into the wash basin and began to clean herself.

When Jenny returned, Vastra was in the center of the bed sitting up with her legs crossed. Her palms were on her knees and her eyes were closed. She looked to be meditating. A small fire popped and crackled and the room was warm. Jenny stretched out on the settee and watched
Vastra.

Vastra smiled. “Hello Jenny.” She didn’t open her eyes or move from her position.

“I didn’t mean to bother you,” she said.

“You didn’t.”

“What are you doing?”

“I am telling my sisters about you. About us.”

Jenny didn’t speak.

Vastra opened her eyes and saw a confused looking Jenny laying naked on the sofa. “Come here. Please.”

Jenny came over and laid across the foot of the bed.

“I know it is silly,” Vastra started. “My sisters are dead and they cannot hear my words, much less answer me. But I have no one here to tell of the wonderful things that are happening in my life. No one to tell about you.”

Jenny reached out and touched Vastra’s hand, which was still resting on her knee.

 Vastra smiled again. “Silurians do not speak to the dead. That is a foolish human ritual. The dead do not listen and they do not reply. So there is no point. I do not know what I was thinking.”

Jenny got to her knees in front of Vastra. Vastra looked her up and down and paused again on the bruised bite mark on Jenny’s thigh.

Jenny took Vastra’s hands and put them on the curves of her sides. Carefully, she placed herself onto Vastra’s lap and wrapped her legs around the muscular Silurian’s waist. She rested her hands on Vastra’s shoulders. Those shoulders.

“You smell wonderful,” Vastra said, taking in a long draw of air across her tongue.

Jenny had not used the lavender or the rose oil. “May I ask you something? About Silurians?”

“You may ask me anything.”


Vastra flicked her tongue out and tasted the air around Jenny. Not that she needed to, she had memorized Jenny’s scent from the first moment she encountered it. “To me, you smell fresh and natural. Nothing specific, but like fresh cut grass or a spring rain or freshly tilled soil.”

“To you?” Jenny said. “Would I smell different to another Silurian?”

“Probably. Not greatly, but to a degree, yes.”

“And I smell different from other humans?”

“Most definitely,” Vastra said. “Each human has its own scent, or more to the point, combination of scents.”
“That’s how you can track criminals,” Jenny smiled.

“Precisely,” Vastra smiled back. “And you, humans, smell differently when different pheromones are being expressed. You smell differently when you are angry compared to happy. Or when you are calm as opposed to excited.”

“Then how do you know it’s the same person if you get their scent from when they were angry, but when you track them they are happy or scared or some other emotion?”

“The basic scent is still there,” Vastra said. “I have learned to tease the scents apart for their pieces as well as know them as a whole for a particular person.”

“What about with me? How do I smell at other times?”

Vastra smiled. She laid soft kisses on Jenny’s neck, lips, and cheeks. “When you are excited, aroused, you smell of musk and spice; salty and sweet. Like saffron and cinnamon; sea air and honey.”

Jenny blushed and buried her face in Vastra’s neck.

“Do not be embarrassed, it is wonderful,” Vastra said.

Jenny pulled away from her sanctuary in Vastra’s neck. “What is the difference between how I taste, and how I smell? Since you use your tongue for both.”

“That is a very insightful question. When I smell the air, I am actually tasting it. When I put my tongue on something I am tasting it too. So the air is just a dilute version of the physical form. And the air can be contaminated with other scents.” Vastra let out her tongue and tasted the air around Jenny.

“Like now, I also taste the smoke from the fire and the lingering scent of our breakfast. When I taste your skin I taste the pheromones concentrated in your sweat,” Vastra smiled and kissed Jenny on the neck, licking her as she did. “But I also taste anything else on your body, such as the rose oil. I am glad you did not use it this time, though I can still taste it. Scents linger for me.”

“But I do smell different than other humans?” Jenny asked.

“Yes,” Vastra said. “All of them but you utterly stink.”

Jenny laughed and kissed Vastra’s lips.

“I have other questions,” Jenny said.

“You can ask me anything, Jenny.”

“When I touched you last night, you are different than me.”

“I am not human. Of course I am different.”

“Are you like the reptiles in the books you have in the library?”

“No,” Vastra smiled. “I am more evolved than the reptiles of today, or any other reptile that has ever existed. I have a reproduction and digestive system more advanced than other reptiles. As such, I have anatomy more similar to yours, at least on the inside. Though I lack your external anatomy.”
“I noticed that,” Jenny smiled.

Vastra smiled.

“You said once you could become pregnant. You could fertilize your own eggs and give birth without the need for a male.”

“That is correct,” Vastra agreed.

“I want you to explain that to me,” Jenny said.

“Perhaps another time,” Vastra offered. “It will take a bit of effort on my part. I will need to remember all of my biology lessons.”

“Alright, love.”

“What else do you want to know?” Vastra asked. “I can tell you have more questions.”

“How do two Silurians make love?” She needed to know. It was important to her that she fulfill her lover in both what she was able to give and receive.

“Just as humans, it is different for each pair,” Vastra seemed confused by the question.

“But tell me about the things that are similar. Like the bite.”

“The bite is reserved for life mates,” Vastra diverted her eyes.

“Oh,” Jenny realized the weight of what Vastra had just said. She reached for Vastra’s face and turned her head back to make eye contact.

“Silurians mark their life mate, to show everyone they are taken,” Vastra said. “The bites are usually on the neck, shoulder, or other more visible location on the body; but I wanted this to remain private—only for us. Your culture would not understand.”


Vastra was a bit hesitant to answer.

“Please.”

“Silurian copulation between two females can be an extension of our warrior roots. It can become quite competitive as each member of the pair vies for dominancy in the physical aspects of the relationship. It can be quite violent and carnal.”

“I am no match for you, physically. Will you become bored if I am unable to compete with you?”

“I do not want to compete with you, Jenny.” Vastra pulled her closer. “Not all Silurian sex is about competition and violence. It can also be tender and gentle.”

Jenny smiled. “That was obvious last night as well.”

Vastra smiled.

“So I don’t have to worry that you’ll get tired of being with a human?”

“What I love most about you is what makes you human. I love our differences. Your warm skin on
my cool body. The feel of your hair as it brushes against my scales. Your tongue, warm and strong as it traces along my skin. Your soft breasts against my hard muscles. All the things that make you human are what I love when we are together. I do not want you to make love to me like a Silurian, but like the human you are.”

“I bet you never thought you’d say that,” Jenny smiled.

“No. But you have captured my heart. And you are the most exquisite thing I have ever seen. And you are beginning to smell of musk and saffron and sea air and honey.”

Jenny cupped Vastra’s face and gave her a passionate kiss.

Vastra tightened her embrace on Jenny, completely wrapping both arms tight around her and drawing her near.

“What do you like about me, Jenny?” Vastra asked in her lover’s ear.

Jenny was caressing Vastra’s head and crown and face as she kissed her. “Your cool soft tongue on my skin. Your cool fingers inside me.” Jenny’s voice was wispy and her breathing quick and shallow.

The psychic connection was forming again.

Vastra kissed Jenny everywhere her mouth could reach; but this wasn’t enough. She rose from her cross legged position and Jenny tightened her grip with her legs around Vastra’s waist. Vastra rose onto her knees and raked her fingernails down Jenny’s back. Jenny gasped. Cradling her back, Vastra lowered Jenny to the bed; Jenny’s thighs draped over Vastra’s hips.

Vastra touched Jenny. At first it was slow and tender, then as Jenny’s hips moved telling Vastra what she wanted, it became rougher, a little quicker. She let Jenny lead her. She watched her move and listened to her breathe. The heat and the pheromones flooded Vastra’s senses. Her eyes swirled dark grey and the connection between them allowed Vastra to feel everything that Jenny felt.

Vastra lowered herself to Jenny. Her mouth and hand now working in unison. Just as Jenny reached her breaking point, Vastra bit down on the same place on her inner thigh. Jenny screamed and moaned it was all so perfectly timed.

Vastra crawled up Jenny, kissing her soft pale skin as she made her way to her lover’s lips.

Making eye contact Jenny asked, “Will you do that every time you make love to me?”

“Yes,” Vastra replied. “Until it is permanent.”

“Good,” Jenny grabbed Vastra by the head and pulled her into a kiss. “I am yours, always.”
April slipped into May and May gave way June and a new normal had set in at 13 Paternoster Row. It wasn’t that different from the old normal; but changes in both personal and professional lives were evident. Jenny still woke at five a.m., only now it was with a naked Silurian pressed against her bare body. Every morning was a battle for Jenny to get out of bed as Vastra sleepily clung to her for warmth. Jenny won that battle every morning, one way or another, and started her day while Vastra always took a little longer to get going.

Breakfast was still quiet and Vastra ate her customary warmed blood and raw meat—usually liver, sipped tea, and read the morning paper. Jenny sat quietly, planned her day, made shopping lists, and sometimes read the back of the paper if Vastra was particularly quiet.

They always kissed goodbye at half past seven as Vastra now had to report her progress on the Whitechapel case to Inspector Abberline daily at eight a.m. There were no leads, no suspects, no new witnesses, and no new evidence. The case was at a stalemate and Inspector Abberline refused to give her anything new. Instead, he publically berated her for subpar detective work. If his goal was to turn Vastra into the laughing stock of Scotland Yard, he may well be succeeding.

Vastra left Scotland Yard each morning with her own agenda and continued her surveillance of Samuel Pines. She inquired about the Whitechapel murder if there was ever any mention of it, but there seldom was. The whole affair was fading out of everyone’s memory and most folks in the Whitechapel District had better things to do than concern themselves with a dead whore—no matter how disturbing her death was.

Jenny helped Vastra when and where she could, but with only one case to assist with, her routine was back to domestic duties and training. She did insist on the occasional patrol with Vastra to keep her street wits about her. And she now included practice with her lock picks as part of her standard training routine to maintain that skill as well.

Today Jenny tidied up 13 Paternoster Row before heading for market. She’d then return home for more domestic duties and a bit of training followed by a warm bath. And with any luck she’d still be awake when Vastra finally came home.

This was their new normal.

Vastra’s Day:

Daily surveillance of Samuel Pines offered no sign that he was an informant for law enforcement or that he was collaborating with anyone for that matter. He was a loner and an opportunist, plain and simple—just as Vastra had discovered so many weeks ago. In the time she’d been following him he picked pockets, stole the occasional crate or barrel from the docks to resell the goods, and even stole a pint from the tap when the bartender went to pick up mugs from the tables. He tried to swindle drunks with card games or dice, but he was fairly incompetent at that. Vastra still had no idea why Kostya had wanted him dead.

She still hadn’t seen him meet with any officers or pass along any information via hired hands. If he had worked with Abberline in the past, there was no evidence the relationship was still active. Vastra went back and forth over whether or not to confront Pines; but if she did, she would have played her hand. And for now, she felt it best to remain as unconnected as possible with anyone.
tied to Kostya. But she did have an idea.

With Jenny’s help, Vastra had accumulated a small group of informants over the past few years. Most of them lived on the streets and weren’t the smartest, but they were loyal for coin and they blended in. She didn’t use them for anything dangerous; and she saw an opportunity to use one of them now to help get information from Pines.

“An’ that’s all I ‘ave to do?” Stanley asked.

“Yes,” Vastra said. “Just ask him the question and report back to me what he says.”

“But I already work for you, ma’am,” Stanley said.

“You are not actually going to work for anyone else. This is merely to see if he is working with the Yard,” Vastra explained—again. Her patience was running thin. “You simply need to ask him if he is an informant for the Yard.”

“What if ‘e says yes?” Stanley asked.

“Then ask him for whom he works,” Vastra said.

“What if ‘e says no.”

“Then tell him that is not what you heard and tell him you will cut him in if he will tell you to whom he reports at Scotland Yard.”

“But I already work for you, ma’am,” Stanley said again.

It took all of the Silurian’s willpower not to strike Stanley down where he stood with her venomous tongue. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. “Stanley,” Vastra said, “do you want to earn some coin or not?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Pines was heading for the docks half an hour ago. Chances are you will find him at the market selling some stolen goods. Do not approach him there. Wait until he leaves and follow him. He will most likely head to a pub to spend his newly earned coin. Approach him there and tell him you heard he is an informant for Scotland Yard and that you want in. Ask him who you need to speak with. Then report back to me tonight outside the Drake. I will find you and I will have the rest of your money.”

“Alright.”

“Are you sure you understand what to do?” Vastra asked.

“I think so.”

Vastra wasn’t sure if her informant fully understood the plan or not. But she thought this would be the best—and safest—way to find out about Pines’ involvement, if any, with the Yard. All she could do now is hope Stanley did as he was told and didn’t compromise her identity in the process.

Vastra spent the day investigating the scene of the Whitechapel assault. She wanted to double check every possible spot from which someone could have witnessed the crime. She made note of every window and every vantage point that had a clear view of the scene. If at all possible, she found out who had access to rooms with a view to the ally. She traced routes and found access to
roof tops and balconies. But the alley was narrow and there were only a few vantage points from which the assault could have been witnessed. Maps and notes safely tucked into an interior pocket of her cape, she headed toward Sweep Street to wait for Stanley.

Around eight o’clock Stanley staggered onto Sweep Street and awkwardly fidgeted around outside the Drake. Vastra watched for a few minutes to make sure he was alone and hadn’t been followed, then approached. She walked beside him, spoke, “follow me,” and kept walking into an alley.

“Were you able to speak with Mr. Pines?” Vastra asked once safely out of sight.

“Sure was,” Stanley smiled.

Vastra waited for a moment for him to tell her what he had learned, but he didn’t speak. “And, what did he say?”

“Right,” he stammered. “’e said ‘e weren’t no rat and if I knew wut wus best I’d steer clear of workin’ with the bobbies. Said ‘e talked to one of ‘em once and he roughed ‘im up right proper.”

“Did he say what he spoke to one of them about or to whom he spoke?”

“No, ma’am,” he said. “Just said one came to ‘im askin’ questions and ‘e wouldn’t answer. Said the bobby threatened to lock ‘im away. Said he’d plant opium on ‘im and haul ‘im in; but ‘e didn’t. Jus’ empty threats.”

“Interesting,” Vastra said. “But he did not say what the bobby asked him?”

“No ma’am.”

“Did he say anything else? When this occurred? How many approached him? If they were in uniform or plain clothes? Anything at all?”

“No, ma’am. That’s all ‘e said.”

“Thank you, Stanley.” Vastra smiled and handed Stanley the rest of his pay. He promptly disappeared into the Drake. Vastra headed home with her new information.

Jenny’s Day:

After morning chores, Jenny headed to market around mid-day. With Frankie’s success and taking her act on the road, market days were lonelier and less fun than they once were. She and Frankie used to visit and have tea and generally make a day of it. Today, more so than other days, she missed her friend. The weather was perfect—not too cold and not too hot. The sun was out and the air was filled with scents of the market in spring.

Jenny bought fresh vegetables from a cart—onions, garlic, turnips, cabbage, and rhubarb.

“You have to sample the strawberries, miss,” the farmer said.

Jenny brought the red fruit to her mouth and took a bite. “Ummm,” she said, smiling. They were sweet and juicy. This was a luxury she would have never been able to afford just a few short years ago. “I’ll take a batch.”

She wished Vastra appreciated foods other than raw meat and blood; but Silurians were predators and Vastra ate to sustain herself, not for enjoyment.
“That’s some right good looking rhubarb,” a man said as the farmer placed Jenny’s produce in a bag. “And strawberries—you gonna make a nice pie with that?"

“Yeah, probably,” Jenny said. She wondered if she could tempt Vastra with something sweet.

Jenny juggled the bags, one in each arm, to steady them for the walk home.

“Can I help you carry those, miss?” the man asked with a smile.

“No thanks,” Jenny smiled back. “I can manage.”

Jenny began to walk away from the cart and out of the market.

“Some tea then?” the man asked, walking along beside her. “Can I buy you a cuppa?”

“Oh, no thank you,” Jenny said as she walked along. “Lots to do.” She didn’t want to be rude, but she also didn’t want to give the bloke any ideas.

The man stopped. “Well I hope that you and Madam Vastra enjoy the strawberry rhubarb pie,” he said as Jenny walked away.

Jenny stopped in her tracks. The hair on the back of her neck stood up and she turned around.

“What did you say?”

“You are Jenny Flint, are you not?” the man asked. “Madam Vastra’s housemaid?”

“What’s it to you?” Jenny asked.

“I suppose it’s nothing to me,” he said. “That all you are though, Jenny Flint? Madam Vastra’s housemaid.”

“I don’t know what you mean, sir,” Jenny said. “What are you implying?”

“I’m not implying anything,” he said. “I’m just asking.”

“Who are you?” Jenny asked.

“I’m Inspector Abberline with Scotland Yard,” he said and held up his credentials. “Pleased to make your acquaintance.”

“What business is it of yours who I work for?” Jenny said.

“I suppose it isn’t.”

“Then if you’ll excuse me, I have things to do,” Jenny turned and walked away.

“Miss Flint,” he called after her, but didn’t make an attempt to follow. “Do you know a man by the name of Simon Higby?”

Vastra arrived home around nine p.m. and immediately tasted Jenny’s pheromones strong in the air. They were elevated and harsh, like scorched spices. Something was wrong. She didn’t bother to take off her boots or gloves but pulled he veil off quickly and tossed it onto the coat tree by the
“Jenny.” She found Jenny in the parlor, pacing. “What is it? What is wrong?”

“Inspector Abberline questioned me at the market today,” Jenny said without hesitation.

Vastra’s heart skipped a beat and then almost burst from her chest to catch up. The word Jenny used was not lost on her—“questioned.” Jenny didn’t say he spoke with her or that she met him.

“What do you mean he questioned you?” Abberline was investigating Vastra and Lang and all she could think is that it had to do with Kostya. She had purposefully kept Jenny in the dark about Kostya’s fate and everything she did to free the woman she loved from that evil bastard. “What did he ask you?”

A knock at the front door interrupted them. Jenny startled then moved to answer.

“Leave it” Vastra said. “What did he ask you, Jenny? You are upset.”

There was another round of knocking. The brass ring striking the plate echoed through the entry hall.

Jenny looked toward the direction of the door and then back to Vastra.

“Whatever it is it can wait,” Vastra insisted. “What did he ask you, Jenny?”

“He,” Jenny started to speak, but she was interrupted again with heavy and insistent banging, this time fist on wood.

Frustrated, Vastra flew to the door, barely placing her veil back on her head before flinging it open.

“What?”

A meek young man, dirty and way too skinny, stood there with a piece of paper in his outstretched hand.

Vastra snatched the paper from his hand and slammed the door in his face. She returned to the parlor and threw the paper on the table.

“What’d it say?” Jenny asked nodding to the paper.

“I did not read it. It is not important right now. What did Inspector Abberline ask you, Jenny? What did he say?” Vastra was anxious and Jenny knew it.

“He asked if I knew Simon Higby,” Jenny said. Her eyes pleaded with Vastra. “Why would he ask me that?”

“I do not know,” Vastra said. She wasn’t lying; she didn’t know why Abberline would ask Jenny that question. But she knew it had something to do with his investigation into her, DCI Lang, and the Kostya case. Her fears were confirmed and now Jenny was being drug into it.

“I think you should read the telegram,” Jenny said.

“It is not a telegram. It was delivered by a boy who was clearly living on the streets,” Vastra said.

“Then I think it’s even more important that you read it,” Jenny said.

Reluctantly, Vastra retrieved the paper from the table and unfolded it. It read: “Limehouse docks
off Queen Street. You have twenty minutes if you want to keep your job. I.A.”

Jenny tried to identify the emotion that washed across Vastra’s face. Was it fear? Vastra was not easily frightened. “What is it?”

“I have to go.” Vastra grabbed her veil. The tone in her voice didn’t go unnoticed by her lover—she was worried.


“I must meet Inspector Abberline.” Vastra headed toward the door.

“What’s going on, Vastra?” Jenny chased after her.

“I cannot tell you,” Vastra said, “not now at least. I have to leave, but I promise I will speak to you when I return.”

“Let me go with you,” Jenny said.

“No,” Vastra snapped. The word came across angrier than she meant it. She approached Jenny. “This is something I must do alone.”

“Does this have to do with that ‘loose end’ you’ve been following up on the past two months?” Jenny asked.

Vastra wanted to lie, but she knew she couldn’t lie to Jenny without getting caught. “It is related,” Vastra said.

“You’re scaring me, Vastra,” Jenny reached out to caress Vastra’s cheek.

Vastra could taste Jenny’s pheromones: anxiety, love, fear. She took Jenny’s hands and kissed her tenderly on the lips. “I will be fine. I will be home soon and I will tell you everything I know. I promise. But for now, you must trust me.”

“I do,” Jenny said. “I don’t like this, but I trust you.”

Not willing to call his bluff, Vastra quickly made her way to the Limehouse docks. Heavy fog rolled off the Thames engulfing everything around it and reducing visibility to mere feet. This was a fortuitous advantage. She could still taste and hear anyone approaching and within minutes her sensitive ears detected heavy footfalls. One flick of her tongue revealed Inspector Abberline approaching from the west. She moved in his direction.

“Madam Vastra,” Abberline greeted her when he was within sight of the veiled detective.

Vastra quickly surveyed him for anything obvious, anything out of the ordinary; she saw nothing. “Inspector Abberline.” She flicked her tongue behind her veil. His pheromones were as they always were. Nothing was elevated and nothing gave her pause. Whatever his business was with her, he was comfortable with it.

“Thank you for meeting with me under these conditions,” he said.

“You did not leave me option to refuse,” Vastra quipped.
“I suppose I didn’t.”

Again, she flicked her tongue slightly beneath her veil. He was calm. “Do not keep me in suspense, Inspector. Why have you threatened me into this clandestine meeting in the middle of the night? What pray tell is so urgent and so secretive?”

“I thought the isolation might afford us the opportunity to speak candidly,” he said.

“Speak about what, Inspector?”

“I am at a loss, Madam, to say the least. I have followed your career from the beginning. I’ve seen you solve cases with less than nothing to go on, so it confuses me as to why you cannot seem to solve the Whitechapel case. Hell, you can’t even garner a suspect or a lead. And it’s the only case you have to concentrate on at the moment.”

“You called me out in the fog and the darkness and threatened my position with the Yard to discuss my failures with this case? Do you not get enough of that each day at headquarters?” Vastra snapped.

“Why do you suppose you are unable to solve this case, Madam Vastra?” Abberline paced around. “You have such an impeccable record when working with DCI Lang. Is it me?”

“There is no evidence,” Vastra countered.

“That has never stopped you before,” Abberline said.

Vastra stared through her veil at Abberline. “What are you accusing me of?” she asked. She tasted the air. Still he was calm.

“Nothing,” Abberline retorted, attempting to sound innocent. “Have you done something wrong? I’m merely making an observation.”

“What observation is that?” Vastra asked.

“There was little to no evidence in the first case you worked. A case that lay cold for years, stumping Scotland Yard’s most decorated detectives. Yet somehow you managed to not only solve it, but earn your place with Scotland Yard as a top investigator.” Abberline smirked. “You have to admit, that is as curious as it is impressive. I’m just looking for insight as to your tactics.”

Vastra did not speak. She owed this man nothing. Besides, he only thought he wanted to know the truth. Vastra was now positive he thought she was dirty—a dishonest detective willing to break the law to solve a case. She had no way to defend herself against this accusation. It wasn’t like she could reveal her secrets—her secret weapon.

“Did you know that you are the reason I came to London?” Abberline asked. “Like I said, I’ve been following your career since the beginning. A detective, seemingly from out of nowhere, a woman no less, solving a case so old no one even thought about any more. Impressive.” He continued his slow methodical semicircle around Vastra. “When I got word that DCI Lang was being promoted I jumped at the chance for the transfer and to work as your superior.”

“I was not aware of that fact,” Vastra answered.

“Well, how could you be?” he said. “I’ve worked very hard to keep my motives unknown to anyone but myself. It’s safer that way, isn’t it, Madam. Keeping your secrets to yourself. Not sharing them with anyone.”
“I suppose if you want to keep secrets, it is best not to share them,” she said.

“But you have, haven’t you? You have shared your secrets.”

Vastra stiffened. Was he implying that Lang worked with her to solve the cases? Or was he talking about Jenny? Why else would he have approached her? Why would he ask her about Simon Higby? Was this a veiled threat? How much did he know about her? She already disliked this man; she was beginning to hate him.

Abberline was a seasoned detective and he noticed the subtle change in Vastra’s posture. “Come now, Madam. I came all the way to London to learn about you. To learn your secrets. How do you do it? I can only come up with a handful of ideas to explain your success. I dare say few would entertain some of my theories. And, well, the alternative is that you are as crooked a detective as the criminals you apprehend. Of course it could just be luck.”

“Luck does play a role in our profession. Does it not?” she answered.

“Not this much luck.” Abberline continued his semicircle around Vastra’s shadowy black figure. “I suspect it is something more, something you cannot admit. Won’t admit. But you can trust me. Won’t you tell me? After all, you’ve told at least one other, maybe more, one more person on your side won’t hurt.”

Who did he mean? Did he think she and Lang were in league together? Did he know Jenny was more than just Vastra’s housemaid? “You have not behaved as though you are on my side, Inspector,” Vastra said.

“You’ve been secretive and unwilling to share your strategies with me,” he countered.

“Are you accusing me of illegal actions, Inspector?”

“I am accusing you of nothing. I am asking that you enlighten me.”

“I fear you would not believe me if I tried to explain,” Vastra said, shifting her body to maintain eye contact with Abberline as he paced. Her tongue snaked out beneath her veil to monitor the human’s pheromones. He was still calm and his pheromones indicated he felt in control.

“You would be surprised at what I would believe, Madam. I have an open mind,” he said. “You should come for supper one evening. Peruse my library, my museum—my collection.”

Vastra didn’t appreciate the cryptic tone. What was he playing at? “You do seem a learned man. Is your library large?” She attempted to play along. But this petty banter was not in her wheelhouse.

“I have quite the collection of mysteries,” he said, pausing, perhaps baiting Vastra.

“I am sorry,” Vastra said. “I do not enjoy fiction. So much history on this planet, why invent false stories?”

“Not fictional mysteries,” Abberline added, “medical mysteries. Scientific mysteries. Oddities from across the globe. Specimen of the world’s most bizarre and unexplained phenomena.”

This was sounding more and more like a threat to the Silurian. She did not respond. But she did notice the spike in pheromones. He was enjoying this. He was toying with her and he enjoyed the thrill of the chase.

“You could bring a guest,” he said. “Someone who understands your... condition.”
“What are you...,” Vastra’s head snapped to the right. She heard people approaching. “Who is that?” Vastra demanded. “Who have you brought with you?”

“No one,” he admitted. “I am alone.”

Vastra tasted the air. He was telling the truth but his pheromones had changed, there was fear. “Three men are coming this way. They are attempting to be stealthy, but I hear them.”

“I hear nothing,” Abberline said. “Are you sure?”

“Of course I am sure, you ape,” Vastra spat. “I am not easily ambushed.”

The word “ape” either escaped Abberline’s attention or he purposely ignored it. Either way, he did not mention it.

“Careful then,” he said. “Anyone out here at this time is up to no good.”

Vastra could taste the fear rolling off of him. “We are out here at this time, Inspector. Are we up to no good?”

“Well, well,” a scratchy voice said from the fog. “Wut ‘ave we ‘ere? Out for a midnight stroll on the docks with your mistress?” A dirty twenty something year old man with scraggly hair and an unkempt beard emerged. “You shouldn’t bring a lady out ‘ere at this time of night. It ain’t safe.”

“Leave us be,” Abberline said. “I am a detective with Scotland Yard and you best be on your way.”

These men were not part of Abberline’s plan. He was genuinely scared. Vastra went into high alert.

“You a bobby?” the man laughed. “You don’t sound like a bobby. You sound like an uptight banker in over ‘is ‘ead in the middle of the night trying to score a little action with a lady.” He looked to Vastra and back to Abberline. “Which means you brought money. And I’ll be takin’ that money and I’ll be takin’ your lady as well. If there’s anything left when I’m done you can ‘ave ‘er back.”

Vastra remained still and calm. She could see the man who was speaking; but her attention was focused on the two men hidden in the fog. One was behind Abberline and one was now behind her.

“I suggest you leave before you end up hurt,” Abberline warned, “and in jail.”

Vastra didn’t know how capable Abberline was in a fight. She suspected he could hold his own against one. But they clearly planned on double teaming him and then coming for her.

Suddenly and without warning, a man emerged from the fog behind Abberline and wrapped both arms tight around him. The man who had been speaking rushed toward him. Abberline was now flanked and held captive.

Vastra had to act. She disappeared into the fog and the third man scrambled to find her.

Sounds of fists against flesh and grunts of pain emanated from Abberline’s location. Vastra couldn’t assess his situation; she had to deal with the third man first.

Sensing movement in her direction, Vastra side stepped and subdued her attacker. A “crack” followed by a blood curdling scream rang out in the fog. Then, all was silent save the sound of a “thud” onto the wooden dock.
“Bean, you a’right?” yelled one of the assailants near Abberline?

There was no answer.

“Bean?” No answer. “Oi! Bean!”

Fog swirled around the three men as Abberline struggled to free himself. The first man repeatedly punched him in his stomach and face. The second man held Abberline up, squeezing tighter and tighter.

Vastra made a large arc around behind them. They heard what could only be described as a whip; then the man behind Abberline dropped like a sack of potatoes.

Abberline stumbled backwards a few steps, almost tripping over the body. He doubled over and held his stomach where the man had been punching him.

The man in front of Abberline looked confused. He quickly drew a knife from his jacket and slowly followed Abberline. He stepped over the body of his associate. “What the ‘ell are you playin’ at mister?”

“Now now,” Abberline stuttered, continuing his slow retreat. He was afraid and the man knew it. He was in no way prepared to fight someone with a knife.

“Now, wut?” The man smiled a black toothed grin and kept approaching.

Suddenly, something wrapped around the man’s neck. Abberline couldn’t make it out. It was a purplish-pink cord-like thing.

The man dropped the knife and helplessly pawed at his neck. He attempted to remove the thing that was cutting off his oxygen supply; then, he fell, limp, on the spot.

The “cord” uncoiled from the man’s throat as he fell and retracted away through the fog. The mist parted as Madam Vastra stepped toward Abberline. Her hat and veil nowhere to be seen; her face and head fully exposed.

“You wanted to know my secret, Inspector Abberline.”
Proper Introductions

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“You wanted to know my secret, Inspector Abberline.”

Vastra sized up the human. “Now, is this going to be a civilized conversation? Or did those thugs just beat you to within an inch of your life and leave you to die?”

Abberline stood motionless, silent, and stared at Vastra. He understood her meaning. And he believed she could kill him on the spot and let the three assailants take all the blame.

She snaked out her tongue to taste the air and discern the ape’s emotions. His eyes widened, but to her surprise there were no fear hormones, nor did she detect anything that could be interpreted as threatening. If anything, he was excited and curious, but not scared.

“You are not surprised,” she said.

“I had heard of your,” he hesitated, “‘skin condition’; but I knew there was more to it than that. What are you?”

“Silurian.”

He furrowed his brow, looked down as if trying to remember, and then looked back at Vastra. “That’s a new one for me,” he said calmly. “What planet are you from?”

Vastra cocked her head to one side. “Actually…,” Motion in the fog behind Abberline silenced her.

Abberline’s body stiffened as a cold steel blade pressed against his throat. “Vastra, your veil,” Jenny said. She stood behind Abberline ready to do whatever was necessary to protect the woman she loved.

“Jenny, put the tanto down,” Vastra said.

“Ah, Miss Flint,” Abberline said. “Your employer and I were about to have a civilized conversation.”

Jenny could see two unconscious thugs strewn about the dock. “This doesn’t look very civilized.” She refused to remove the blade and in fact pressed it harder into Abberline’s skin.

“Jenny, I assure you, everything is under control,” Vastra said, her eyes locked with her lover’s.

Jenny slowly removed the tanto and stepped back from Abberline keeping him flanked between herself and Vastra and keeping the blade in her hand.
“As I suspected,” Abberline said. “You do have assistance—people who know your secret.” Abberline attempted to remain calm given that he was flanked by two women that seemed more capable of ending his life than the three thugs now lying unconscious on the docks. And by all accounts, had more reason to. “My invitation stands. Let us retire to my home and discuss things. I have,” he paused, “so many questions.”

“Like hell she will,” Jenny said before she could stop herself. Vastra shot her a look.

“What Jenny means is,” Vastra stepped in, “if you care to speak with me it will be on my terms and in my home. Not yours.” She looked to the thugs rendered unconscious by her venom. “What about these three? They will regain consciousness soon.”

“I don’t care about these hoodlums,” Abberline said. He was gleeful with the prospect of finally getting answers he had been seeking for so long.

Vastra looked at Jenny. The psychic link had grown ever stronger between them as their relationship had evolved and their love for one another deepened. It was not a tool to be used idly or that even allowed itself to be used idly. But it could be used between the women now in situations that necessitated it.

Jenny nodded slightly toward Vastra. “Alright, Inspector,” Jenny said, kneeling down to sheath her tanto, concealing it beneath her trousers in a scabbard strapped to her calf. “I’ll escort you to our home.”

Vastra turned abruptly and disappeared into the fog. “What about you, Madam?” Abberline’s spirit seemed to fall as he called out to her.

“She’ll be along,” Jenny said. “Now, off we go.”

Hiding herself quickly in the fog, Vastra took side streets and rooftops as she followed Jenny and Abberline who were slowly making their way to 13 Paternoster Row along main thoroughfares. The fog lifted as they diverged from the river and visibility improved. She was on the lookout for anyone who may be in league with Abberline—anyone trying to crash their party. There was no one following Jenny and Abberline nor anyone one who seemed to take an interest in them. Abberline appeared to be working on his own. At least for tonight.

“Follow me,” Jenny instructed as they entered the front door of the house. Abberline looked around as the woman in trousers, vest, and tie led him down a hallway lined with built in shelves filled with books. Finally, they entered a large room full of vegetation—potted flowers and trees. “Sit.” Jenny pointed to a smaller seat across from a large rattan peacock chair. Abberline took in all the greenery in Vastra’s conservatory. He felt Jenny’s stare burning through him.

“When do you suppose…”

“I’m not here to answer your questions,” Jenny interrupted. Abberline stopped speaking and continued to study the room.

It was a long fifteen minutes before Vastra arrived home and Jenny stared at Abberline in silence the entire time they waited. Abberline felt completely vulnerable by the time Vastra walked into the conservatory.

“Madam I…,” Abberline started. Vastra simply put her hand up and stopped his conversation altogether.
Jenny braced for Vastra’s reaction now that she had him alone.

Vastra took her seat in the peacock chair. “Jenny, dear, please get the Inspector and I some tea,” Vastra said taking her attention completely away from Inspector Abberline and smiling at Jenny.

“Tea?” Jenny asked. She was confused as to why Vastra would want to have a civilized conversation with this man. Vastra just tilted her head slightly at Jenny. “Right away, ma’am.”

Jenny contemplated her response on the way to the kitchen. The word “ma’am” felt an odd way to address Vastra now. She hadn’t called Vastra “ma’am” since, well, since they had become more than housemaid and employer. She called her “Vastra” and “love” and “dear” now, but not “ma’am.” Still, there was a need to maintain a level of propriety when dealing with certain company, she supposed. It was odd, but perhaps true, that this man would be more accepting of Vastra being Silurian than he would be of the relationship they shared.

“Madam, I...,” Inspector Abberline attempted to continue.

“No,” Vastra stopped him. “I shall ask the questions and you will answer. And make no mistake I shall know if you are lying.” Vastra’s immediate goal was to figure out why Abberline was investigating her and if the investigation was tied to the Kostya case. More to the point, did he know or suspect that it was she who had murdered him? This was the reason she wanted Jenny out of the room. “Why have you been humiliating me every day at the Yard?”

“I knew you were hiding something,” he said. “I was hoping I could force your secret from you.”

“As you would force a viper to bare its fangs by poking it with a stick?” Vastra scoffed. “You are fortunate that I do not react like a viper. Though make no mistake, I shall do whatever is necessary to protect myself if I sense you intend me harm.”

“I mean you no harm, Madam, I assure you,” Abberline said. He watched with rapt attention as Vastra snaked her tongue out a foot or so to taste the air. He was telling the truth, or at least he thought he was. But the mere fact that he knew her secret was enough to cause her harm if he let this information slip after a pint or two.

“You have been investigating me have you not? Looking into past cases?”

“I have,” Abberline admitted, “both you and Superintendent Lang.”

“Why?” Vastra asked. “Do you suspect me of unethical police work?”

“Everything I said earlier was true. I heard of your ability to solve crimes with little to no evidence and I was initially impressed; and perhaps a bit suspicious, if I’m being honest. Then I heard of your ‘skin condition’ and the fact that you always wear a veil and it piqued my interest even further. I realized that there must be more to you than meets the eye. As I said, I have an interest in things beyond human. Whether it be medical oddities or,” he cleared his throat, “alien in nature.”

“So you assumed that I solved these crimes due to some super human ability?” Vastra asked in a somewhat condescending tone. “Not that I am unethical? Not that I ignore or bend or even break the rules? I dare say most men would assume I used some unethical means to garner my success. Feminine wiles or some such. But you, you jumped immediately to super human abilities. To alien.”

“Yes,” Abberline said excitedly, “and that Superintendent Lang knew and abetted you.”

Vastra laughed. Abberline didn’t suspect her of killing Kostya. He was at a total loss for facts. His
imagination had led him along a trail of suspicions and hopeful guesses to know and understand the oddity he now supervised. She was relieved to say the least and decided to have a bit of fun at his expense.

“You are correct that I do possess,” Vastra paused, “abilities. Abilities that far surpass human capabilities. Abilities you cannot begin to imagine. But Detective Superintendent Lang has no idea. He has never assisted me nor does he know who I truly am. I have suppressed my talents in order to fit into the laughable institution you apes call ‘law enforcement’. Where I am from, criminals are publicly punished and held accountable for their crimes. They are made examples of and as a result we do not have the criminal element that is so prevalent in this forsaken society.”

“You said ‘where I am from,’ so you are an alien?”

“Silurian,” Vastra corrected. She sat up a little taller in her chair. “I told you that. But I suppose you do not know what that even means.”

“No,” Abberline admitted. “I don’t.”

Abberline stared at Vastra. He was taking in her face and head, examining each scale, and counting her crests.

“Why do I not frighten you?” Vastra interrupted his examination. “You act as though you have seen sentient non-human species before.”

“I have seen,” he trailed off, “things.” He seemed to have no regard for protocol or even for treading lightly on the subject. “I pay attention to freak shows and creatures of all manner of affliction.”

“I assure you, Inspector, I have no affliction,” Vastra hissed.

“No. Of course not. I just, well,” Abberline was stuttering to regain composure. “I didn’t mean. I was merely suggesting that the unusual does not shock me.”

“You mentioned a collection,” Vastra said. “What sort of collection do you have?”

“Embryos, mostly,” he confessed rather quickly. “Most with birth defects and other tragic deformities that ended life too soon. Some specimens in my possession are assuredly fake; but most are genuine, though not of the alien species the seller claimed. I also have various, random body parts. It is, however, difficult if not impossible to ascertain their authenticity without a full specimen.”

“And do you wish to ‘collect’ me, Inspector? Am I to be your prized specimen? Your fully intact alien centerpiece to your hodgepodge collection of bits and pieces? A conversation piece for you and your inquisitive friends to dissect, discuss, and debate like a common science project?”

“No!” Abberline insisted. “Absolutely not.”

“Then what is your obsession with me?” Vastra snapped.

“A tool,” Abberline confessed. “A tool to take down the criminal element in London.”

“Just how much do you believe one Silurian can do?” Vastra asked.

“A great deal,” Abberline said, “if given the resources and freedom to act as you see fit.”
Jenny entered the room with a tray of tea and Abberline stopped speaking. She made Vastra’s cup and then focused her attention to Abberline. “How do you take your tea, Sir?” she asked, a bit of contempt in her voice.

“One sugar, please,” Abberline said. Jenny made his cup and handed it to him. “Thank you.”

Jenny stood beside Vastra.

“Inspector Abberline has offered, how did you put it, the ‘resources and freedom to act as I see fit’ in taking down the criminal element in all of London,” Vastra said.

“Well, I,” he stammered and squirmed in his seat.

“Please, Inspector, you may speak freely in front of Jenny. She is my partner in all things and has been invaluable in some of my cases.”

“I see,” Abberline said. He looked Jenny up and down once more and took in her manner of dress and appearance.

“He seems more put off by my trousers than your scales, Vastra,” Jenny said. She placed a loving hand gently on Vastra’s shoulder and Vastra did not flinch.

“Forgive me, please,” Abberline said. “I had no idea what to expect, only that it would be unexpected. This is a lot for me to take in.” He paused for a moment. “Who else knows? That you are not human?”

“No one,” Vastra said. “And that is the way things will remain. This information is mine and mine alone and you will not disclose my identity to anyone, do you understand?”

“Quite clearly,” Abberline said. “But you still have not explained exactly how you solve the cases, Madam.”

“Indeed,” Vastra said and sipped her tea. “Let us back up to your previous questions about my origins. I am no alien, far from it. In fact, I am more of an Earthling than you. I am from an ancient race of reptilian humanoids that have inhabited the Earth since the dawn of time. We were forced underground and remained hidden there for centuries.”

“I see,” Abberline listened with rapt attention, almost spilling his tea in the process.

“I, along with some of my sisters, was awakened from hibernation some years ago during excavations for the London Underground. I survived; however, my sisters did not. Unable to return to my underground sanctuary for continued hibernation, I made my way on the surface as best I could. With the help of a very dear friend I was given the chance to prove myself as a detective for Scotland Yard. The rest, as you say, is history.”

“I see,” Abberline said, saving his tea from spilling as he regained focus. “And this ‘dear friend’ you speak of. Who might that be?”

Vastra smiled and placed her tea cup and saucer on the table beside her. “That friend is the Doctor.”

Abberline almost spilt tea across the room. Luckily for him, he was able to contain his emotions and swallow the liquid down. “The Doctor?” he asked excitedly. “You know the Doctor?”

“Yes,” Vastra answered very matter-of-factly. “Do you?”
"Only by reputation. By legend," he said excitedly. "He, or more to the point his actual existence, is a topic of discussion with men who share my interests."

"And have I been a topic discussion among the men who share your interest?" Vastra asked, pointedly.

"No," Abberline said, defensively. "No, I have kept you to myself."

"She’s not your possession," Jenny burst out, unconsciously tightening her grip on Vastra’s shoulder.

"I beg your pardon," Abberline back peddled. "I simply meant..."

"Perhaps what Inspector Abberline meant is that he has exercised caution where I am concerned?" Vastra asked.

"Yes," Abberline said, "caution. I had my suspicions; but I kept them to myself."

Jenny looked at Vastra with a furrowed brow and narrowed eyes. She was less trusting of Abberline and she didn’t have Vastra’s talent that allowed her to use her tongue as a lie detector. Plus, she had heard nothing but unfavorable things about Inspector Abberline since his first day in London.

Vastra could taste Jenny’s pheromones rising and turning to the scent of burnt spices—she was getting irritated. Vastra turned her gaze to Jenny and smiled. Jenny relaxed and just as unconsciously as she had tightened her grip, she relaxed her hand.

"Why did you seek Jenny out in the market and ask if she knew Simon Higby?" Vastra asked, turning her attention back to Abberline. "You obviously knew the answer before you asked; so what was your motive?"

"As I confessed earlier, to provoke you," Abberline admitted. "While looking into your previous cases, I noted that one Miss Jenny Flint visited Mr. Higby during his incarceration. When I first learned of this I naturally assumed she had gone there on your behalf for some reason; although I could not imagine a reason for which you would send your housemaid to visit a criminal. But, after questioning some of Mr. Higby’s associates, I discovered she had her own her cause to visit. The old adage ‘honor among thieves’ is only as binding as their level of hunger, and it didn’t take long for one of Mr. Higby’s starving street rats to tell me all about the only girl he had taken in and trained."

Jenny did not like being the focus of conversation and Vastra could smell the harsh, burnt-spiced scented pheromones billowing off her like smoke.

"As you might imagine, I was deeply curious why a Scotland Yard detective would have a trained thief for a housemaid," he said. "And given that you are an adept detective I had to assume you knew."

"Jenny possesses certain skills that I find invaluable to my work," Vastra said. "She is smart, talented, and more than capable of handling herself on the streets."

"Does she accompany you on all your cases?"

"No," Vastra said, "not all. But we are not here to discuss Jenny."

"Quite right," he said. "But, Madam, we have yet to discuss exactly how you are able to solve the
cases.”

“And we shall not discuss it tonight,” Vastra cut him off. “Tomorrow I shall turn in the Whitechapel case as ‘unsolved’ and you will accept it. That bumbling ape Detective Morris has yet to solve the two cases that I handed him even though they were practically gift wrapped. You will re-assign those to me and I shall show you how I work. I shall answer your questions and you will give me the leeway to do as I see fit to solve all my cases.” Vastra sipped her tea and gingerly returned the cup to the saucer. “Does that arrangement work for you, Inspector Abberline?”

“Yes,” he beamed. “That arrangement seems quite fair. And I suppose I should cease ‘poking the viper’ as well.”

“Well, Inspector, you would not want to cause suspicion in a sudden alteration of character. I have yet to strike; I dare say my skin is thick enough to take the prodding.”

“As you wish, Madam,” he said.

As soon as the door clicked shut Jenny turned on her heel and made a concentrated beeline for Vastra. Finding the Silurian in her study, Jenny grabbed her by the collar and pulled her in and kissed her hard.

Parting somewhat breathless, Vastra asked, “What was that for?”

Jenny’s features were hard and her look stern. “It was either kiss you or slap you.” She told Vastra. “I opted for the kiss so I wouldn’t have to seek your forgiveness afterwards.”

“I shall never understand you apes. You make no sense, Jenny,” Vastra said.

Jenny was so mad she let the “ape” comment slide. “My biggest fear is that someone discovers your secret. That someone sees you as a freak to be gawked at, or worse. So when I arrived at the docks and saw you, veil off, and face to face with that man.” Jenny had to pause and recompose herself. “That man who has made you miserable for months now, I assumed the worst.”

“Do you not think I could have dealt with that incompetent ape?” Vastra asked. “I could have killed him in that fog and he would have never known what hit him. I exposed myself to him on purpose.”

“On purpose?” Jenny said at a volume quite unbecoming a lady.

“Yes, Jenny, on purpose,” Vastra clarified. “He has prodded and attempted to provoke me for months. I felt it was time to prod back. He wanted to know my secret; and that fog and those thugs provided the opportune time to show him. If he had reacted differently, I could have dealt with him.”

“But what do you have to gain?” Jenny asked. “It seems to me this was a one sided arrangement.”

“Nonsense,” Vastra said, “I shall have my cases back tomorrow and I dare say that my future cases will be far more interesting and have a much higher priority.”

Jenny stood with her hands on her hips. “So you risked everything for better cases?”

“This ape is no threat. He has no ulterior motive.”
“How do you know that?” Jenny asked.

“Because, my love,” Vastra placed a cool scaled hand upon Jenny’s cheek and ran her fingertips along her jaw, “if he did, I would smell it all over him.”
The Hightower Case

Vastra, Jenny, and Detective Abberline sat in the carriage safely out of sight of Vastra’s suspect. She successfully re-inherited one of her two old case files—the Hightower murder. The other case remained with Detective Morris despite her protests. Abberline insisted he had a reputation to maintain and couldn’t appear soft. So he was only giving her one case for now. Besides, he was also holding it as leverage to get her to come clean about what made her so effective at solving cases. She had yet to divulge her most powerful secret.

They peered out at a small group of men who were already drunk and seemed to be going from pub to pub increasing their inebriation along the way. “The chap in the brown coat and hat is Marcus Dillard. I know without a doubt he committed the murder of Joseph Hightower. The problem is I do not have any evidence that would satisfy the burden of guilt in your court of law.”

“Detective Morris spoke to me about this when he first inherited the Hightower case. He said you based your assumption solely on the fact that you believed Marcus Dillard and Catherine Hightower were having an affair. You had no proof of the affair and refused to pursue other suspects. He disregarded your allegation and started the case anew,” Abberline said.

“Incompetent ape,” Vastra spat. “If he had surveilled Mr. Dillard and Mrs. Hightower when he first received the case he may well have found all the evidence he needed. Certainly he would have discovered their affair and thus, the motive. And that would have opened him up to interview them as suspects.”

“Morris concluded that Hightower was a victim of opportunistic mugging and was left for dead. He was found on the docks after receiving a blow to the back of the head. His clothes were disheveled; and his wallet, wedding ring, and pocket watch were all missing. It does seem a cut and dry case of mugging gone fatal. We were just about to close the case. But in light of our recent,” he hesitated, “friendship, I thought it warranted you looking at it once more.”

Vastra mumbled something under her breath. Jenny understood perfectly that she had again said, ‘incompetent ape’ but Abberline had no clue. “And what was the item used to knock Mr. Hightower unconscious?” Vastra asked, staring unblinking at Abberline.

“I don’t recall that bit of information,” Abberline confessed.

“Because there was no such item found near the body. If this had been an opportunistic mugging, the murder weapon would likely have been a rock or other heavy item found nearby. It would have been dropped beside the body as the thief pilfered Mr. Hightower for valuables. But there was no such item found because this was not an opportunistic mugging.” Vastra paused and glanced out at the men now loudly making their way into the pub.

“We needed to prove the connection between Dillard and Mrs. Hightower to establish motive in the murder. Now, who knows? This may be another case of a guilty man going free because you apes insist on evidence you rarely have the means to gather.”

“And what makes you so sure he is guilty?” Abberline asked.

“I know he is guilty. Of that there is no question,” Vastra snapped. She had yet to disclose her secret, her reptilian sense of smell, to Abberline. But it was time. “My ability that has allowed me to solve the most difficult cases over the years always assures me of the guilt of the suspect. The challenge for me is producing evidence sufficient enough to convict the criminal within your
justice system. Only once have I not been able to do this.”

“The Mason case,” Abberline said, pointedly. He was intimately familiar with Vastra’s case history.

“Yes,” Vastra said. “The wife killed her husband. He beat and abused her; but he was a wealthy and influential member of London society who would never be caught, much less punished. She feared her only way out was to kill him. She came up with the perfect murder; but not perfect enough to fool me. Or Jenny.” Vastra looked to Jenny and smiled. “It was Jenny who put the final pieces together on that case. And my senses did the rest.”

“Senses?”

“My secret weapon,” Vastra started, “is my sense of smell. Or taste, if you prefer.” She snaked out her tongue a bit for show. “Like many modern day reptiles I can taste the air around me and pick up pheromones that are invisible to you apes.”

“Vastra,” Jenny snapped.

“You humans,” Vastra corrected. “While basic pheromones are universally similar, fear, for example, always has a certain taste and tone; these pheromones are distinct to the human who produces them. In other words, your fear pheromones and Jenny’s fear pheromones, while similar in overall scent, are indeed unique to each of you. I can just as easily tell humans apart by their unique scents as you can by their faces. For me, human faces are almost indistinguishable from one another unless they possess some feature that sets them apart such as a scar or facial hair or unique eye color. Or preferably some combination of those things. But a humans’ scent, well, that is a unique thing.”

Vastra paused and gave Detective Abberline a chance to absorb what she said.

“Exactly how does it work?” he asked.

“The biochemical and physiological mechanisms are not important,” Vastra said. “But in practice, if I can get to a victim before they have been contaminated with the scent of officers or medical staff, I can pick out the scent signature of the culprit. It is typically a suite of pheromones: fear, excitement, hate, passion, rage and any other emotions the killer or perpetrator was feeling at the time they committed the crime.

“Committing this signature to memory, I investigate motives and seek out people the victim knew for an interview. As you are aware, victims typically know their murderer. And if I can get just one bit of their scent, I can identify the guilty party. And if I can interview them, I can monitor the elevation of pheromones as I ask questions and detect lies and guilt within minutes.”

Jenny could see Abberline thinking it all out.

“Why didn’t this work with the Whitechapel murder? Why were you unable to get the scent of the men who assaulted that prostitute and hunt them down?”

“The victim had been bathed and her clothes incinerated before I got to her. All trace of the perpetrators’ pheromone signature was erased. And even if I had gotten their scents, if they were strangers to her then it would have been like finding a needle in a haystack. I would have had to have wandered the Whitechapel district blindly in search of the owner, or owners, of the signature.

“Anonymous crimes require a great deal of luck for me to connect the perpetrator with the victim. And I assure you, Detective Abberline, no one was speaking in Whitechapel regarding that case.
They were either truly ignorant of the assailants or scared they would be next. My theory is that the victim was made an example of. I am not sure they intended to kill her. But I believe she did something to offend the man who prostituted her and he made an example of her.”

“But what about the first crime you ever solved?” Abberline asked. “That case occurred years before you ever worked on it. There was no victim at that point for you to get a scent from.”

“No,” Vastra said. “But there was evidence. The dresses of the victims were boxed and they retained minute traces of pheromones. There was one pheromone signature with a unique set of tones that was consistent among all the evidence. And again it came down to a great deal of luck to link that scent to the perpetrator. Once I found the perpetrator the hard part began—finding the evidence to link my suspect to the murders. That was where the real detective work came in.”

Abberline believed Vastra, according to his pheromones; but he was still mulling it all over trying to get a grip on the notion of Vastra solving cases with her tongue.

“That is where I find myself now with the Hightower case. Dillard is guilty. His scent, and only his scent, is all over the victim. Whether or not I can link him to the murder is unknown. I had him under surveillance directly following the murder waiting for him to slip up; but you pulled me from the case before he gave me anything I could use. Now I am not sure I will get what I need.”

“What were you hoping to find? What do you think his motives were?” Abberline asked.

“The carnal instinct that drives all men, lust,” Vastra said. “I am certain he was having an affair with Mr. Hightower’s wife, Catherine. Dillard either killed him to be with her; or Mr. Hightower caught them in the act and there was an altercation. The pheromone signature would have been the same: lust, anger, jealousy, it was all there. Marcus Dillard’s scent was all over Mr. Hightower. He is the murderer.”

“And how do you plan to proceed with the investigation, Madam?” Abberline asked.

“Just as any competent detective would—surveillance and putting clues together to form a complete picture. Even the smallest detail is relevant in a murder, Detective Chief Inspector Abberline,” Vastra said. “I have no idea if the relationship between Dillard and Mrs. Hightower is ongoing; or whether the murder was a crime of passion or premeditated. If Dillard is no longer pursuing Mrs. Hightower, there may be no way to show motive. And if that is the case, there may be no way to get evidence suitable for court.”

“Why did you assume there was an affair in the first place?” Abberline asked.

“After leaving the crime scene and committing the perpetrator’s scent to memory, I began to hunt for the owner of the pheromone signature. The next day while surveilling Mrs. Hightower, I caught the scent of Mr. Dillard. As soon as it hit my tongue I knew I found my murderer. He went to Mrs. Hightower’s home and she reluctantly let him in. I remember the exchange at the door was awkward and filled with hushed harsh tones. I could not make out what they were saying from my vantage point; but they had a heated argument once he was inside. It was passionate but lasted only a few minutes before he stormed out.

“Why would a man come to the home of a grieving widow, just hours after her husband was found brutally murdered, and get into an argument? One who loved her? One who killed for her? One who killed for them to be together? That is when I made my assumption they were having an affair. It made perfect sense. I assumed she did not want him around that day as to not raise suspicion. That is why she was hesitant to let him in and why they argued once inside. However, I never got the chance to see if their relationship continued as I was pulled from the case the very
next day.”

Vastra, Jenny, and Abberline looked out the widows of the carriage upon hearing the ruckus outside. Several men, drunk and singing, crashed out of the pub—Dillard being one of them. A large man stepped out after them. “And don’t come back tonight you drunkards.”

Two of the men separated from the group and waved ‘goodnight’ to their companions. The rest—Dillard and three other men—continued down the street in search of the next pub.

“I believe we are at a stopping point,” Vastra said. “It appears Mr. Dillard will be in no shape to provide me any clues about the murder tonight. I will reassume surveillance of both Mr. Dillard and Mr. Hightower’s widow tomorrow. I am quite curious to know what their relationship is at this time.”

The carriage ride back to the Yard was relatively silent as they went to drop off Detective Abberline. Finally, Abberline broke the silence. “And what are the alternatives if you are unable to find the evidence you need to bring the suspect to justice?” he asked awkwardly as though continuing a conversation that had not been happening.

“Are you asking if I take justice in my own hands, Detective?”

“I don’t mean to imply…”

“Ah, but you do.” Vastra was curt. “I told you, Detective, while I do not understand your justice system, I do work within its boundaries. I am not judge, jury, and executioner.” A flash of guilt washed over Vastra. She was glad humans did not possess her ability to read pheromones or they would have known she was lying. An image of Kostya’s blood soaked body flashed in her mind. She shook it off. She had no remorse for her actions as far as he was concerned.

Abberline diverted his eyes from Vastra’s gaze. “But if you are certain of guilt.”

“When I am certain of guilt I will stop at nothing to prove it.”

Abberline wanted to ask about the wife in the Mason case; but he thought better of it. She disappeared from London shortly after the investigation concluded and Vastra already confessed to knowing the woman’s guilt. He couldn’t help but wonder. “Very well, Madam,” he said as the carriage stopped outside Scotland Yard. “I will see you tomorrow.”

“I think not,” Vastra said. “I will inform you when I have evidence or leads to discuss. You know where to find me if you have anything for me. I work best without the confines and structure put upon me for the past months. I shall have Dillard in custody within the month or not at all. It will not take long to get the evidence or see that it is unavailable.”

“As you wish.” Abberline stepped out and left the women to head home. He retreated into his office.

*****

“Do you really think that was wise?” Jenny asked as she crawled into bed. Her nightdress receiving
“Which part?” Vastra asked. “And are you really going to wear that thing to bed?”

“I’m cold,” Jenny said. It was mid-August and there was a nip in the air. The fire had lapsed in the bedroom while they were out and the gas radiator was taking a bit to warm up the house. “And you are like a brick of ice.”

“All the more reason for you to take that off,” Vastra grinned. “I need your unobstructed body heat to warm me up.” Vastra reached for the night dress and grabbed a handful of fabric.

Jenny swatted away her hand. “You are avoiding my question.”

“Technically, you are avoiding my question,” Vastra quipped. “I asked you ‘which part’?”

Jenny narrowed her eyes and shot Vastra a look. “Oi! You aggravating lizard. Do you think it was wise to tell Abberline all your secrets?”

“I do not think it unwise. I will keep a close eye on him. If I suspect him of anything that will harm me, or you, I shall set things right. Besides, I did not tell him all my secrets.”

The fire was beginning to warm up the room; but Vastra still snuggled into Jenny to steal her body heat. “Go put some clothes on, you are like ice,” Jenny said.

“You know clothes do not warm me up,” Vastra said snuggling in even closer. “I do not produce heat, so no matter how many layers I put on it isn’t going to make me warm.”

“No, but it’ll keep me warm,” Jenny snapped back. She snuggled into Vastra all the same to help warm up the Silurian. Jenny knew that if she was cold, Vastra must be freezing. “It sounded like Abberline was suggesting that if you knew someone was guilty, but it couldn’t be proved it in court, you should take matters into your own hands.”

“Perhaps he was,” Vastra said. “If he is more interested in seeing justice served rather than the law followed he may well allow me such leeway.”

“He may also be setting you up,” Jenny warned.

“Jenny,” Vastra said in a surprised tone, “you are ever so skeptical of Inspector Abberline. Why do you feel so strongly that he is out to harm me?”

“I’m just concerned for your safety. This is the first time you’ve let anyone know your true self.” Jenny laid her head on Vastra’s chest. “I worry, love. That’s all.”

“I let you see my true self,” Vastra countered. “That turned out quite well.”

“That’s different,” Jenny said as she ran her fingertips along the patterns in Vastra’s scales. “And you know it.”

Vastra brushed her fingers through Jenny’s long, chestnut locks. “I cautiously trust him. He has shown no indication he means me harm. And as I said, I will keep a close eye on him.” Vastra kissed Jenny on top of the head and whispered. “Now please, take off that ridiculous sleeping dress and let me warm you up.”

******
After several days of surveillance Vastra observed no contact between Mrs. Hightower and Mr. Dillard. Perhaps their love affair died along with Mr. Hightower. ‘What a pity,’ she thought to herself, ‘the man died for no reason.’ Either way, Vastra decided it was time to meet Mrs. Hightower and refresh her memory of the woman’s scent.

Mrs. Hightower worked at a ladies’ accessory stall in the Soho Bazaar. Among her wares were gloves, handbags, parasols, shawls, handkerchiefs, hats, hat accessories, hair accessories, perfumes, and other miscellaneous items any lady might need.

The bell on the door alerted the clerk to Vastra’s presence. “Hello, ma’am,” greeted Mrs. Hightower. “Is there anything I can help you find today?” The Soho bazaar was quite posh, so Vastra did not stand out in her dress despite the usual all-black ensemble complete with veil and gloves.

The shop air was fouled with various perfumes and scents that made Vastra’s tongue sting. She recoiled immediately upon entry. She would still be able to get Mrs. Hightower’s scent; but she would need to get close. “Yes,” she said, “I am looking for hair accessories.”

“Right this way.” Mrs. Hightower showed Vastra over to a small display of hair ribbons; but a tortoise shell comb in a glass display case caught Vastra’s eye. It was silver, ornately and delicately sculpted in the form of vines with leaves and flowers atop three tortoise shell “teeth.” Small pearls were threaded along the vines. She imagined how it would stand out against Jenny’s chestnut hair.

“May I see that one?” Vastra pointed to the comb.

“That is an excellent comb,” Mrs. Hightower said, excited the item was finally getting attention after being in the shop for months. It had been used as payment to help settle a rather large outstanding line of credit from a departed client. She held it out for Vastra to examine.

“Could you please put it on?” Vastra asked. “I would like to get a feel for how it will look when worn.”

“Of course,” Mrs. Hightower said and placed the comb in her auburn hair. The silver and pearls stood out against the dark background. Vastra imagined it in Jenny’s hair for a night out to the theatre.

Vastra leaned in close as to examine the comb and took in Mrs. Hightower’s scent with a discreet flick of her tongue. Despite the fog of perfumes and soaps she was able to get a pheromone signature on the woman.

“Yes,” Vastra said, “I think that will do nicely.”

Vastra followed Mrs. Hightower back to the till and began analyzing her scent. She confirmed there was no trace of Mr. Dillard on the woman. Perhaps their love affair was long over. If so, she feared it may be almost impossible to collect any evidence connecting Mrs. Hightower to Dr. Dillard and thus the motive for the murder.

“Would you like this gift wrapped?” Mrs. Hightower asked.

“Yes, please.”

Vastra watched as delicate hands wrapped brown paper around a box and tied white and gold ribbon into a fancy bow on top.
“Thank you, Mrs. Hightower,” she said as she exchanged her money for the package.

“Do I know you?” Mrs. Hightower asked.

“No, I do not believe so,” Vastra said. “I am Madam Vastra, detective with Scotland Yard. Your husband’s murder case has been assigned to me.”

“To you?” she asked. “I’ve been speaking with Detective Morris about Joseph’s murder.”

“Yes. And now you will speak with me,” Vastra said pointedly. “I assure you I am doing everything in my power to find and capture your husband’s killer.”

“Thank you,” Mrs. Hightower said. “Although I find it quite surprising Scotland Yard has a female detective.”

“You are not alone in that sentiment,” Vastra said. “But rest assured, I will bring the culprit to justice. I have an impeccable record. You may check my credentials with Detective Chief Inspector Abberline if you wish.”

“That won’t be necessary,” Mrs. Hightower said. “Perhaps you can shed some new light on the case. I had come to believe Detective Morris would be unable to solve the crime.”

“And I am sure I would agree with you,” Vastra jabbed. “I am on the case now and I intend to make the capture of the perpetrator my top priority.”

“Detective Morris believes the murderer to be a random assailant who mugged Joseph and left him for dead. Have there been more, similar muggings? Do you have a suspect?”

“No. There have not been any similar muggings,” Vastra said, ignoring the question as to whether she had any suspects. “I should like to ask you some questions when there is a convenient time for you to meet with me.”

“Me?” Mrs. Hightower asked. “I’m not sure I understand what you think I could help with. I have already answered questions for Detective Morris.”

“Routine questions only,” Vastra assured her. “I need to clarify some details from your statement with Detective Morris.”

“Of course,” Mrs. Hightower said. “Anything I can do to be of assistance. I can answer questions now.”

Vastra wasn’t ready to interview Mrs. Hightower—there were some things she needed to figure out first. Chief among them, were Mrs. Hightower and Mr. Dillard still seeing each other or perhaps just laying low until the investigation was over? Besides, this place was too thick with artificial scents to be of use to her for questioning. “I would rather not inconvenience you at work,” Vastra said. “I shall be in touch.”

“As you wish,” Mrs. Hightower said.

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Vastra waited outside the shop until closing time. She then followed Mrs. Hightower home where
she stayed for the remainder of the evening. This was the same routine she observed for the past several nights. She hoped tonight would be different. She thought maybe her unexpected visit to the shop would prompt Mrs. Hightower to meet with Dillard. But Vastra now felt more certain the affair between she and Dillard had dissolved. She waited patiently until all the lights went off inside the house and she was sure Mrs. Hightower had gone to bed. With nothing more to observe tonight, Vastra headed home.

“I do not understand why they would abandon their affair after killing Mr. Hightower. Why kill him if not to be together?” Vastra asked during after-dinner tea in her office.

“Maybe you’re wrong about the affair,” Jenny suggested. “Maybe they were fighting for another reason when you saw Mr. Dillard at her home.”

“What do you suggest?” Vastra asked.

“Maybe she hired Mr. Dillard to kill her husband and he was coming to collect his money,” Jenny offered. “Perhaps it was like with Mrs. Mason. What do you know about Mr. Hightower? Could he have been abusive and Mrs. Hightower wanted him gone but wasn’t willing to kill him herself? Maybe she hired Mr. Dillard and later they fought about payment. Perhaps he felt he was underpaid or she wasn’t willing to follow through with payment. Maybe she was just angry he came to collect so soon?”

“I suppose that is valid reasoning,” Vastra conceded. “But, an assassination doesn’t quite explain the pheromone signature I smelled on Mr. Hightower’s body. Mr. Dillard did not simply sneak up behind Mr. Hightower on the street and strike him in the back of the head and leave him for dead. And why hire Mr. Dillard in the first place? Why him? What is their connection?”

“I don’t know. It was just a theory,” Jenny admitted. “But I’ve looked through the case file over the past few days while you’ve been out on surveillance and there isn’t much to go on. Detective Morris didn’t follow up at all with your suggestion that Mr. Dillard was the murderer.”

“It was not a suggestion,” Vastra said harshly. “It was a statement of fact.”

“But he didn’t know that,” Jenny said. “You offered no proof or reasoning other than you saw them together arguing after Mr. Hightower’s death.”

“I could not very well say ‘I smelled Mr. Dillard’s pheromones on the victim’ could I?” Vastra snapped. “Ugh! This is all Abberline’s fault. If he had not pulled me from this case I could have caught Mr. Dillard and Mrs. Hightower together and presented a motive. Now it seems their relationship has dissolved and thus any connection between the two of them lost.”

“Maybe they were having an affair; but they didn’t kill him to get him out of the way,” Jenny suggested. “What if Mr. Hightower walked in on them in the act and he and Mr. Dillard fought. Maybe Mr. Hightower fell and hit his head in the struggle. It could have been an accident. Perhaps Mr. Dillard was just a fling and she didn’t want her husband dead.”

“That would explain the pheromone signature on Mr. Hightower’s body if they struggled for any length of time. But then why would Mrs. Hightower cover it up?”

“Shame?” Jenny offered. “Fear of being punished for her involvement?”

“I do not know,” Vastra admitted. “I shall interview them both and hope to put enough together to convict Mr. Dillard. And perhaps Mrs. Hightower as well if she was involved. Even if it was an accident.”
“How can I help?” Jenny asked.

“I shall interview Mrs. Hightower and Mr. Dillard. You can track down some of the chaps Mr. Dillard was with the other night at the pub. Speak to them and see if you can get a feel for Dillard’s personality. If he sleeps around with a lot of married women. That sort of thing. I shall get Mrs. Hightower to confirm her alibi and check to see if it holds up.”

“Sounds good,” Jenny smiled. “Now get to bed, you’ve been staying out late and not sleeping enough. Nothing else we can do until tomorrow.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Vastra smiled and headed upstairs while Jenny took the tea service back to the kitchen.

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“Thank you for meeting with me on such short notice, Mrs. Hightower,” Vastra said, starting their meeting at the Rose Kettle Tea Room. “I hope this was not an inconvenience.”

“Catherine. Please, call me Catherine,” Mrs. Hightower smiled across the table at Vastra.

“Very well,” Vastra said, although she hated calling anyone she met for professional reasons by their first name. It was an official meeting and as such, she believed, demanded the use of surnames.

“And anything I can do to help find my husband’s murderer is never an inconvenience,” Mrs. Hightower added.

“Thank you for your cooperation, Mrs. Hightower. I need to confirm the statement you gave to Detective Morris. It is simply a formality that occurs whenever a new detective takes over a case. You understand.”

“Certainly. Can you tell me why Detective Morris was taken off the case?” Catherine asked.

“Actually,” Vastra began, “I was initially assigned to your case and then pulled within a few days to work another case. So this case is coming back to me.”

“You solved the other case then?” Catherine asked.

“Well, no,” Vastra said. “It was a rather impossible case and has since been closed.”

“So you failed to solve your last case and they pulled Detective Morris and gave my husband’s murder case to you? Why would they do that?”

“I can assure you, Mrs. Hightower, solving this case is my utmost priority,” Vastra quickly got on the defensive.

“You’ll forgive me if I seem less than hopeful, Madam Vastra,” Mrs. Hightower said. “Joseph’s murder does seem most likely the result of a random mugging. Detective Morris seemed to think so.”

“Did you not only a few days ago admit to me that you felt Detective Morris was incapable of solving your husband’s murder?” Vastra spat back. It wasn’t like her to get defensive, but she had
just turned in only the second case of her career she was unable to solve. And she already knew she had her work cut out for her with this case, even if she did know who the murderer was.

“I admit I had my doubts,” Catherine said. “Detective Morris said it would be impossible to find the man who did it if it was a random act. Honestly, do you believe you can do any better?”

“I do,” Vastra said matter-of-factly. She opened the case file and retrieved a pen from her leather attaché case. “Now, Mrs. Hightower, can you please confirm your whereabouts on the night Mr. Hightower was killed?”

“As I told Detective Morris, I was at my monthly gossip circle. We meet the first Thursday of every month,” Catherine said. “Then I went straight home where I remained all night.”

Vastra detected no lies in this statement. “What does this ‘gossip circle’ consist of, Mrs. Hightower?”

“Catherine, please,” Mrs. Hightower reiterated. “It’s just a group of women who’ve been friends for years. We get together and gossip about people in our neighborhood, complain about our husbands, drink tea, and things like that. It’s all very typical.”

“And your husband allowed you to attend this ‘gossip circle’ every month?” Vastra asked.

“Allowed? Ha!” Mrs. Hightower let out a sharp tone. “He never knew I was gone. He went to the pub with his friends practically every night until he stumbled home for supper. Some nights he didn’t come home until time for bed. And some nights he didn’t bother coming home at all.”

“I see.” Vastra quickly jotted notes and let her tongue flicker slightly beneath her veil to monitor Mrs. Hightower’s pheromones. She was telling the truth. “How did you feel about this? About your husband going out every night? Not being home?”

“Are you married, Madam Vastra?” Catherine asked.

Vastra straightened up in her chair even more than she already was. “No.”

“Then you probably don’t understand. Men make the money and men are allowed to do as they please. It didn’t matter what I thought about it, it was what it was. He chose to shirk his responsibilities as my husband and I had no choice in the matter.”

“But you have the job at the bazaar. You also bring home money,” Vastra said.

“I only worked there a few hours a week before my husband’s death,” she said. “It was more of a hobby. Something to get me out of the house and give me something to do.”

“And was it always like this? For the whole marriage? Your husband out drinking every night.”

“No.” Mrs. Hightower dropped her head and looked to the ground. “At first our marriage was perfect. Newlyweds in love, the whole bit. But after several years of trying to have children and failing, it was like he just gave up. He gave up on me. He gave up on trying to have kids. He gave up on our marriage.”

“But you stayed with him? And he with you?”

“We made vows. And we still loved each other. It was just,” she paused for a moment, “different.”

Vastra flicked her tongue and smelled the air—smelled Mrs. Hightower. She was telling the truth.
This seemed to be the reality of the marriage. Perhaps this is why she struck up the affair with Mr. Dillard. “And this gossip group, is it always the same women?” Vastra needed to get back to the interview.

“Yes. It’s the same group of women. Of course there are some months some of us can’t attend for various reasons.”

“And will you please give me each of their names? All the women in your group.”

“I already gave them to Detective Morris,” Mrs. Hightower said, lighting a cigarette.

“No, actually,” Vastra said, “Detective Morris failed to get a list of names.”

“Am I a suspect, Madam Vastra?” Mrs. Hightower asked suddenly.

“I assure you, this is all routine,” Vastra said. “I must verify your alibi. You do understand?”

“I suppose so,” Mrs. Hightower said. “Here, let me write them down for you. What information do you need?”

Mrs. Hightower wrote the names of six women who were at the ‘gossip circle’ that night as well as their husband’s name and their address. She also included the three other women who were unable to attend that night due to personal reasons.

“What time did you arrive at your gossip circle?” Vastra asked.

“It starts at seven, and I arrived just after then. Maybe quarter past.”

“And you were there until what time?” Vastra asked.

“I’m not sure exactly,” Mrs. Hightower said. “I got a headache and felt light headed so I left early. I don’t remember the exact time.”

And there it was. Vastra detected the first lie of the interview. Mrs. Hightower’s pheromones turned bitter. Something about that statement wasn’t true. Was she lying about not knowing the time or getting ill? Or both?

“And did you go straight home?”

“Yes,” Mrs. Hightower said. “I felt a bit better once I got outside in the fresh air. I decided to walk home.”

Another lie. “Do you remember the time you arrived home?”

“Just before eight o’clock, I think. I’m not sure of the exact time.”

Vastra jotted down notes. “And what happened when you arrived home?”

“Joseph was home. He wasn’t happy that I had come home early. He said that he wanted some time to himself in his own home.” Mrs. Hightower lowered her head and looked at her hands, now wringing in her lap. “We argued.”

There it was again, heavier this time. The bitter pheromones assaulted Vastra’s tongue.

“Then what happened? After the argument”
“He left.”

“At what time?”

“A little after eight. I remember the clock chiming after our fight but before he left.”

“Where did Joseph go when he left?” Vastra asked.

“I don’t know. Out drinking I suppose.”

“Did Mr. Hightower return home that night?”

“No.”

The bitter pheromones were now so pervasive that Vastra was having trouble discerning which statement might be true, and which ones were lies. “And you did not think it suspicious when your husband did not return home that night?” Vastra asked.

“No,” Catherine said. “Like I told you before, he went out almost every night. And some nights he didn’t come home. I was used to that.”

“Do you know any of Mr. Hightower’s drinking companions?” Vastra asked. She wanted to see if Catherine would admit to knowing Mr. Dillard.

“Not really,” she said. Her pheromones spiked and Vastra could taste the lies. “I have met one or two on occasion, but I don’t really know any of them.” She took a long drag off her cigarette and exhaled the smoke up into the air.

Vastra continued with her notes. “And when did you report your husband missing?”

“The next day. Shortly after I returned home from running errands there was a knock at the door. It was a boy—a messenger—he handed me a letter from Joseph’s foreman. It was a warning that if Joseph didn’t show up for work again the next day he would be fired. Joseph never missed work; that’s when I notified the police.”

“And this foreman, what is his name?”

“James Golden,” Mrs. Hightower said. “They work at a rope factory down on the docks. Joseph tied nets. He learned the skill from Mr. Golden. Its steady work and easier than loading and unloading cargo. Pays more too. A lot of men want that job. The owner doesn’t take kindly to missed days. And Joseph, screw up that he was with me, didn’t miss work—even when he ought to. I knew then that something was wrong.”

“And it was later that evening when the police informed you that your husband’s body had been found?”

“Yes,” Mrs. Hightower said. She retrieved a handkerchief from her handbag and dabbed her eyes. Vastra couldn’t tell if she was actually crying; but she did notice that Mrs. Hightower was no longer wearing her wedding ring.

“That is enough for today,” Vastra said. “I will let you know if I find out anything about your husband’s case. Thank you again for meeting with me.” Vastra once again discretely flicked her tongue beneath her veil. She could detect genuine sadness in Mrs. Hightower’s pheromones; but she could also detect something else she couldn’t quite place. It was possible that Mr. Hightower was a lousy husband and Mrs. Hightower was not entirely grieved to be rid of him. But still, she
felt there was something else to be learned from the widow.


“Mrs. Hightower is certainly lying about something,” Vastra said to Jenny as they completed their training and placed their swords back onto the wooden rack. “I shall have to figure out what that is.”

“What do you suppose she’s hiding?” Jenny asked, re-securing her hair into a tight bun.

“I do not know exactly,” Vastra said. “Before I start making too many suppositions, I will need to interview her neighbors and see if I can confirm her timeline given in her statement. If her timeline is the lie, then she could have gone or done just about anything. And I will need to speak to the ladies in her gossip circle and corroborate her timeline on that end. I need to know if she ever even showed up for the gossip circle and if so what time she left.”

“I can do that,” Jenny offered. “I can’t imagine those ladies would have anything to hide. Shouldn’t be much use for your tongue there.” Jenny winked at Vastra, but the sentiment went unnoticed.

“I do need to interview Mr. Dillard as soon as possible,” Vastra said. “And James Golden.”

“Who’s that?”

“Mr. Hightower’s foreman at the rope factory,” Vastra said.

“Rope factory?” Jenny asked. She remembered the day she met Simon’s gang for the first time. How she sat perched in the window of a rope factory and watched from on high as Simon spoke to the boys.

“Yes, why?”

“Nothing.” Jenny couldn’t help but smile again at the memory. Vastra tasted the air and sensed the sweetness and bitterness of whatever happy and sad memory Jenny was keeping to herself.

“Did you find any of the men Dillard was with the other night at the pub?” Vastra asked, snapping Jenny from her trance.

“Yes,” she said. “Well, one. He wasn’t any help. He just kept making lewd comments and wouldn’t answer any of my questions. I don’t think those blokes are going to be of any use.”

“Perhaps not,” Vastra said. “Or perhaps they need a different form of questioning.”

“I’ll try a different tactic with the next one,” Jenny smiled.


Mrs. Hightower’s neighbors were no help to Vastra. None of them saw or heard anything. But there was one neighbor who was unavailable when Vastra went by, so she would come back and
try again tomorrow. For now, she needed to hit the docks and find Mr. Golden and Mr. Dillard.

Vastra didn’t make an appointment with Mr. Dillard. Instead she waited at the docks until his shift was over and he was headed out. Marcus worked as a loader and was fit and muscular. He certainly looked capable of holding his own in a physical altercation.

“Mr. Dillard,” Vastra called.

“Yes, love.” He answered before even turning around to see the woman calling his name. He was taken aback when he saw the figure that had called to him. “I’m sorry, ma’am,” he said changing both his tone and demeanor. “I don’t know where the funeral is.”

Vastra tilted her head to one side, then remembered that Jenny mentioned before that her typical all black attire—dress, gloves, and veil—did look horribly funereal. “I am not looking for a funeral, Mr. Dillard. I am looking for you.”

“Is that right? And why would you be looking for me?” he asked.

“Did you know Mr. Joseph Hightower?” she asked.

Dillard’s demeanor changed again. This time Vastra could sense a spike in his pheromones. “And, who are you?” he asked.

“I am Madam Vastra, detective with Scotland Yard, and I have been assigned Mr. Hightower’s murder case. I would like to ask you some questions. Now, if you have time.” Vastra wanted to interview Dillard now; but even if he refused it may still prove helpful—especially if he ran to Mrs. Hightower. This was the reason for catching him off guard.

unexpectedly, Mr. Dillard smiled, but his pheromones were swirling in chaos. “Certainly. Although I wasn’t aware any female detectives were employed with the Yard. For that matter I wasn’t aware females were allowed to be detectives.” He was clearly attempting to provoke a reaction from Vastra and shift the focus away from himself.

“I assure you, Mr. Dillard, you are not the first person shocked by this revelation and I am sure you will not be the last. Now, where would you like to speak?”

“There’s a bench with a lovely view right down the dock here,” he swept his arm to the right. “Shall we sit there and speak while viewing the beautiful Thames?”

‘Is he trying to sweet talk me?’ Vastra thought to herself. ‘Foolish ape!’

“That is agreeable,” Vastra said.

They took a seat on the bench and Vastra pulled a notepad and a pencil from her leather case. “I have a few routine questions for you, Mr. Dillard. If you would answer as completely and truthfully as possible I would appreciate it. But do try to be succinct. I am not here for stories.” She got the impression that Mr. Dillard was accustomed to talking his way into and out of most situations. She wanted to put an end to that before it began.

“Ask me anything,” he smiled.

“Did you know Mr. Hightower?”

“You know I did or you wouldn’t be interviewing me.” He smiled as he replied.
“A simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ will do, Mr. Dillard. Did you know Mr. Hightower?”

“Yes.”

“And how was it that you came to know Mr. Hightower?”

“We worked close to one another and we met through chance meeting.”

“What was the nature of your relationship with Mr. Hightower?”

Dillard’s pheromones continued to swirl. “We were drinking mates, mostly. He and I and several other blokes from the docks go out drinking after work occasionally.”

“Occasionally?” Vastra asked. “Can you tell me how often you would go out drinking after work?”

“I don’t keep track,” he said, defensively.

“Your best estimate is fine,” she said.

“Several times a week. But it isn’t always the same group, so I don’t know exactly how often Joseph and I were out together.”

Vastra was busy writing. “And what would you do on these nights out drinking?”

“Drink.”

“Where?”

“Everywhere,” he said. “We usually make a night of it. Go from pub to pub. We don’t have a schedule.”

“And were you with Mr. Hightower the night he was murdered?”

His pheromones spiked. He quickly fumbled in his coat pocket and retrieved and lit a pre-rolled cigarette. “Yes. We started the night as usual, but he left early.”

“Why did he leave early?” Vastra asked.

“He said his wife was out with friends and he wanted a little peace and quiet at home before she got back.”

This was a lie, or at least something about it was a lie. But the statement confirmed Mrs. Hightower’s story that Joseph was home when she got home and that he was upset when she arrived because he wanted to be alone. “So he just left the pub?”

“Yup. After only one or two pints. I remember it was early, but not sure what time. I remember him saying that ‘she was probably gone by now’ and he paid his tab and left.”

“Do you know his wife?” Vastra could smell the pheromones rolling off him with the mention of Mrs. Hightower. The pheromone scent mixed with the cigarette smoke was assaulting Vastra’s tongue. It was obvious he knew her.

“Mostly by reputation,” he said. “Joseph said she was a real nag. Always on him about being out with his mates. Constantly telling him what to do, what to wear, who he could and couldn’t be mates with.”
More lies. “Have you ever met Mrs. Hightower?”

“Once maybe.”

The lie was easy to detect. “You have meet her once. Is that correct?”

“Yes.”

“When was that?”

“I don’t remember the date.”

“Was it before or after her husband’s murder?”

“Twice,” he said quickly.

“Twice what?”

“I met her twice. Once before Joseph’s death and once after. At the funeral.”

Lies. “And when did you meet her before Mr. Hightower’s death?”

“Like I said, I don’t remember the date. We were out at a pub one night and Joseph got really drunk. I helped him walk home. He needed someone to lean on. She met us at the door. Right pissed off too.” Marcus laughed. “She was pissed off and he was just plain pissed.”

Vastra didn’t laugh. Though this story appeared to be true, even if it wasn’t the only time Dillard had met Mrs. Hightower before Joseph’s death.

“Anyway, I met her then. And again at the funeral.”

More lies. Vastra finished writing and put her pencil and paper away. “Thank you Mr. Dillard. You have been most helpful.”

“I’m not sure how that was helpful; but you’re welcome.”

“My assistant and I are interviewing Mr. Hightower’s drinking companions to try to piece together his whereabouts the night he was murdered. Your account of the night in question was most insightful. You said he left the pub early and went home to be alone. But you do not remember the pub. Perhaps one of his other mates will remember.”

“The Drunken Sailor,” Marcus said suddenly. “I just remembered it was the Drunken Sailor. We all meet up for a round or two and then we go out from there.”

Vastra quickly retrieved her paper and pencil and jotted down the new information. She smelled the air and it seemed Mr. Dillard was not lying. Perhaps this was the place where they parted ways that night. Although she was quite certain little else about his story was true.

“And where is the Drunken Sailor located?”

Marcus told her the location of the pub and even offered to walk her down the docks. “My shift just ended and I was headed there anyway. I’d be happy to escort you. The docks can be quite rough for a lady.” He smiled.

“No need to worry,” Vastra said. “I am quite capable of taking care of myself. Thank you for your offer but I shall visit it another day.”
Jenny arrived home after interviewing all the women she could track down from Mrs. Hightower’s gossip group. She met Vastra in her office.

“Hello, love.” She walked behind Vastra’s desk and gave her favorite Silurian a kiss on the crest. “Did you find Marcus Dillard?” She started to walk away.

“I did,” Vastra smiled and grabbed Jenny and pulled her back. “I need a proper kiss.” Jenny kissed Vastra on her cool lips and smiled. “How did your interviews with the gossip ladies go?” Vastra asked as she watched Jenny walk across the room and take a seat on the small couch in the office.

“Exhausting.”

“What did you find out?”

“Mildred suspects Mr. Hightower was having an affair and was killed by a jealous husband. Susan said she believed the official suspicion that he was mugged and left for dead. Margret said he probably got drunk and propositioned a woman who wasn’t a prostitute and a kindly stranger came to her defense. Annette believes he got himself drunk and fell off the dock and into the Thames, never mind the fact that he wasn’t found in the Thames and hadn’t been in the Thames.” Jenny paused and put her hands over her face and groaned. “I could go on but, as you may suspect, they were all more interested in gossip than facts.”

“So you were unable to get anything useful?” Vastra asked.

Jenny looked at Vastra and raised an eyebrow. “Do you think I’m an amateur? Of course I got some useful information.”

“Well?” Vastra wasn’t very patient this evening.

“They each said they remembered she left shortly after arriving—before half seven. They were all very clear on this because after she left they all discussed why she would even bother showing up at all if she was just going to leave so soon. They thought surely she must have known she was ill before leaving home, so why bother showing up at all.”

“I see. Did any of them say they suspected that she was not ill at all?” Vastra asked.

“Annette did say she tried to bring that up, but the rest of the ladies refused to entertain it,” Jenny said.

“That is useful information.” Vastra said. “And it gives us a proper beginning to our timeline.”

Jenny smiled. “What did Mr. Hightower’s foreman at the rope factory have to say?”

“Nothing new. He said Mr. Hightower was a skilled and loyal worker. He confirmed that he sent a messenger to his home the day he was found dead because he did not show for work. Apparently he has only missed one other day of work since he started there. That helps to corroborate part of Mrs. Hightower’s story.”

“And what did Mr. Dillard have to say?” Jenny asked.
“A lot of lies,” Vastra said. “And as with Mrs. Hightower, I need to figure out what exactly he was lying about. But one thing is certain, they both know more about this murder then either of them are admitting.”

Jenny got up and went to the large board she bought Vastra when they moved into the house. It currently had a few notes and photos tacked on the corkboard side, but the chalk board on the other side was empty. “Let’s make some notes, shall we?” Jenny flipped the board over to the chalk side and drew a line down the middle. At the top of the left side she wrote “Mrs. Hightower” and at the top of the right side she wrote “Dillard.”

“What did Mrs. Hightower lie about?” Jenny asked, and readied herself to write.

“Jenny, I have already written this down in my notes,” Vastra said, somewhat exasperated.

“No up here,” Jenny retorted. “If we put it up here we can both work on it.”

“Very well,” Vastra said. She gave in to Jenny’s demands. “She said she felt better after she left the gossip group and walked directly home where she and Mr. Hightower argued. She then said Mr. Hightower left and never returned.”

Jenny jotted down an abbreviated account with bullet points of the facts as told by Mrs. Hightower. “What do you believe is false about that statement? Or what are the possibilities?”

“Any of it really,” Vastra said. “She could have not been ill. She could have not gone directly home. Joseph may or may not have been there when she arrived. Someone else could have been there. I will know more after I interview the last of her neighbors if they can corroborate her story and timeline.”

“What about Mr. Dillard? What do you suspect him of lying of?”

“His pheromones were elevated and erratic as soon as I told him I wanted to speak with him about Mr. Hightower.”

Jenny wrote, ‘elevated pheromones—sign of guilt’ on the chalkboard beneath ‘Dillard.’

“He claimed only a vague memory of the night of the murder, but admitted he was with Mr. Hightower at a pub on the docks. He also confirmed Mrs. Hightower’s claim that her husband went home to be alone while she was out with her friends—although there was something not altogether truthful when he said it.”

Jenny was listening carefully. She wrote, ‘suspicious account of leaving pub.’

“He then said he only met Mrs. Hightower once, then changed his story and said twice. This was an obvious lie.” Jenny noted that he lied about how many times he had met Mrs. Hightower. “And he said the only time he had seen her after her husband’s death was at the funeral. I know for sure that is a lie because I saw him at her home after the murder but before the funeral. And they had a heated discussion about something, as I have said.”

“Maybe your instinct was right all along,” Jenny said. “If he lied about how many times he had met Mrs. Hightower, maybe it’s because they were having an affair. Maybe Mrs. Hightower didn’t hire him to murder her husband as I suggested. Maybe they concocted a plan to be together and after Mr. Hightower left that night to go out drinking after the argument. Then Mr. Dillard found him and murdered him at the docks.”

“Perhaps,” Vastra sighed, “but that does not explain why they are no longer together if they
murdered him to get him out of the way. And besides, even though their testimonies align in some areas, that does not mean it is what happened. The only thing I know at this point is that they are both lying about something and they are both likely involved in the murder. Even if Mr. Dillard is the one who actually committed the murder, Mrs. Hightower bears some guilt in the matter. Hopefully the other neighbors will be home tomorrow and can either confirm or refute Mrs. Hightower’s statement of when she arrived home and what transpired upon arrival.”

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“Yes?” A little old lady answered the door of the residence beside Mrs. Hightower. This was the last neighbor Vastra had yet to interview. None of the others could offer any statement about Mrs. Hightower’s actions the night of Joseph’s murder. Vastra needed this one to be different.

“Mrs. Irma Chesterfield?” Vastra asked.

“Why yes. What can I do for you?”

Vastra explained who she was and what she was there for. After a bit of convincing, Mrs. Chesterfield let Vastra into her home for an interview. This was already looking more promising than the last five neighbors.

“Would you like some tea?” Mrs. Chesterfield asked.

“Yes. That would be lovely, thank you,” Vastra said, remembering her manners. Jenny once told her it was rude to not accept tea when offered in someone else’s home. Besides, she was rather chilly and the warm beverage did sound lovely. She followed Irma into the kitchen and took a seat at a small table. The warmth from the wood burning stove was a welcome relief from the damp cold August day. “As I stated, I have a few questions regarding the night Mr. Hightower was murdered.”

“Oh dear,” Mrs. Chesterfield said, “awful business that.”

“Yes, well, I need to establish an appropriate timeline which will aid in the capture of the perpetrator. Can you tell me what you remember about that night?”

“Frank and I got home from visiting my sister around half seven. A bit late for us, but she insisted on recounting her recent trip abroad in excruciating detail.”

“Are you certain of the time?” Vastra asked?

“Yes, the clock chimed just as we were hanging our coats on the hooks.”

Vastra began to jot down notes. “And was Mr. or Mrs. Hightower home at that time?”

“Mr. Hightower was,” Irma said. “I didn’t know that at the time, of course; but after he left a bit later I saw that he had been home.”

“So you never saw him arrive, only leave?” Vastra asked.

“That’s right. But shortly after we arrived home I did see Mrs. Hightower walking home. I remember being confused because I thought it was the night she met with that ladies gossip group.
She meets with them the first Thursday of every month.” She smiled. She was rather proud to be helping. The kettle whistled and Irma went to pour water for tea.

“Was Mrs. Hightower alone when you saw her walking home?”

“Why yes,” Irma said, bringing two cups to the table. “I would remember if she wasn’t. That would be odd.”

“Do you remember specifically what time she arrived home?” Vastra asked.

“No, not specifically. But it was between half seven and eight o’clock.”

Vastra snaked her tongue out beneath her veil, there were no lies in Mrs. Chesterfield’s statement. “You are sure it was before eight?”

“Yes. As soon as she went inside she and Joseph got into a very loud argument. Then the clock chimed eight. He left shortly after that.”

“An argument?” Vastra asked. This confirmed Mrs. Hightower’s story. “Was that common?”

“Oh heaven’s yes. Those two argued all the time, well, all the time he was home. I don’t mean to speak ill of the dead, but that man was out quite a bit. Not much of a marriage if you ask me.”

“Do you suppose they were fighting? Physically? Did you hear signs of an altercation?”

“Fighting? No. Arguing? Yes,” she said. “You couldn’t help but hear them. The walls are thinner than you would think with what we pay in rent.”

“How long did they argue?”

“Not long,” Mrs. Chesterfield said. “Maybe five minutes.”

“And what happened after they stopped arguing?” Vastra asked.

“They were quiet for a bit. I could hear talking, not arguing, that’s when I remember the clock struck eight. Just after that, Mr. Hightower left.”

“You saw him leave? And you are sure about the time?”

“Yes. It was shortly after the clock struck eight because that’s when Frank told me it was time for bed. We were both exhausted from the evening with my sister.”

Vastra still detected no lies. “And you saw him leave? You did not just hear the door close? You saw Mr. Hightower leave just after eight?”

“With my own two eyes,” Irma smiled.

“Did you see or hear him return?”

“Oh no, dear,” Irma said. “I went to bed right after I saw him leave. I was exhausted after listening to my sister drone on about her trip to America.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Chesterfield,” Vastra said as she packed away her things. “You have been most helpful. Would you be willing to sign a statement or even appear in court if we find that your testimony helps us arrest a suspect?”
“Why yes, dear,” she smiled. “I just hate what happened to that man, even if he was a lousy husband.”

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Vastra sat down with a huff. “I am beginning to believe your theory that Mrs. Hightower hired Mr. Dillard to murder her husband.”

“Oh really? And not that they were having an affair?” Jenny sounded surprised. “What changed your mind?”

“Mrs. Chesterfield, their neighbor, corroborated Mrs. Hightower’s story completely. She also testified that Mr. Hightower was an awful husband who was out at all hours and often. She said they argued all the time. Well, all the time he was home.”

“That is certainly enough to want out of a marriage;” Jenny said. “But is that enough to have your husband killed?”

“Mrs. Hightower did say to me that she and Mr. Hightower took vows when they were married. Do those vows not include the phrase ‘til death do us part’?”

“Yes, but,” Jenny paused, “do you really think that’s enough?”

“Perhaps she thought, as Mrs. Mason did, that his death was the only way out. This would explain why Mrs. Hightower and Mr. Dillard are no longer in a relationship, they never were!” Vastra paused and tapped her pencil against her case file. “But what was Mrs. Hightower lying about?” She glanced up at the chalkboard where Jenny made notes and couldn’t find a hole in Mrs. Hightower’s story; but she knew Mrs. Hightower lied to her about something.

“Are you sure she went straight home that night,” Jenny asked.

“The time frame does match up. Given the time the ladies in her group say she left and the time she says she arrived home, which was corroborated by her neighbor, there would have been very little time for her to have gone elsewhere,” Vastra said. “Why?”

“I’ve been thinking you were right all along—Mr. Dillard and Mrs. Hightower were having an affair.”

“Why do you think that now?” Vastra asked.

“I have a new theory. Maybe she did go straight home, but she didn’t walk alone,” Jenny said. “What if she and Dillard planned to spend the evening together and that’s why she left her gossip group early. She wasn’t ill, she had to meet her lover. But Dillard caught her on her way home, somewhere along the route and told her that Joseph had left the pub early and gone home to be alone. Just as they both stated.”

Vastra interrupted. “But Mrs. Chesterfield clearly remembers that Mrs. Hightower arrived at her home alone. There was no one with her.”

“I’m sure Dillard would not have risked getting too close to their home. He probably hid before they got within eyeshot.”
“Perhaps.”

“Either way,” Jenny continued, “maybe this was the last straw. They wanted to be together and Joseph just kept getting in the way. So they quickly made a plan. Mrs. Hightower would get into an argument with her husband when she got home. She knew this would drive him out, most likely to the pub to meet his mates. It was still early, so he would likely go straight to the Drunken Sailor and see if they were still there. Dillard would lay low, wait for Joseph to leave, follow him to the docks, then attack him from behind, and hide his body at the docks.”

“Jenny Flint,” Vastra said. “That is a very good theory.”

“I told you that chalkboard would come in handy,” Jenny smiled. “The theory fits the timeline, the motive, the eye witness accounts, it even explains why Mr. Dillard’s scent was on the body. Dillard knew his way around the docks and knew where he could put the body without anyone finding it for at least a day or so.”

“He was certainly fit enough to kill Mr. Hightower in one blow and carry the body to a place out of the way to hide it. That would also explain the confrontation and the emotion when he went back to her house after they found Mr. Hightower’s body,” Vastra said.

“She probably told him to stay away until everything settled down. But he either got nervous when the body was found or missed his lover. Either way he went to her house and she was not happy about it. She may have been remorseful and regretted killing her husband. Any of those reasons would have certainly been enough to cause an argument and explain the awkward exchange on the steps.”

“What’s your next move?” Jenny asked.

“I need to surveil Mr. Dillard. After all, no matter which theory is correct—hired assassin or determined lover—he is our murderer. At this point I can only hope he slips up and either confesses to one of his drinking companions or otherwise gives me a clue.”

******

Vastra followed Marcus Dillard along his pub crawls for several nights. He always began his evening at the Drunken Sailor, as he told her earlier. A quick check with the bartender confirmed that Dillard and his mates arrived here, most days, after their shifts for a pint or two. He recalled nothing unusual the day of Hightower’s murder and couldn’t confirm nor deny the statement that Joseph left early that night. He simply didn’t remember, and that was the truth.

From The Drunken Sailor Dillard and a group of men, the participants in the group varied nightly, began their journey of going from pub to pub. Men would leave the group, one or two at a time, as the night went on. But each night, Marcus Dillard was the last to go home. That was a constant.

On the third night Vastra followed Dillard as he left the last pub, alone. She assumed he was going home, but he went along a different route than she had previously seen him use. Diverting off the main street and onto lesser side streets, Dillard disappeared through a blue door and into another pub.

Vastra quickly followed down the side street and past the door. A copper plate bolted onto the brick read “The Blue Door.” She scoffed, “How literal,” and went further down the alley to a
darkened spot and waited.

Within half an hour Dillard emerged from The Blue Door. Unknowingly, just moments after his exit, he offered up a bit of evidence to Vastra’s sharp ears that shed new light on the entire investigation. Vastra rushed home to put all the pieces together. Within hours she had solved the case. She telegraphed Detective Abberline instructing him to meet her the next day. She would need his help in setting a trap to force Dillard to confess to his part in the Hightower murder.

******

“Are you sure this will work?” Abberline asked, somewhat nervous. It was late and dark and he and Vastra were alone in her carriage. But that isn’t why he was nervous.

“Yes,” Vastra assured him. “As long as you do what I have told you.”

“You better be right about this,” he said.

“I am.”

“Can’t we get another officer to do this?” he asked.

“No. This will give us leverage.”

“Leverage? How?”

“Just do as I have instructed and we will have our murderer behind bars before the sun comes up.”

With the trap set, Vastra waited outside the pub on Bright Street. A nearby clock chimed ten. Dillard had entered the pub alone—the rest of his drinking companions taking their leave at the last stop—but was now leaving with another man, detective Abberline.

Disappearing into an alley, Vastra quickly followed to two men. Nearing their location, Vastra heard the muffled commotion of a struggle, followed by Detective Abberline yelling. “You are under arrest for buggery and gross indecency.”


“You solicited me in that pub and attempted to initiate sexual acts with me in this alley.”

“I did nothing of the sort. And it’s my word against yours,” Dillard said.

“And mine,” Vastra said, stepping close enough for the two men to see her in the darkness. She blended in with her all-black ensemble.

“You!” Dillard exclaimed.

“Yes. Now be quiet. We are taking you to the Yard.”

Vastra’s private carriage pulled up to the end of the alley. “Parker, to Scotland Yard. And do take the long way ‘round.” Dillard, Vastra, and Abberline piled in.

The carriage lurched forward and Vastra began her plea to Mr. Dillard before he could protest
further. “I know you had a sexual relationship with Mr. Hightower. I also know you know more
about his death than you have told me. But I also know you did not kill him. I assume that Mrs.
Hightower killed him in a fit of rage. Is that correct?”

Marcus looked shocked. “I’m sure I don’t know what you are talking about.”

“Mr. Dillard. We have evidence that both you and Mrs. Hightower were involved in the death of
Joseph Hightower.” Of course this was only partially true, the only evidence Vastra had was what
she knew by her sense of smell; and that couldn’t be used in court. “Both your and Mrs.
Hightower’s testimonies were similar enough that I know you were both involved in the murder.
My superiors agree with me and want me to arrest you both. When I charge Mrs. Hightower, she
will produce a more convincing story that it was you who killed her husband. She will most likely
win and you will most likely be sentenced to murder.”

Marcus still stared across the carriage at Vastra. “I said I don’t know what you’re talking about.
And you can’t prove anything or else I would be under arrest and you wouldn’t be speaking to me.”

“But you are under arrest, Mr. Dillard. You are currently under arrest for buggery and gross
indecency. Charges that I and my counterpart, Detective Abberline, are willing to overlook if you
cooperate.”

“You can’t prove that either. You set me up,” Dillard barked.

“The word of a Detective Chief Inspector with Scotland Yard is all the jury will need. These sort of
traps are set all the time. You already know this which is why you are so careful to only
proposition men at the end of the night, after your other companions have gone home.”

Dillard sat quietly.

“I am offering you a way to avoid being charged for a murder you did not commit. The only way.
You have until this carriage arrives at Scotland Yard to understand and accept what I am saying to
you. After that, everything you say will be handled by our superiors and I will not be able to help
you. Do you understand?” This was the leverage Vastra spoke to Abberline of. She hated
blackmailing Dillard in this way; but more than that, she hated an innocent man going to prison
while a guilty woman went free. “Either way I will name you and Mrs. Hightower as suspects in
Mr. Hightower’s murder. I am offering you a chance, the only chance, to prove your innocence.”

Dillard reluctantly nodded. He realized he was between a rock and a hard place.

“I do not have enough evidence to prove Mrs. Hightower killed her husband. Nor do I have enough
to prove that you did not. But I can prove you were both involved. When I make my accusations to
my superiors, it will become a ‘he said, she said’ affair. She will argue that she has a witness who
can confirm her whereabouts and who put her at home alone on the night of his murder. Thus
making her incapable of performing the murder. She will accuse you and she will be successful.
She will expose your affair with her husband and use that to implicate you in his murder. However,
if you confess to your involvement and tell me truthfully what happened that night I can help you.”

“How can I trust you?” Dillard asked, defeated. “You just set me up now you’re blackmailing me
to confess to involvement in a murder. What am I supposed to think?”

“You will have to weigh your chances, I suppose,” Vastra said. “I know you are innocent of
murder. The jury will not. Where do you want to put your trust?”

“Tell us what happened that night, son,” Abberline spoke up.
Dillard sighed and admitted defeat. “We left the Drunken Sailor, like I said, after only two rounds. We were giving Catherine enough time to leave. She has a monthly night out with her friends and Joseph said she’d be gone by seven.”

“Do you remember what time you arrived at the Hightower residence?” Vastra asked.

“It was shortly after seven. I don’t remember exactly. Joseph said she left at seven and shouldn’t be home until at least nine, giving us plenty of time. But she came home early. And caught us.”

“She caught you in the act of sexual intercourse?” Vastra asked, with her usual amount of Silurian tact.

“No. We were packing Joseph’s things. He was leaving her—for me. He told her so when she came in.”

“How did she react?” Vastra asked.

“How do you think she reacted? She was furious. She said she knew he was cheating on her; but she never suspected it was with a man. She started yelling at him and he started yelling back.”

“What did you while they argued?”

“I just stood and watched. He tried to calm her down. He pleaded with her. He just wanted to talk like adults. Finally, he walked toward her, to comfort her, not to harm her; but she picked up a brick from beside the fireplace and she smashed him in the head. He fell dead, instantly.”

Vastra detected only the truth from Dillard.

“Then what happened?” Abberline asked.

“We were stunned. We both just stood there. Then I rushed to Joseph. I tried to get him to wake up, but he was already gone.” Dillard teared up.

Again, Vastra detected no lies in his accounting.

“She said it was my fault. That if I hadn’t interfered in their marriage none of this would have happened. She told me to take the body to the Thames and throw it in; but I refused. Then she did exactly what you said she’d do; she said if I didn’t dispose of his body she would tell the police about the affair and say that I killed him when he refused to leave her for me.”

Vastra tasted the air. Once again, there were no lies in his statement, only sadness. And this is exactly what Vastra had come to suspect the instant she saw Marcus leave The Blue Door with another man and ask if they could go back to his place. It was then she realized that it wasn’t Mrs. Hightower that Dillard was having the affair with, it was Mr. Hightower. With this new revelation, Vastra pieced together the new scenario and realized it made more sense that Mrs. Hightower was the murderer.

“What did you do?” Vastra asked.

“I left. I told her I wouldn’t do that to Joseph. I thought that if I got far enough away there would be no way to connect me to any of it. I hadn’t done anything wrong and she couldn’t prove anything.

“But you obviously changed your mind,” Vastra said. “Why?”

“I thought maybe someone saw me go to their home that night. If someone had seen me then I
couldn’t deny being there. I thought that if I could sneak Joseph’s body out in the cover of darkness, I could make it look like a mugging and I could avoid any trouble altogether. So I went back and agreed to help.”

Vastra looked across at Abberline who was sitting beside Dillard. She wasn’t sure he would go for what she was about to propose, but she also knew he wanted justice for the death of Mr. Hightower and this way the rightful person would be tried.

“Does anyone know of your relationship with Mr. Hightower?”

“No. We were very careful. No one knew.”

“This is what will happen,” Vastra began. “We will say that you turned yourself in tonight. That you grew tired of the constant surveillance and you felt as though you had no choice but to confess, especially since you had not indeed killed Mr. Hightower. We will not speak of the advances toward Detective Chief Inspector Abberline if you confess to your part in Mr. Hightower’s death and name Mrs. Hightower as the murderer.”

“Why would I do that?” Dillard asked. “I can go to prison for far more if I admit to involvement in Joseph’s murder than if I just confess to buggery and gross indecency.”

“Do you know what they do to men convicted of buggery, Mr. Dillard?” Vastra asked.

“Yes.”

“Then you will need to trust me when I tell you that I will do everything in my power to make sure that does not happen to you.” Vastra was referring to the forced “treatment” of administering female hormones to men in order to “cure” them of their unnatural urges. It was barbaric and left the men impotent and suicidal. “You will vehemently deny her allegations of that nature and hopefully there is no one out there who will say otherwise.”

Marcus, wide eyed and on the verge of tears, said, “But what if they believe her? Either way I will be convicted of that crime.”

“That is why you will modify your confession.”

Abberline shot Vastra a sideways look.

“I will not have this man punished for something that should not be a crime to begin with,” she said to Abberline.

“But Madam,” Abberline said, “it is a crime.”

“And it should not be!” She was adamant about this. “He will confess, and he will be punished for his part in the murder: wrongful disposal of a body and impeding an investigation. But he will not be punished for having a relationship with a man. That is ridiculous.”

Dillard sat shaking.

Vastra refocused on Dillard and softened her tone. “You will tell the officer who interviews you that you were simply there to help Mr. Hightower pack his belongings and help him leave his wife. He knew you were a dock loader and therefore able to move large crates and trunks with ease. You will testify that he wanted to do this on that night because Mrs. Hightower was out in order to avoid a confrontation. However, she came home and caught him leaving and an argument erupted.
“There is a witness that will confirm the argument. You will testify that she picked up the brick and hit him over the head and killed him and that she instructed you to dispose of the body. You will tell the truth that she said she would blackmail you, that she would tell everyone that you and Mr. Hightower were involved sexually; but you will lie and say that was not the case.

“You will then say that you left just after eight o’clock, like you did, but decided to come back and dispose of the body out of fear that the police would believe her over you given your past history with the police for drunken and disorderly behavior. You will be punished for disposing of the body and for impeding the investigation; but I can assure you that is much better than being charged for murder or buggery and gross misconduct.”

Dillard was crying at this point. The confession sounded solid, although he was scared it wouldn’t work.

Vastra picked up on his pheromones. “I assure you, this is your best chance. A confession shows remorse. And even with your word against hers this is the best version and the best chance your word has.” She paused for a moment. “I will name you as a suspect as soon as we get to the Yard. You will be arrested along with Mrs. Hightower and then it truly will be her word against yours. This way we will see the proper murderer convicted.”

Dillard nodded.

“When we arrive I will say that I have been surveilling you for some time and tonight Detective Abberline and I approached you for questioning. You will say that you realized we would not leave you alone and that your conscience finally got the better of you and out of guilt you confessed. They will then ask for your official testimony. You will tell them everything that actually happened, down to the last detail, with only the deviation of your relationship with Mr. Hightower. Do you understand?”

“Yes. But, how do you know I’m telling you the truth?” Dillard asked.

“I just do.”

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Upon arriving at the Yard, Dillard was sequestered to a small room where his official statement and confession would be recorded.

“I need to be the one who brings Mrs. Hightower in,” Vastra told Abberline.

“You? Why?”

“She does not have the slightest notion I suspect her. I even went so far as to meet with her at her shop again today to inform her that her neighbor and gossip circle companions fully corroborated her story and it was a great help in developing a timeline of Mr. Hightower’s death. I also told her I had a suspect under surveillance and would let her know when I was able to bring them in. She asked that I inform her immediately, no matter what time, day or night. If I retrieve her she will believe she is coming in to identify a suspect, not that she is the suspect. I want to catch her off guard so that she has no chance to change her story or concoct a new one.”

“You are very sneaky Madam Vastra,” Abberline said.
“You once indicated you were more concerned that justice be served than strict law followed, Detective Abberline,” Vastra said. “This is the only way we will see the guilty parties punished for their involvement in the death of a man. I think we both agree we can live with ourselves over the small deviations of the truth it took to get make this happen.”

Abberline simply nodded his agreement and Vastra left in her personal carriage to pick up Mrs. Hightower.

*****

“Mrs. Hightower,” Vastra said when they reached the Yard. “Before I ask you if you recognize the man we have in custody, I need you to confirm and sign the official statement you gave me earlier. As I said, it will help us establish and prove the timeline and will assist in a swift conviction.”

“Absolutely,” she said eagerly, “anything to help to put the man who murdered my husband behind bars.”

Vastra smiled beneath her veil as Mrs. Hightower signed the document stating that she and Joseph had an argument around eight o’clock; and that he left just afterwards, never to be seen alive by her again.

“The man I have been surveilling is in here, Mrs. Hightower,” Vastra said, leading Catherine down a hallway. “I need to know if you recognize him.” The two women peered through a small glass window. Dillard was being questioned by a detective and didn’t notice them.

Mrs. Hightower’s pheromones spiked. Vastra was picking up all sorts of emotions: happiness, excitement, fear, and guilt.

“Do you know that man?” Vastra asked.

“That is Marcus Dillard, he was one of Joseph’s drinking mates. He killed Joseph?” Mrs. Hightower asked.

“No,” Vastra said. “You killed your husband, Mrs. Hightower.”

Mrs. Hightower spun around to face Vastra. “What? Don’t be absurd. You said you had a suspect.”

“I do,” Vastra smiled beneath her veil, “you.”

Mrs. Hightower made to protest, but Vastra cut her off.

“Mr. Dillard has confessed to his involvement in Mr. Hightower’s murder. He takes full responsibility for disposing of the body. But he did not kill your husband. There is no reason not to believe his testimony. He has nothing to gain from any admission and he knows he will be charged with several crimes. He simply could no longer live with the guilt.”

“Did he tell you he was having an affair with Joseph? That the two of them were lovers?” Mrs. Hightower spat.

“What he told me is that you killed your husband. And I believe him,” Vastra said.

“Good luck proving any of it,” Mrs. Hightower snapped. “I have my version of what happened that
night and he has his. I have witnesses to back me up. You said yourself, Madam, my neighbors and mates corroborated my story to the minute.”

“You are under arrest for the murder of Mr. Joseph Hightower,” Vastra said to Catherine. “You will remain in custody and will be visited by a solicitor tomorrow. I suggest you rest up.” An officer ushered Mrs. Hightower to a detention room while reading her rights.

Abberline met Vastra in the hallway. “She’s right. It is still her word against his. And she has witnesses that place her home alone during the murder.”

“I have been thinking about that,” Vastra said. “Would you mind posing for some photographs, Detective Abberline?”

“What now, Madam?” Abberline said.

“Trust me.”

*******

Photos in hand, Vastra and Detective Abberline set out to revisit Mrs. Irma Chesterfield first thing in the morning.

“Madam Vastra,” Abberline started as they rolled their way down the street. “Why did blackmail Dillard into a confession by trapping him with a crime you had no intention of charging him with? It seems rather drastic to me.”

“Mr. Dillard is not blameless in this crime, Detective. He could have avoided the whole thing had he gone to the police the moment he left the Hightower residence that night. Had he done so, they would have discovered the body, the packed trunks, every scrap of evidence needed to solve the case. Instead, he helped cover it up by hiding the body and altering the crime scene. My sympathies only go so far. I did what I had to do to catch a murderer.”

Abberline was silent the rest of the way to Mrs. Chesterfield’s. After a brief conversation they returned to Scotland Yard with a new official eye witness statement in hand. Vastra and Abberline presented their findings to Detective Superintendent Lang.

“So you see, Detective Superintendent Lang, according to Mrs. Hightower’s first official statement Mr. Hightower left home just after eight p.m. and she did not see him again. Were this true, Mrs. Hightower would indeed be home alone when her husband was murdered. And initially, her neighbor Mrs. Chesterfield corroborated Mrs. Hightower’s alibi.

“But if you take a look at Mrs. Chesterfield’s new official testimony, she admits that she never saw the man’s face, only that a man—or a person in a man’s coat and hat—leaving the Hightower residence just after eight p.m. I presented photos to Mrs. Chesterfield of Detective Abberline wearing a series of coats including the grey coat Mr. Hightower was found dead in, Mr. Dillard’s brown coat and hat, and other coats and hats from various gentlemen here at the yard.

“Without hesitation or prompting Mrs. Chesterfield identified Mr. Dillard’s coat and hat as the garments worn by the person who left the Hightower home just after eight. It was Mr. Dillard who left, as he admitted, not Mr. Hightower. Given this new evidence, at least that part of Mrs. Hightower’s testimony is false, thus putting all of her testimony in doubt.”
Lang sat and studied the new evidence. “The witness testimony helps. But this doesn’t make Mr. Dillard’s account true.”

“Why would he confess at all?” Vastra asked. “Why risk it?”

“I don’t know,” Lang said. “But I can tell you that a jury is going to be hard pressed to believe that a woman could have killed a man with a single blow to the head.”

“Her adrenaline had to be greatly elevated,” Vastra offered. “It could have been at just the right spot. There are any number of reasons that make it feasible she was able to kill her husband in one blow to the head with a brick.” Vastra emphasized the last three words.

“I believe you, but this is a job for a jury and a judge. We merely present the evidence. They determine guilt.”

Vastra wondered if he had forgotten that she knew perfectly well how the justice system worked.

“None the less, another great job, Detective Vastra,” Lang smiled. “I still don’t know how you managed to suspect Dillard of anything in the first place. But once again, your instincts proved correct.”

“We are luckier than most know to have her,” Abberline added and shot Vastra a wink and a head nod.

“I have paperwork to finish, then I shall take my leave,” Vastra said flatly. “I trust my other case that was relinquished to Detective Morris shall be returned to me tomorrow?”

“I think so,” Abberline said. “First thing in the morning.”

*******

Vastra and Jenny sat cuddled on the settee in the parlor after dinner. As they sat in their favorite arrangement—Jenny leaned back against Vastra—Vastra mindlessly twirled Jenny’s hair in her fingers.

“Do you think the jury will find Mrs. Hightower guilty?” Jenny asked.

“I certainly hope so,” she said. “She is, after all, guilty.”

“But you know it doesn’t always work out like that,” Jenny said.

“I know,” Vastra exhaled. “I wish there had been more evidence. As it is, Mrs. Hightower has created her own doubt with her false testimony.”

“I think it’s incredible you were able to piece it all together like you did,” Jenny said. “I’m not sure any other detective would have been able to do it.”

“Knowing that Mr. Dillard was involved certainly gave me an edge,” Vastra admitted. “For that I can only thank my Silurian traits.”

“Yes, but still, the rest was superb detective work.”
“Abberline will return my other case to me tomorrow. Hopefully I can solve this one as quickly,” Vastra said.

“I’m certain you will, love,” Jenny said.

Reaching behind the settee, Vastra retrieved a small parcel she had hidden while Jenny cleaned up after dinner. “I bought this for you when I started the case. I told myself I would give it to you only after I solved it.”

Jenny untied the white and gold ribbon and unwrapped the brown paper. She opened the box to reveal the beautiful silver and pearl tortoise shell hair comb Vastra purchased from the bazaar.

“This is lovely,” she said, turning around to give Vastra a kiss.

“Not nearly as lovely as you, my dear,” Vastra said and kissed Jenny again.

“How about we continue this upstairs?” Jenny smiled a sly smile and the glint in here eye was enough for Vastra.

The Silurian scooped Jenny up in her arms and headed upstairs.

Thud thud thud.

Thud thud thud.

Thud thud thud.

A relentless pounding at the front door woke Vastra and Jenny from deep sleep just after four in the morning. Jenny threw on a dressing gown and rushed downstairs.

“Wut?” she screamed at the delivery boy; her accent thick.

“Urgent message for Madam Vastra,” he said, holding out a telegram.

Jenny took the telegram up to Vastra who was already up and restarting the fire. News at this hour was never good.

The telegram simply read, “Urgent. Buck’s Row, Whitechapel.” And it was signed, “D.S. Lang.”
Buck's Row to Hanbury Street

Chapter Summary

Vastra investigates two gruesome murders; and old murders are reexamined. While everyone guesses which murders are connected, only Vastra, with her remarkable sense of smell, knows the truth.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

31 August 1888

Arriving at Buck’s Row around half four in the morning and heading east, Parker turned right onto Court Street and parked the carriage to avoid the mass of people now assembled around the board school area. As Vastra walked toward the scene, she couldn’t see the body for the wall of brown, black, and grey coat-clad officers and onlookers who had arrived before her. But despite being unable to see the gruesome display, her tongue was assaulted by the taste of iron and the putrid stench of food matter in every state of digestion.

A whisper started and spread like a ripple over water as the veiled detective approached. Finally, Detective Chief Inspector Abberline, who was standing next to and speaking with Detective Superintendent Lang, turned and addressed Vastra.

“Madam,” he said, “I have tried to keep the scene as pristine as possible for you. Though I must say there have already been several men who have examined the body.”

“Yes,” Lang interjected, “Abberline was adamant that we get you here right away so that you could examine the scene before anyone else touched the victim.”

“And he was correct to do so,” Vastra said dryly. “Finally a modicum of competency in handling a scene of which you intend me to investigate.”

“I think we will all be investigating this one,” Lang said.

“Oh?” Vastra asked.

“This is unlike anything I’ve seen in all my years on the force,” Lang said. “It’s quite gruesome. You should prepare yourself.”

“Superintendent Lang, have you ever known me to have a weak constitution?” Vastra asked, somewhat put off.

“No, I have not,” Lang admitted. “Let’s get you up there.”

“Make way,” Abberline barked as the trio walked toward the body.

The smell from the victim continued to assault Vastra’s sensitive tongue. When she got her first glimpse of the corpse she was surprised at how little blood there was; yet the smell of it lingered thick like a miasma in the air around her. The taste of iron dominated her senses above all else.
Vastra quickly surmised the cause of death to be from the cuts to her throat—two massive slits that severed her jugular, arteries, and airway. Her abdomen was cut and slashed, including her intestines and bowels, creating the stench of partially digested food that possibly only offended Vastra to any great amount. One massive, deep cut bisected her abdomen and several smaller nicks and cuts could be seen scattered about her stomach from her pubic area to her breasts.

The veiled detective slowly circled the body as the crowd of police, medical staff, and onlookers gawked. She took note of everything: the position of the body, the wounds, and the way in which the clothing lay on the corpse. She examined the ground and noticed several boot prints in the blood spatter—most likely from the arterial spray when the throat was slashed.

“Have we matched the boot prints to the officers who have examined the body or any witnesses who approached her?” Vastra asked.

“We have everyone who we know had contact with the body, or came within the vicinity of the scene, accounted for and we have collected statements. We did look at their shoes and have made notes on the prints,” Lang said.

“Good,” Vastra said without looking up, “I will need to speak with each of them right away.”

“We’ve already got their statements,” Lang started, “you will have access to those…”

“No,” Vastra barked. “I will speak to them now. Let me know when they have been gathered.”

Lang wasn’t used to taking orders from his subordinates; but he knew Vastra had her own methods and he had learned to trust in them, and her, over the years. “Very well.”

“I’ll get them rounded up,” Abberline volunteered.

Lang watched as Abberline was happy to do Vastra’s bidding.

Vastra squatted next to the body—her back to Lang—careful not to get her dress and petticoats in the gore. She cursed the confines of the veil and disguise she was forced to endure for the sake of anonymity. She needed to get all the pheromones from the body before anyone else touched it. It was contaminated enough as it was.

She snaked her tongue out beneath her veil and began drinking in all the scents. The iron taste of the blood was strong; but she could will herself to ignore it and search past it. The stench of the victim’s gut contents was also overwhelming to Vastra’s sensitive tongue; but again, she concentrated and ignored it. She picked up several individuals, at least five, probably more. Then, there it was.

The taste of rage filled her mouth. It was complimented by hatred, desire, and a host of pheromones all fueled by the perpetrator’s passion. He reveled in this act at first. Then it seemed to turn to hate and anger. At least that is what her tongue and her gut were telling her. She drew in more air and let it drift across her tongue. This was somewhat effective; but she needed more. She needed a better vantage point and she needed her veil out of the way so her tongue could do what it needed to get the full pheromone signature. She would need to acquire a piece of clothing from the evidence locker to keep the pheromones fresh on her tongue and in her mind.

“Madam,” Abberline called out from across the way, “the witnesses are ready for you.”

Vastra slowly stood and took one more look at the body. “You will have photographs available shortly?”
“They should be ready by afternoon,” Lang said. “We will have a briefing as soon as we get done here. Please do attend. I know you have your own way; but there will be much to discuss.”

“Thank you, Superintendent,” Vastra said. “Thank you for allowing me to examine the scene so quickly while still in relatively pristine condition. I assure you it will aid in my investigation. So often, evidence is missed or destroyed early on. Even the slightest change to the scene can alter theories and send investigators down a wrong path.”

“You are one of my most valuable and competent Detectives, Madam,” Lang smiled. “You are given a lot of leeway. And if anyone attempts to hinder your investigation, they will answer to me.” Lang turned to walk away when he suddenly stopped and turned to face Vastra once more. “Oh, you mentioned alterations in the scene.”

“Yes.”

“The victim’s skirt was raised when the first witnesses arrived at the scene. They lowered it to preserve what was left of her dignity.”

“I suppose that was a kind act,” Vastra said. “But I do wish people would let things be. This is a murder investigation after all!” Vastra left to question the witnesses.

“Madam,” Abberline started. He headed toward Vastra, meeting her a few feet from the witnesses. “We have the first four officials to come onto the scene as well as two witnesses who discovered the body. They left the scene to head into work after the officers arrived; but were retrieved as soon as Lang arrived on scene and questioned the officers.”

“Very good,” Vastra said. “That saves me the trouble of tracking them down. No one else has contacted the body?”

“Not to our knowledge, no. As soon as Lang arrived he posted the officers already on scene to barricade the body and gave strict orders to not allow access to anyone. There were some other looky-loos, but no one was allowed within at least three yards of the scene.”

“Excellent. I need to get the scent of everyone who contacted the body before I arrived to rule them out of the investigation, or place them on a suspect list.”

Abberline nodded. “This way.”

“Oi!” The first witness barked. “You bobbies gonna pay my wages while I miss out on work today?”

“This is Charles Cross,” Abberline said, ignoring the man’s question and obvious frustration. “He is the cart driver who found the body.”

Vastra approached him and took in a large breath of air. “You are the one who pulled her skirt down to protect her dignity?” Vastra asked. She recognized his scent on the victim’s skirt, but he was not the killer.

“That’s right,” he said. “Poor woman all on display for God and ever’body to gawk at. I had to do somethin’. Weren’t no helpin’ her at that point.”

“Let me see the bottom of your shoes” Vastra demanded.
Mr. Cross turned and lifted up his foot for Vastra to see. She studied the sole and took note of the size. She turned to face Abberline, “Do we have his statement?”

“Yes, Madam.”

“Take an outline of his shoe and then he is free to go. Make sure we know how to contact him for further questions if need be.”

“We have his address and we know where he works. He has been cooperative thus far,” Abberline said.

Mr. Cross walked away, heading toward an officer Abberline had pointed out and mumbling about lost wages.

“This is Robert Paul,” Abberline said, approaching the second man. “He is also a cart driver and was passing by when Mr. Cross pointed out the body to him.”

Vastra stepped closer and took in his scent. “You did not touch the body,” she said very matter-of-factly.

“No, ma’am,” he said. “She was already gone. There was nothing for her. Figured we best find the police and try to catch the bastard that did this.”

Vastra turned again to Abberline and whispered, “He did not do it. His scent is barely near the body. I do not think he approached her. See how he cannot look toward her. I believe he is squeamish.”

“I think you’re right,” Abberline agreed as he watched Mr. Paul turn to face away from the scene. “You’re free to go.” He said to Mr. Paul. “We have your information if we need to speak with you again.”

They proceeded down the line to the next men. “These are the three officers first on scene,” he introduced each in turn, “PC Jonas Mizen, PC John Neil, and PC John Thain.”

A quick scan of their pheromones and Vastra immediately ruled them out as suspects. “You were all on your beat when Mr. Cross and Mr. Paul reported the body?”

“Yes, ma’am,” they said in unison.

“And you did not hear any commotion or disturbance prior to the witnesses calling your attention to the scene?”

“No, ma’am,” PC Jonas Mizen said. “I was first officer on the scene and I hadn’t heard a peep all night.”

“That’s because the murder didn’t happen here,” said a man Vastra had yet to be introduced to.

“And you are?” Vastra asked.

“Dr. Henry Llewellyn,” he said. “I arrived on scene around 4 a.m. and concluded right away that due to lack of blood around the body, the murder happened elsewhere and the body dumped here.”

“That is your professional, medical conclusion?” Vastra asked.

“Yes.”
“Then you are wrong,” Vastra said, flatly.

“I beg your pardon,” Dr. Llewellyn said. He looked aghast. “Are you a doctor, Detective?”

“I do not have to be a doctor to know that the blood pattern along the ground and up the short wall near the victim occurred when the murderer slit the victim’s throat. That is arterial spray from a live victim.”

“I’ve never heard of such a thing,” Dr. Llewellyn stammered.

“Then you have not been paying attention. Furthermore, the scent of iron is palpable in the air, even for an ape such as yourself.” Abberline shot Vastra a look. “I am quite sure that when the body is lifted you will find a pool of blood beneath the victim and a substantial amount of blood that has seeped into her hair, wool coat, and other articles of clothing.”

“You can’t possibly know that,” the doctor said.

Vastra stood and stared at the doctor through her veil. “Tell me, Doctor, are you a forensic medical examiner?”

“I am a surgeon at the London Hospital. Just there.” Dr. Llewellyn pointed through the buildings to the south toward London Hospital, only a block away. “I was arriving for my shift when PC Thain came to fetch a doctor.”

“I see,” Vastra said. “And as a surgeon, are you called to crime scenes often?”

“No,” Dr. Llewellyn said, “this is the first time.”

“Then please leave the detective work to the detectives. We shall decide whether or not the victim was killed here or at a different location. And I can most assuredly tell you that she was indeed killed where she lays.”

Vastra turned on her heel and left the three PCs and Dr. Llewellyn standing with their mouths agape.

Abberline hurried to catch up. “Don’t you want to question them further?”

“No need. We have their statements. All I needed was their scents so I can narrow down the killer.”

Vastra stopped suddenly and Abberline followed suite. “Finding the man who did this will be a tricky business,” Vastra said. “I do not have time for amateur detectives or the slow wheels of justice. I will attend the meeting that Superintendent Lang has arranged for today; but after that I must be given freedom to pursue this case as I see fit.”

“I understand, Madam. I will do everything in my power to make that happen. And I’m sure DS Lang feels the same.”

“I also want ink prints of each of the officer’s shoes once back at the Yard. There is a set of shoe prints in that blood belonging to our killer. Anyone who stepped near the body up to this point is to have their shoes inked and logged in as evidence. Myself included.” Vastra was adamant about this. “And make sure there are ample photographs taken now, before anyone else steps in that blood and before the body is moved.”

“Yes, Madam,” Abberline said. “Right away.” Abberline scurried off like a good little soldier and Vastra smiled at the thought of how the tables had turned in their relationship.
Although the police were doing their best to keep the growing crowd of onlookers at bay, the body on Buck’s Row was quickly becoming an attraction. Spectators were gathering from all around to get a glimpse of the gruesome sight, and when the body was lifted onto a trolley an audible gasp filled the air.

As Vastra predicted there was a tremendous pool of thick blood beneath the victim and her hair, wool coat, and other clothing had soaked up almost every pint of blood from her body.

“How did you know?” Abberline asked, leaning toward Vastra.

“All I could smell from ten feet away was the metallic taste of iron assaulting my tongue. I knew there was a large amount of blood nearby. When I did not see it on the ground, I made an informed speculation it was hidden beneath the victim.” Vastra smirked beneath her veil. “And I was correct.”

Vastra arrived at the Yard early so that she could meet with Lang before the briefing.

“It seems as though you and Abberline’s relationship has taken a turn. He can’t speak highly enough of you,” Lang said. “What happened?”

“We came to an understanding,” Vastra said.

“What sort of understanding?” Lang asked.

“I simply confronted him and he admitted his suspicions that you and I were acting above the law in past cases. Specifically, he questioned my methods and assumed you allowed it or at the very least turned a blind eye. He argued that some of my previously solved cases lacked sufficient evidence and questioned how I was able to solve them. When I failed to solve the initial Whitechapel case he felt this confirmed his theory and now that he was in the picture you and I were unable to cheat the system, as it were.”

“What changed his mind?”

“I told him if he would give me back my previously assigned cases I would take him with me on surveillance and I would walk him through every aspect of my detective work to convince him I did indeed act within the law.”

“This must have worked,” Lang said.

“He was impressed by my work with the Hightower case and I believe that has changed his mind toward both of us.”

“So you think he’s dropped his personal investigation into us and into the Kostya case?” Lang asked.

“I guarantee it,” Vastra smiled.

“Good,” Lang said. “Not that I thought we had anything to worry about. But good all the same.”

Vastra smiled beneath her veil. If Lang only knew. She had so much more at stake regarding the Kostya case than he did. And as far as her secret identity was concerned, she did feel somewhat
bad for keeping Lang in the dark now that Abberline knew she was a Silurian. But honestly, she also knew that the fewer who knew her secret, the safer she would be. She had managed to gain Lang’s trust and respect without divulging her secret, and she didn’t intend to tell him now.

Every detective on the force was called in for the briefing. “Settle down,” he began. “As you know, this morning at approximately half three, 31 September 1888, the body of a woman was found mutilated in Buck’s Row. As of now, cause of death appears to be two slashes to her throat that caused her to bleed out.”

Detective Superintendent Lang continued, going over the facts of the case and the entirety of the audience hung on every word. “We have written the timeline as we know it from witness and officer accounts. We have transcribed multiple copies; but you will need to create your own for your file. We have a collection of photographs from the scene. These may be viewed in, but not removed from evidence room A. There are no exceptions to this.” Lang cut his eyes toward Vastra who often felt she was above the rules.

“We took shoe prints from the witnesses and officers who approached the body upon suggestion of Madam Vastra. We have linked all shoes but one to prints in the blood around the body.”

With this information, a flurry of noise filled the room as detectives began to comment on the bit of detective work.

“Quiet!” Lang demanded. “Given the relative size of the prints that we know, compared to the unknown print, we can safely say that the print left behind was of a man’s dress shoe.”

“What good is that information?” one man asked. “We know it’s a man who did this.”

Vastra smirked under her veil. “Fools,” she thought to herself. The mere fact that it was dress shoes and not work boots said a lot about the killer. And while it was most probable that a man committed the murder, it wasn’t unfathomable that a woman was capable of the rage—although she already knew different based on the pheromones she had detected at the scene.

“The information is there for you to add to your notes. Use it how you see fit,” Lang said. “Now, Detective Chief Inspector Abberline is lead investigator on this murder. Vastra, Cox, Webb, and Taylor are primary investigators under him. Everyone else will work on this case secondary to your other assigned duties only. We need to find and stop whoever did this as soon as possible.”

Several men grumbled about being picked over for primary investigator, especially over a woman. But Lang had spoken and his word was law here.

“Dismissed.”

Directly following the briefing, Abberline called Vastra, Cox, Webb, and Taylor into Evidence Room A. “We are the primaries on this case and as such I expect one of us to solve it. Do not make a fool of me or this unit by letting a lesser detective outperform or outsmart you.”

“Yes, Sir,” echoed the three men. Vastra remained silent. She wasn’t used to sharing cases and this would surely try her most of all.

“Good,” Abberline said. “Now let’s discuss some recent cases.” Abberline pulled two casefiles out of his case and put them on the table. Vastra recognized one instantly. “This is the Whitechapel
It remains unsolved and now we need to decide if we think it is related to the Buck’s Row murder.” This was the name now given to the case. The Yard wasn’t known for their clever or creative case names, they typically went with the street or location of the crime unless the victim’s name was known.

“The two are unrelated,” Vastra said matter-of-factly.

“And how do you know that?” Abberline asked. “You didn’t solve the Whitechapel case and the killer is still at large. The crimes were committed in close proximity and they both involve the death of a prostitute.”

Cox, Webb, and Taylor watched the exchange between Vastra and Abberline. None of them would dare speak to him the way Vastra was.

“The Whitechapel murder was brutish and carried out by multiple men,” Vastra said. “The Buck’s Row murder was performed by a single individual, male, who has some degree of skill with a knife.”

“Skill?” Webb spoke up. “He slaughtered that woman like swine. There’s no skill in that. Anyone can slit a throat.”

“Mark my words,” Vastra insisted. “The man we seek has some training.”

“And what sort of training do you reckon he has?” Cox asked.

“I do not know,” Vastra admitted. “He is perhaps a surgeon or a butcher. Or some similar profession trained with knives.”

The three detectives and DCI Abberline remained skeptical.

“Besides,” she continued, “it is not merely the skill in which he handled the knife, it is the fact that he enjoyed what he did. He relished it. Until he got angry. If you notice the many slices to the victim’s abdomen,” Vastra pointed to the photograph, “these were all done with patience. He relished the act of cutting into her flesh. He did not simply stab away recklessly. Then something happened and he got angry. He got sloppy. He lost his composure, his control, and that is when his cuts became erratic and jagged. I believe that is when he slit her throat and then made the large jagged cut to her abdomen.”

“This brings me to the second unsolved case.” Abberline laid another case file on the table. “This happened 24 days ago, on 7 August. Martha Tabram, Whitechapel prostitute, was found murdered with 39 stab wounds to the throat and abdomen.”

“What?” Vastra said. “Why did you not tell me of this case earlier?”

“You were otherwise occupied, Madam, with the case I assigned you—which was not this case.” Abberline allowed Vastra significant leeway; but she was not to question him in front of senior detectives in this manner.

“Imbecile!” Vastra cursed under her breath.

“There is ample reason to believe these two murders were committed by the same man. The number of wounds, while significantly more than on the Buck’s Row victim, could have been his first clumsy attempt at murder.”

Vastra examined the photograph. “No. I do not believe so.”
“And why not?” asked Taylor. He was the most senior detective in the room next to Abberline. And he had certainly been at Scotland Yard longer than anyone here.

“These stab wounds are the work of an enraged amateur.” Vastra was confident on that fact alone that the two murders, while both gruesome, were unrelated. “Do you still have the material evidence from this murder, Detective Chief Inspector Abberline? I would like to examine it.”

“Of course,” Abberline said. “I can send an officer to retrieve it once we are finished here.” He assumed Vastra wanted to see if she could pick up the scent of the murderer from the clothes.

A knock on the door interrupted the session.

“Sir,” a young uniformed man said, “we have obtained the name of the victim found on Buck’s Row. Miss Mary Ann Nichols.”

“Very good,” Abberline said. “Any other information?”

“Just confirmation she was a prostitute, as we suspected. She was staying in a nearby boarding house and had no family to speak of. Her roommate, Emily Holland, last saw her around half of two this morning near Osborn Street and Whitechapel Road as she was going off to earn some money.”

“Osborn Street. Prostitute,” Abberline said, smugly, “Madam, are you still so sure these murders are not connected?”

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“These incompetent apes insist on second guessing what I know to be true,” Vastra exclaimed as she paced back and forth in her office. She had yet to explain to Jenny what had gotten her so riled up and was simply spewing the same rhetoric she always did about the Scotland Yard police and detective force.

Jenny seemed unfazed by Vastra’s frustrated display. She knew Vastra and knew how worked up she got by these “incompetent apes” she worked with; so she just let her go and waited until there was a lull in Vastra’s grumblings.

“What have they done this time, love?” Jenny asked with a sweetness in her voice that seemed to melt all of Vastra’s troubles away.

“There has been a murder,” Vastra began, “a particularly gruesome and heinous murder. It was the case I was called out to this morning at four. Abberline and the other senior detectives seem to believe that the Whitechapel case is related, but I have assured them it isn’t. While both are gruesome in their own right, the Whitechapel murderer was nothing compared to this assailant.”

Jenny reacted with an audible gasp. She knew how brutal the Whitechapel murder had been. If this was worse, then it must truly be nightmarish. “That sounds horrible,” Jenny said. “Why do they suspect the same killer yet you do not?”

“Both victims were prostitutes,” Vastra began. “Both crime scenes were within the same general area, and the last place this victim was seen was Osborn Street and Whitechapel Road.” Jenny started to say something, and then thought better of it. She had just gotten Vastra calm enough to
speak in coherent sentences.

“The differences in these murders, however,” Vastra continued, “is the obvious change in assault
and injury patterns. Not to mention, the Whitechapel victim said she was attacked by three men
before she died of her injuries. This new victim was attacked by only one man. And he was a
professional.”

“A professional what?” Jenny asked.

“I do not know,” Vastra said. She finally stopped pacing and took a seat at her desk. “I suspect he
has some training with a knife or scalpel. Either a butcher or a surgeon would fit the bill. But I will
not know for sure until I do more research.”

“Let me know how I can help,” Jenny offered. “Do you have photographs of the scene? I can
arrange them on your board.”

“No,” Vastra said. “The original crime scene photographs are to remain at Scotland Yard. But I
have arranged for the department photographer to photograph the photographs for my private files.
They should arrive shortly.”

“Very well,” Jenny said. “What else can I do to help?”

“I need to produce a list of professions trained in using a knife or scalpel. Then I need to locate and
map all such businesses in the vicinity of the murder who would employ such professions. I know
there is a hospital across the street and a knackery nearby. In fact three men visited the crime scene
on their way home from an overnight shift at the knacker’s yard.”

“I can help with that,” Jenny smiled. “I will start with the knackeries, slaughter houses, and butch
shops within a five minute walk of the scene. I’m sure by the time I finish that you will have other
ideas of where to look.”

“That sounds good,” Vastra agreed. “I need to stay here and wait on the photos to arrive.”

Jenny kissed Vastra on the cheek. “I’m going to change and then I’ll head out.”

Vastra smiled as she watched Jenny descend the stairs. She had traded her typical “at home” attire
—a simple black dress suitable for housework—for knickers, shirt, tie, and vest. It wasn’t the
clothing that made Vastra smile, it was the fact that Jenny felt so good in those things. Her
confidence was bolstered and she was a woman in charge. Those clothes meant that Jenny meant
business.

“Do be careful, love,” Vastra said as Jenny pulled on a coat and placed a bowler hat atop her head
—her hair up in its signature tight bun.

“I can handle myself,” Jenny smiled and kissed Vastra once more.

“Of that I have no doubt.”

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About an hour after Jenny left there was a knock on the door. “Ah, my photographs,” Vastra said
aloud. She made her way to the door as she adorned her veil and gloves. Opening the door wide,
she was surprised to see DCI Abberline standing on her stoop. “Detective Abberline,” Vastra
greeted him, “what brings you here?”

“Perhaps we can speak in private?” he said. Vastra was slow when it came to human courtesy.

“Of course,” Vastra said, “do come inside.”

Abberline had an envelope in one hand and a small box tucked under his arm.

“Shall I take your coat?” Vastra asked, surprising herself with the level of hospitality she was showing. Normally it was Jenny who answered the door and upheld the human courtesies and traditions such as welcoming guests and all that entailed.

“Yes, thank you.” Abberline said as he juggled parcels and removed his coat and hat. The late August weather was particularly cool and damp today. “Might I trouble you for some tea while we discuss the case?”

“Certainly,” Vastra said. She showed Abberline to her office and excused herself to make tea after shedding her veil and gloves. There was no need for such disguises with Abberline anymore. She hoped the human would mind his manners and keep out of her things. But it would have been rude, even for her, to ask him to wait in the parlor where a fire had not been built.

Abberline stood in front of the rolling chalk board examining a crude map Vastra had sketched of the crime scene and surrounding area. “Tea service,” Vastra announced as she entered the office with a tray filled with hot tea and biscuits. Jenny insisted they keep biscuits in the cupboard for guests despite Vastra’s protests that they were nothing more than dehydrated wheat.

“Thank you,” Abberline said as he took a seat in front of the small table while Vastra poured. “I have your photographs of the crime scene.” He laid the envelope on the table beside the tray. “I have something else for you as well, Madam.”

Vastra put the envelope of photographs down and looked at the box in Abberline’s outstretched hand.

“It’s the blouse worn by Martha Tabram, the victim from 7 August.” This was merely three weeks ago.

Vastra took the box and opened it to find a shredded and bloody piece of cloth. It was hardly recognizable as an article of clothing due to the considerable damage caused by the killer’s blade.

“I was hoping you could…”

“Tell you if I picked up the killer’s scent?” Vastra cut him off.

“Exactly,” Abberline said between sips of tea.

“Who has touched this garment?” Vastra asked.

“I can’t be sure,” Abberline confessed, “the officers who were at the scene, the medical examiner, the detective assigned to the case, myself.” To say the chain of evidence was preserved was a joke. Even now, no one would miss this critical piece of evidence absent from storage.

Vastra sniffed the air without removing the blouse. The metallic taste of blood filled her senses first. Then the scents of all the humans who had touched the cloth. She recognized several—detectives and other personnel at the Yard. She detected one female scent—the victim. But overwhelming the array of smells was the rage-filled scent of the perpetrator. And this was not the
same man who killed Mary Ann Nichols.

She concentrated on this scent. She pulled it out and isolated it from the noise. She picked it apart and studied its components. Rage was the most dominant. Then jealousy. Then hurt or sorrow and perhaps the slightest bit of remorse.

“Well?” Abberline interrupted Vastra’s process. He was impatient.

“It is not the same man. Like I said before. This is a completely different murder with completely different motives.” Vastra put the lid back on the box, confident she had gotten everything she needed from the garment. “This killer was jealous, filled with rage, and there is a hint of,” she paused, “not quite regret, but there is a hint of remorse for the act.”

“You can get all of that from the scent he left on the shirt?” Abberline asked, still amazed at Vastra’s talent.

“Yes. And this murderer knew the victim. He may have been seeking revenge of some sort.”

“Revenge?” Abberline said. “Who seeks revenge on a prostitute?”

“Someone who contracted a disease? Someone whose wife found out about his tryst and left him. A jilted would be lover, perhaps,” Vastra said. “Have your detective interview Tabram’s peers. Find out if there was a man who sought her services but was denied.”

“Prostitutes aren’t in a habit of refusing clients,” Abberline said. “They see the worst of London and service it all the same.”

“The worst of humanity,” Vastra added. “None the less, have the detective interview her closest friends and see what they know about someone she turned down. To fill him with this amount of rage, it would have to be someone she rejected more than once.”

“I’m sure Detective Pickering has already interviewed any prostitutes who may have been privy to her final days,” Abberline said.

“Or, Detective Pickering may have sat on his laurels and not cared as poor Miss Tabram was merely a prostitute who did not matter,” Vastra snapped. “Much like our first victim, Emma Smith. These women are abused on their best day; but not even being brutally murdered is enough for some of you apes to conjure up a modicum of sympathy for these women.”

“Apes?” Abberline was insulted.

“Humans!” Vastra amended her statement.

Abberline didn’t seem much happier with this moniker; but he understood Vastra’s frustration. “I shall have Detective Pickering re-question the prostitutes close to Miss Tabram.”

“Have him extend his questioning to bar tenders and frequent pub patrons where she spent her coin,” Vastra said. “This man was more than some ‘John’ looking for a quick thrill. He knew her. Pursued her. He perhaps even loved her. There is too much raw emotion in his actions for the murder to be a mere chance encounter and a casual denial.”

Abberline took a few notes in his pad then shifted his attention back to Vastra and his tea. “Now tell me. What do you think of our new killer? Was this an isolated incident like Smith and Tabram?”
“I certainly do not know, Detective Chief Inspector,” Vastra said. “It is less than a day into the investigation. But even if this is another isolated incident, it would seem that there is much to be done to protect London’s prostitutes.”

“I cannot disagree.”

“You certainly believe it is something more,” Vastra said as she casually sipped her tea. “You think there is more to the death of Mary Ann Nichols, that it is not just a singular act by a random killer.”

“Why do you say that?” Abberline asked.

“Because you did not summon the troops, as it were, for either of the other murders. Yet all hands were on deck for this one.”

“That’s because Lang and I both agreed this was the second murder by the same perpetrator,” Abberline admitted.

“Again, I can say with absolute certainty that this is not the same killer that stabbed Miss Tabram to death. Though you will have a hard time convincing anyone else of that fact.”

“Agreed,” Abberline said. “But perhaps I don’t need to convince anyone of that. If I let Detective Pickering believe he’s helping to solve a double murder he will be more inclined to do his job more thoroughly.” He finished his tea and stood. “I need to get that evidence back to storage. You have your photographs. Is there anything else you need from me?”

“I will need a piece of clothing from Miss Nichols. It will be useful to keep the killer’s scent fresh in my memory,” Vastra said. “In the meantime I will sort all of this out in my head and come up with a plan. These photographs will help.”

“Very well then,” Abberline said. “I expect we’ll have the final medical report within a few days. I will call everyone in to review that. In the meantime, I’ll leave you to your work. You are my most capable detective, Madam.”

“Yes,” Vastra saw no vanity in the admittance, “I am.”

*****

“Vastra, I’m home, love,” Jenny called out as she made her way to the office.

Vastra stood at the cork side of the mobile board studying the crime scene photographs. She was deep in thought and made no sign that she realized Jenny’s presence.

Jenny slowly approached. She looked in horror at the photographs. “Oh my god!”

Vastra whirled around. “Jenny.”

“That’s what he did?” Jenny said. “That poor woman.”

“Yes,” Vastra said matter-of-factly. “What did you find out?” She turned the board over to reveal the map she had drawn on the chalk side of the rolling board.
“Within a five minute or so walk from the crime scene there are two knacker’s yards and two slaughter houses, three butchers, and three barbers.”

“Barbers?” Vastra asked.

“Yes. They use razors, I thought they may be worth investigating.”

“Clever,” Vastra smiled. “I had not considered barbers.”

“Good thing you have me,” Jenny smiled and kissed Vastra on the cheek.

Jenny went upstairs to get changed and then start supper while Vastra added the various locations to her map and began compiling a plan of action for the next day. So far it consisted of visiting all the shops Jenny had found, searching for new places with men skilled in knives, and interviewing prostitutes who knew Mary Ann Nichols.

****

The week of September first through the sixth consisted of long days, methodical planning, and questioning anyone and everyone who may have any connection with Mary Ann Nichols. Jenny worked with Vastra, interviewing the prostitutes and bar patrons who knew Nichols best. They had discovered, not surprisingly, that this task was best left to Jenny.

Vastra knew she but only need to get a whiff of the murderer in her nose, so she concentrated on interviewing butchers, barbers, slaughter house workers, and even doctors. Slowly making her way farther and farther out from the epicenter of the crime, she exhaustively met with a dozen or more men per day.

Midway through the week she expanded her interviews to tailors when she happened to walk past a shop and witnessed a man in dress shoes carefully and lovingly sharpening his shears. Although this particular man turned out to be eccentric in his own right, he was not the killer.

“I do not think I need to waste time on butchers and slaughter house workers,” Vastra told Jenny one night at supper. “Our killer wore dress shoes. And I believe him to be a learned man. I think the focus should shift to tailors, doctors, barbers—any profession that requires some amount of formal training and dress attire.”

“What about undertakers?” Jenny suggested.

“I have already added them to my list. There are fewer undertakers than tailors in London, so the list should remain short.”

Abberline called his team in on Tuesday to discuss the official medical report. “There were several more cuts along Miss Nichol’s side that were not visible until the autopsy. They seem inconsequential in the scheme of things, they did not contribute to her death and were not deep; but they were there nonetheless. However, they may suggest that the killer was left handed.”

Vastra seemed skeptical of this information.
“Of particular note was the doctor’s findings that five teeth were missing and there was a small cut to her tongue. Additionally, there was bruising on her face and jaw that indicated she was forcibly held by someone and the pressure from the thumb or fingers caused some amount of damage.

“All cuts seem to be from the same instrument, believed to be a long bladed knife.”

“Not a scalpel?” Vastra interrupted.

“Not according to the doctor. His full report is available for you to read, please do not take it from evidence room A.”

Vastra spent the rest of the day studying the report, making notes, and tracing the diagram of the body with all the indicated injuries. She found it of particular concern that the doctor did not note which injuries occurred before death, and which occurred post mortem. She knew the victim’s throat had been slashed while she was still alive, but the question remained: were the many cuts to her abdomen pre or post mortem?

The rest of the week went on much like the first of it. Both Vastra and Jenny were exhausted from walking, talking, and thinking about nothing but this case. For all their efforts, they seemed no closer to solving it. In fact, they had not discovered a single lead. Vastra had not picked up a single whiff of the scent she desperately sought and Jenny had not been able to find any leads from the timeline she had pieced together from the prostitutes she interviewed around Whitechapel.

Jenny came home well after sunset on Thursday, 6 September. The house was dark and cold and she found Vastra pacing back and forth in her study in front of her information board.

“Vastra,” Jenny said rather loudly, “it’s freezing in here. Why did you let your fire die?” Jenny went to the hearth and stoked the embers and added more wood and soon produced a roaring fire. “Did you even bother to turn the gas on?” She felt the radiator and it was cold.

Vastra had not acknowledged her.

“Vastra!”

“Jenny,” Vastra turned around at the sound of her name. She seemed confused and not at all herself. “When did you get home?”

“Just now, love,” Jenny smiled. She had so much sympathy for Vastra and her current frustration with the case. “I’m going to go turn on the heat and make tea. Are you ready for supper? Have you even eaten since breakfast?”

“You know I do not eat much when it gets cold,” Vastra answered mindlessly, not taking her eyes off her board.

“Well I’m at least bringing you tea and warm blood.” Those words would have seemed odd to anyone else, but for Jenny, it was no different than saying “tea and biscuits.”

The house was slow to warm and the gas heat should have been turned on hours ago. Jenny took time to start fires in the bedroom and parlor while the water boiled and the blood warmed. She soon returned to Vastra’s study with a tray of tea, blood for Vastra, and sandwiches for herself.

“Sit, Drink.” Jenny insisted. She put another log on the fire in Vastra’s office and came over to sit beside her beloved. “What’s wrong, love?”
“I’m no closer to solving this case than I was a week ago when I received it,” Vastra said. “I have exhausted all slaughterhouses, butcher shops, barber shops, hospitals, and knacker’s surrounding the crime scene. Still I cannot find the man who did this to this poor woman.”

“Why don’t you take a day off,” Jenny suggested. “I know you’re going to say ‘no’, but maybe if you allowed yourself a day to clear your head you’d get a new perspective. We’ve been doing the same thing all week and perhaps it is time to explore a different path.”

Vastra breathed deep. This wasn’t the first time Jenny had given her similar advice. And in the past it did seem to help. It went against every ounce of her nature, however, to put aside a case in progress.

“Tomorrow’s Friday,” Jenny said. “We could take in a play, go for a ride in the country, or just lock ourselves in here and read or work on the house. But I think you need a day off of this case to clear your head.”

Vastra smiled. Of course Jenny was right. She knew her better than anyone had ever known her, human or Silurian. “I will concede to take tomorrow off,” Vastra started. Jenny beamed with happiness. “But, you have to spar with me. We have neglected our training as of late.”

“I look forward to kicking your lizard arse,” Jenny smiled.

8 Sept 1888

Jenny woke up at her usual five a.m. to start her day. Like most mornings, she was naked and holding Vastra who was happily drawing warmth from her mammalian body. She kissed her Silurian lover’s shoulders and spoke sweet nothings as she carefully removed herself from the bed to start a fire and warm the house. She smiled at the memories of yesterday when the two of them had just holed up in their home all day and did nothing but spar, fuck, eat, and sleep. It was exactly what they both needed and wanted; but now it was back to business in order to solve this case.

The house was cold, so Jenny left Vastra curled up under a mound of covers while she started fires and prepared breakfast. She began the process of waking Vastra about a half of five and it was half of six before Vastra found her way to the kitchen for breakfast.

“Good morning, love,” she greeted Jenny with a kiss.

“Indeed.”

“I believe you were right about the day off,” Vastra said. “I have decided that a change in tactics is necessary to move the investigation forward.”

“Do tell.”

“It is not too cold yet so I will begin overnight surveillance of the Whitechapel district. If our murderer has plans to strike again, perhaps I can pick up his scent. Even if he does not strike again, he may frequent the area. I will prepare a plan today before heading out.”

“I think that is a fantastic idea. Now eat your breakfast; you exerted yourself yesterday.” Jenny smiled a mischievous grin toward Vastra and set her plate and glass on the table.

The lovers ate their breakfast in silence and Vastra read the morning paper looking for articles about the Yard. The press did love to paint them as incompetent. Just after seven there was a knock on the door.
“Detective Abberline,” Jenny greeted him. She noticed the carriage parked on the street.

“I’ve come to collect Madam Vastra,” he said, grimly.

“We have a telephone, Detective. Notice would be appreciated,” Jenny said.

“There was no time, dear,” he said. He wasn’t being condescending, he looked defeated.

“Oh no,” Jenny said. “Has there been?”

“Just please fetch the Madam.”

*****

A crowd had already gathered at 29 Hanbury Street, Spitalfields. But this time, the initial officers on the site had done a much better job containing the scene and limiting access.

“The body is in the backyard,” Abberline told Vastra. On the ride over he had assured her this was the same murderer as the one who struck a week ago. She however insisted that she would let her sense of smell make that determination.

They walked down the hallway toward the back where they were greeted by Detective Taylor, one of the other leads on the case. He had been on duty when the call came in and was the first detective on the scene. “How many people have had access?”

“Mr. John Davis discovered the body shortly before six. He went into the street and fetched two gentlemen, James Green and James Kent, and told them of what he had found. The three of them came back to the body, then left the house and went to the Commercial Street Police Station. Two officers arrived and quickly secured the scene not allowing anyone else access to the back yard. One stood guard while the other phoned the Yard.”

“So far that is a minimum of five individuals who have possibly contaminated the scene,” Vastra spat. “Who else?”

“Just myself and DCI Abberline. The doctor is on his way as is the photographer,” Taylor informed her.

“Good.” She turned to speak to Abberline. “Please secure the hallway and allow me privacy with the body. I need to examine it before any more contamination is allowed.”

Abberline cleared the hallway and Vastra closed the door to the back yard. She didn’t have the privacy she wanted as the windows to the apartments looked in on her, but she was able to lift her veil a bit to take in the scent.

The scene was equally gruesome as the one a week before. Two massive cuts to the throat seemed to be the cause of death. The spray of blood along the fence behind the body indicated that the victim was alive when her throat was slashed. The blood had been subsequently smeared along the fence.

The body lay, mutilated, with her feet flat on the ground and her legs drawn up, and splayed such that her knees were pointing outward. Her abdomen was completely severed and her intestines lay
on the outside of her body.

Once again, the sharp taste of iron filled Vastra’s senses, along with the putrid scent of the contents of her intestines. Pushing past the scent of the blood and the partially digested food, searching through the scent of all the human males who had contaminated the crime scene, Vastra finally found what she was searching for. “There.” It was the unmistakable scent of the same man who had murdered Mary Ann Nichols.

Satisfied with her initial investigation of the scene, Vastra made her way out of the hallway and into the street where Abberline and Taylor were discussing next steps. “I agree with your assessment that this is the same killer who murdered Ms. Nichols.” Vastra gave Abberline a slight nod that he picked up on. She had confirmed via her sense of smell that it was indeed the same killer.

“How do you wish to proceed, Madam,” Abberline asked.

“I know this looks gruesome, but this was done with a delicate, sharp instrument and by steady and precise hands. I will continue my investigation of men who work in professions that require the knife skills I believe one needs to make these lacerations.”

“I’ll continue to question prostitutes who may have worked with the victims and see if I can find anything in common.”

“How do you know this woman is a prostitute?” Vastra asked.

“Mr. Davis who discovered her recognized her. He said it’s widely known that she is a prostitute, although he won’t admit to knowing much more about her.” Taylor hesitated for a moment. “One other thing. There is a woman asking around about the Nichols case. Short, brunette, dressed in trousers. She’s a real looker if she was in a dress, but a woman shouldn’t be wearing men’s clothes.”

Vastra almost struck Taylor where he stood. “That is my assistant, Jenny Flint.”

“You have an assistant?” Taylor asked. “Why don’t I get an assistant? And is it such a good idea for a woman of her stature to be hanging around in Whitechapel by herself?”

“I assure you Jenny is more than capable of taking care of herself,” Vastra spouted.

“Just tell her to stay out of the way of the real detectives,” Taylor smirked.

Vastra let it go. There was nothing to be gained from entering into an argument with this imbecile.

“Very good,” Abberline interrupted. “I’ll have Cox attempt to piece together a timeline for this victim and question any witnesses. There will be a briefing later today and I want you both in attendance.”

Vastra caught the photographer before she left the scene. “Take two of everything. One copy for the Yard and one for me. Have them delivered to 13 Paternoster Row as soon as they are developed.” She handed him a large bank note.

He looked at the money and back and forth to the other detectives standing around but not really paying any attention. “Yes, ma’am.”
“The victim has been identified as Annie Chapman,” Lang addressed the group of detectives. “She is a known prostitute and we have every reason to believe this crime was perpetrated by the same man who killed Mary Ann Nichols. There seems to be debate on whether or not this is yet the same man who murdered Martha Tabram.”

“How can there be any debate?” a detective spoke up. “They’re all prostitutes, they were all stabbed about the neck and stomach.”

“Quiet,” Lang spat. “For now we are treating all three cases with equal efforts and seriousness. Whether they are connected or not will be sorted out by investigation.”

Grumblings spread out across the room. Of course each detective had his own theory, but none had the kind of proof that Vastra had. She may not have been any closer to solving these crimes than any other detective at the Yard, but she did know for sure they were looking for two killers.

“Quiet,” Lang spat again. “Initial medical findings conclude cause of death to be two severe cuts to the throat. It is believed that the cuts to her abdomen were performed post mortem. It is also believed, due to lack of signs of struggle that the victim went willingly into the back yard of 29 Hanbury Street.”

Lang continued to go over the facts thus far gathered in the case and then answered questions from the detectives. After about an hour, he released the detectives back to work.

“I need to see you in my office, Madam,” Abberline said to Vastra. She followed him down the hallway without protest. Once inside, he handed her an envelope.

“What’s this?”

“This is a piece of fabric from Mary Ann Nichol’s shirt. I assume the killer’s scent is on it and you had requested it.”

“Yes. Thank you.” She opened the envelope only enough to examine the scent. It was there, and this time, it was all she could smell.

“I suppose you’ll want a copy of the photographs of the new crime scene,” Abberline said.

“No need,” Vastra said. “I instructed the photographer to take two of every image he photographed. He will deliver a copy to me tonight.”

“Seems like you have everything you need then,” Abberline said.

“Yes,” Vastra said. “I will continue my search as I described before. But Detective, I will also go out at night and attempt to find this man on my own. What shall I do if I find him before we have the evidence to charge him?”

Abberline took a long look at Vastra. He knew what she was asking and he wasn’t sure he was able to give her the go ahead to kill indiscriminately. “Let’s get the evidence first,” he said. “Unless you can catch him in the act, we need the evidence. We can’t let this one slip away.”
“This man has killed twice, that we know of. He will kill again. You can be sure of that.”

“I know, Madam, I know.”

*****

Vastra expanded her search of barbers, tailors, butchers, doctors, undertakers, skilled craftsmen, and now even artists to include all areas north of the Thames from Whitechapel west to Piccadilly Circus. Although she had previously decided to no longer pursue this line of investigation, the discovery of the second body energized her to only add to her workload, not to simply alter course. This consumed her days. Every night was spent on the prowl. Vastra roamed the streets of London like a lion stalking prey. Ever hopeful of picking up the scent, she performed grid searches throughout Whitechapel from midnight to sun up.

In addition to interviewing anyone who knew the victims, Jenny had taken up the task of updating Vastra’s new map to pinpoint the places they visited and the people they spoke with. The map, commissioned by a local cartographer, fit perfectly on the rolling board. Jenny used small pins Vastra had purchased at a tailor’s shop to hold tiny pieces of paper to the cork. Each piece of paper had a number that corresponded to a list of shops and names that each of them had visited. Each of these corresponded to files of notes.

This methodical routine and record keeping made it possible for Vastra and Jenny to easily communicate to one another, even though they barely saw each other anymore. Vastra was home only a few hours a day, and most of that was spent sleeping.

Within two days of Annie Chapman’s death, the press had picked up the story and run. Article after article, condemned the entirety of the London police force including the Yard and local precincts. Headlines such as “Whitechapel Serial Murderer” and “Whitechapel Butcher” filled citizens with terror. The Yard became the butt of jokes when satirical comics exposed flaws in the investigations of Emma Smith, Martha Tabram, Mary Ann Nichols, and Annie Chapman—all of which the press linked together as victims of the same man.

One week after the Chapman murder, Abberline called his team into a meeting to discuss the official medical report before it became available to the entire Yard—and inevitably leaked to the press.

“There have been some startling and substantial findings by the medical examiner in the Chapman case,” Abberline started. Superintendent Lang was present in the room, but he let Abberline address his team of primary investigators. “Once the body was cleaned and examined fully, it was discovered that the uterus, as well as parts of the bladder and vagina, had been removed from the victim.”

“Bloody hell,” Cox said before he could stop himself.

“This man’s a goddamn butcher!” exclaimed Webb.

“Quiet,” Abberline said. “That’s just it. By all accounts, the removal of the uterus and surrounding organs was done carefully and with precision. The doctor has stated that this type of dissection, with this detail and precision, would take a skilled surgeon one hour.”

“That would mean they were in that back yard for more time than originally thought,” Vastra said.
“Yes. That or the dissection was performed elsewhere and her body was dumped in the yard,” Taylor said.

“No.” Vastra was adamant about this fact. “She was killed where she lay. Of that I have no doubt.”

“What makes you so certain,” Taylor scoffed.

“The cut to the throat is what killed her, just as the cut to the throat killed Mary Ann Nichols. The spray of blood around the crime scene tells us with certainty they were killed where they were found. Any cuts or dissection to the abdomen was performed post mortem.”

“The doctor also feels certain the cuts to the abdomen were post mortem,” Abberline agreed. “I think that is the theory we must work with.”

“Do we not have an eye witness who saw Chapman with a man at half of five and then Mr. Davis’ testimony that he found her, dead, just before six?” Taylor asked.

“We do,” Abberline said.

“Then why does the doctor say it would have taken an hour to remove those parts?” Taylor asked.

“Perhaps this murderer is more skilled than our resident medical examiner,” Vastra said. “I have maintained all along that our killer is skilled with a blade. Perhaps he himself is a surgeon.”

“While I do not wish to ignore the expert opinion of the medical examiner,” Lang finally chimed in. “I believe we must concentrate more on the facts and the testimony of the witnesses. Elizabeth Long places Chapman with a man in the street at 29 Hanbury when a nearby clock struck half of five in the morning. Shortly thereafter, within minutes, the neighbor at 27 Hanbury said he heard hushed voices, a woman say ‘no,’ and then a thud against the fence that separates the yards. Finally, Mr. Davis found the body just before six and he has two witnesses who confirm this time. The officers from the Commercial Street station were on scene within minutes. That is our timeline.”

“Well said, Superintendent,” Abberline praised his superior.

“Has anyone confirmed that the clock Mrs. Long heard at half five is accurate? Or that she could be mistaken and it was half four, not half five?” Vastra was unwell with herself that she was only now thinking of this.

“No, madam, I do not believe we have any reason to suspect the clock is faulty, however it is worth pursuing Mrs. Long’s testimony and that she is certain of the time,” Abberline said. “Regardless of how long it took our killer to dissect the victim, we must now use this information for what it is worth. That is to say that we do indeed have a skilled man who is intensifying his murders. We must find him before he claims another victim. I will meet with you each individually for an update on your current methods and findings. We shall have another briefing on Friday, midday.”

Vastra made her way back to 13 Paternoster Row in the comfort of her private carriage. As Parker drove down Paternoster Row, Vastra saw Jenny arguing with a young man on the stoop of their home. He appeared to have a pad of paper in his hand. Then, as Vastra looked out the back of the carriage, he appeared to be picking up said pad of paper from the middle of the street.

“Jenny, love, I am home,” Vastra called as she came in through the back entrance.
“I saw the carriage come by,” Jenny smiled, meeting her in the back room.

“And I saw you had a visitor,” Vastra smiled as she took her veil off. She kissed Jenny on the cheek and put away her things.

“A reporter,” Jenny said.

“I suspect there will be many more as soon as the news of the autopsy is leaked,” Vastra said.

“Oh god, what did he find?” Jenny asked.

“Apparently our murderer removed Miss Chapman’s uterus as well as surrounding organs, or parts of organs.”

“That’s terrible,” Jenny said. “Please tell me she wasn’t alive when that happened.”

“No,” Vastra said, “if only a bit of news to be thankful for, the dissection was performed post mortem.”

They entered Vastra’s office where Jenny had just started a fire when saw the carriage pulling ‘round. “How does this change your investigation?” Jenny asked.

“I am no longer concerned with butchers, slaughter house workers, or knackers,” Vastra said. “This man has surgeon quality training. Of that I am certain. He may be a practicing surgeon; or he may in fact be a surgeon who lost his license to practice medicine. Either way he will not be satisfied working a job where his knife skills are not appreciated, even if they are needed. I am not sure where I will find him; but, I am certain it is not at a slaughterhouse.”

“What about a veterinarian?” Jenny asked. “Maybe someone who couldn’t make it as a surgeon and resorted to working on animals?”

“Perhaps,” Vastra said. “Some people are not meant to work with humans, no matter what their skill level.”

“I can search public records for anyone who has lost their medical license in London,” Jenny offered. “That’s a start at least.”

“I will continue my nightly hunts using the grid we created,” Vastra said. “I will also continue my interviews with men employed in certain fields. I fear that is a long shot; but, I would hate to know this killer is working nearby and I did not find him sooner.”

“You’re going to burn yourself out if you keep up this pace, love,” Jenny said. “You’re barely here, you barely eat, and it’s colder and wetter than normal this year for mid-September. You’ll be lucky if you don’t catch your death of cold.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Vastra said. “I have to find this man—this butcher. He isn’t leaving any evidence and I’m the only one who can identify him.”

“So what will you do if you find him?” Jenny asked.

“I will make sure there will be no more murders.”

This was their life—searching records, interviewing tradesmen, scouring the streets at all hours of the night—until 27 September when Vastra fell ill with a horrible chest cold.

Vastra sat in her office in front of a roaring fire with a hot water bottle behind her back. She
coughed a wet cough and grimaced in pain. “It’s been almost a month since Mary Ann Nichols was found,” Vastra said. “We are no closer to solving these crimes than we were the day they happened.” She coughed. “I need to get back out there.”

“Not until you are better, Vastra,” Jenny insisted. “I know you want to get back to the streets, but you will die out there if you don’t let this run its course. I don’t have to remind you the last time you got some cold that almost killed you!”

She had gotten sick two days ago and Jenny forced her to stay home and keep warm and dry and drink plenty of warm blood.

“Would you at least try some chicken broth?” Jenny asked, hoping this would be the time Vastra would change her mind. “It’ll help cure that cold.”

“No,” Vastra said curtly. “There are no healing properties in cooked foods. Raw meat and blood are the only things that can help a body as it fights off infections.”

Jenny wasn’t going to argue. “Fine.” She said. “I’m going to warm you up some blood and liver and you’re going to eat every bite.” Jenny turned on her heel and left the office.

When Jenny returned with Vastra’s supper, the Silurian was asleep in her desk chair.

“Up you go, love,” Jenny said. “Come on, you need to get into bed.”

Vastra woke just enough to help get herself up the stairs and into bed. Jenny piled more wood on the fire then crawled into bed and held Vastra close so she could benefit from her body heat. They were both soon fast asleep.

30 September 1888

Just minutes after the clock struck 2 a.m. there was a frantic knock on the front door.

“God, not another one,” Jenny said as she sat bolt up in bed.

Chapter End Notes

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Berner Street to Mitre Square

Chapter Summary

With two gruesome murders on the books in Whitechapel, Londoners are on edge and Scotland Yard on high alert. An ailing Vastra is of little use to the ongoing investigation. And an angry perpetrator seeks what he's owed.

Chapter Notes


So sorry for the delay. I hope you enjoy this new installment.

30 September 1888

A nearby clock tower struck ten p.m. as a drunk man stumbled out of a pub and evacuated the contents of his stomach, mostly cheap ale, all over the street. The splatter just missed the short man’s shoes. “Philistine!” the short man said under his breath. He kept walking east on Cable Street.

The stench of the Whitechapel district was overwhelming with human waste in every dark corner and pollution from nearby factories lingering in damp Thames air. The short man pulled out a handkerchief and placed it over his nose and turned north onto Back Church Lane.

A blonde prostitute propositioned a dock worker who was milling about. “Towheaded harlot,” the short man muttered. He shot her a look of disdain and kept walking. He placed the handkerchief back in his coat pocket and paused at the intersection of Ellen Street. “Ellen,” the man said. “Lovely name. I’ve never had the pleasure.”

He turned onto Ellen Street and headed east. He wasn’t in a hurry and didn’t seem, to the casual observer, to be looking for anything in particular. He certainly wasn’t looking for companionship as he ignored the propositions being offered by the women who were scattered along the way.

Maintaining course, he paused again at the intersection where Elizabeth Street crossed Ellen Street. He turned south. “Elizabeth,” he spat the word from his mouth as if it were a fly who found its way there mid yawn. He continued to mumble until he reached the intersection of Mary Ann Street.

“He turned right. His way seemed to be dictated by the street signs he encountered, especially the ones named after women. He hummed a tune as he strolled to the end the Mary Ann Street where it abruptly ended as it met Philip Street.

“The short man said nothing and turned right heading back toward Ellen Street, completing a
“What you lookin’ for, love?” a woman with curly brown hair asked.

For the first time tonight, he stopped and turned to the prostitute. “What is your name?” he asked.

“Sally,” she said. She took a step toward the short man thinking she had secured another client.

He turned on his heel and kept walking north up Philip Street.

“Oi,” Sally yelled. “I can be whoever you bloody well like.” He didn’t stop. “Ahh!” She swatted at the air and watched him walk away.

It was now half of ten. The East End was always busy. When factories shut down for the day, the pleasure houses and opium dens opened for the evening. Someone was always trying to earn, or steal, your hard earned coin. “Pints, cigars, dope,” a man barked at passersby of a seedy looking storefront. The short man kept walking.

“Four pence, mister,” a woman said to the short man. “You look like you could use a roll.”

He paused. “What is your name?” he asked.

“What’s it matter what my name is, love?” she asked. “It’s all the same in the dark.”

The short man resumed walking.

He continued on, winding through streets and back alleyways. He was propositioned several more times, and each time he would ask their name. And each time he would continue walking.

The clock on the church tower struck eleven. A heated conversation caught the short man’s attention on Berner Street just outside two large wooden gates. “Come on Elizabeth,” a man in a bowler hat begged, “you let me for two pence before.”

“No, Henry,” she spat back. “I’m trying to work here.”

“And I’m tryin’ a pay ya,” he said.

“Two pence ain’t payin’ the rent, Henry,” she said. “Now find som’ore coins or find another woman to bother.”

“Elizabeth,” the short man whispered under his breath, extending the “z” and the “th” giving her name a snakelike hiss. He leaned against the wall across the street and lit a cigarette and watched. The prostitute was wearing a black jacket and skirt and seemed to fade into the dimly lit street.

She turned. Surveying the street for possible clients she looked right at the short man who immediately threw his cigarette to the ground and walked away in the direction he had just come from. “It’s too early,” he murmured to himself.

He ducked into a pub on Lower Berner Street and stood leaned against the window so that he could see out—so that he could see Elizabeth in the distance. “Have a beer so you don’t look suspicious,” he said to himself.

He settled into a chair with a pint where he could still see his target. Instead of drinking, he watched. He watched the prostitute. He watched the beat cop.

“Drink your pint. You look suspicious,” he muttered to himself and took a sip of the ale.
A beat cop made his way up Berner Street about every half hour or so, give or take. And Elizabeth would disappear behind the large gates for several minutes at a time with random men. This was all he concerned himself with right now. The rest of the street could be vacant for all he cared.

Elizabeth disappeared behind the gates again. He left the pub and a full pint of ale and walked past where she had just been standing, propositioning a man—the same place she had been stationed all night. One of the gates into the yard was open just enough for someone to slip through without risking the creaking of hinges or wood.

Peering inside, the yard was pitch dark. But he heard the muffled grunts of a man who was clearly getting his four pence worth. “Animals,” he muttered. He left the gate and took a stroll around the block.

He walked in the opposite direction of the beat cop, tipped his hat when they met, and continued on his way. Chimes struck nearby. It was a quarter past midnight now. He made his way back to Berner Street, lit a smoke, and waited in the shadows nearby. The beat cop passed, on schedule. As soon as he was far enough away, Elizabeth pulled a client into the dark yard between numbers 40 and 42 Berner Street. The short man threw the cigarette down and walked briskly to the gate.

He entered the yard and quickly ducked to the left and behind some crates. He let his eyes adjust to the dark and kept an ear out for Elizabeth and her client. It didn’t take long for the client to finish and make his way out of the yard and back onto Berner Street. Elizabeth stayed behind to clean herself up.

“Elizabeth,” said a voice from behind, angry and full of contempt.

She turned to see who was calling her name when a sharp pain hit her in the throat. She stumbled back, clutching at her neck and trying to scream; but no words would come. Her windpipe was severed and she was bleeding profusely.

“It’s no use, Elizabeth,” the short man said. For every step she stumbled backwards, he took one to maintain an intimidating proximity. “No one can hear you; no one can help you. Only I can save you, Elizabeth. Only I can save your soul.”

Her body hit the ground with a thud. Blood gurgled out of her throat and flowed from her neck and just like that, she was dead.

“Now, Elizabeth, I can get to work.” He loomed over the body, positioning her legs just so. It was dark, but his eyes had adjusted enough to get started. “It’s a shame you have to be dead for this part. But trials have shown your lot just won’t hold still. I assume you would be no different. Would you?” He spoke as if Elizabeth were alive and could hear and understand him—perhaps even offer feedback. “Nonetheless, we must rid your body of this evil.”

Just as he was about to expose her abdomen, the yard gates began to open. He paused, frozen in the darkness. He assumed it was a client looking for Elizabeth and that he would leave when she didn’t answer. But this was not the case.

The right gate was opened all the way and the short man could see a horse drawn cart silhouetted in the street light. Then he saw a man walk across to open the other gate.

“You must flee!” he thought to himself.

“But where?” he asked himself.

The yard was closed on all sides with apartments. As the second gate opened, enough light filtered
into the yard for him to see a small staircase. That was it, the only way out.

“There!” he answered and scrambled to the stairs.

The sudden movement to the staircase was enough to spook the horse, but the man with the cart never saw a thing. “Whoa, boy,” he said to the horse. “No need for all that. You’re home now.” As he led the horse to the stable the horse stamped his hooves and threw his head back and whinnied.

“What’s gotten into you, boy?”

“You better not be using this yard to do your whorin’” he threatened to anyone who may hear.

“You hear me, whore? I don’t need your kind in my yard.” He struck a match to light the lantern he kept on the stable post. The small flickering light was all it took for him to see the body.

****

Jenny hurried down the stairs securing a dressing gown around her naked body as she went. Frantic pounding on the door at 13 Paternoster Row at two in the morning could only mean one thing.

She flung the door open to a uniformed bobby on her stoop and a carriage parked in the street.

“I’ve come to collect Madam Vastra.” Jenny hadn’t seen this man before. But either way Vastra was in no condition to go out on a cold damp September night. Had this been Abberline, she may have gotten him to understand.

“I’m sorry,” Jenny said. “Madam is not feeling well tonight and she cannot be bothered to make it to another crime scene. DCI Abberline will just have to fill her in tomorrow, if she’s feeling up to it.”

The officer looked stunned. You didn’t refuse an order and he was working under the order of Superintendent Lang to fetch Madam Vastra. And by proxy, Madam Vastra was also under orders to oblige. “I’m sorry, miss,” he said. “Refusal simply isn’t an option. Madam Vastra has her orders and they are to appear at number 40 Berner Street as soon as possible.” He leaned in as though several people were attempting to eavesdrop on their conversation. “There’s been another murder.”

Jenny looked at the young man with her head cocked to the side. “Really? Anotha one,” she said sarcastically, her east end accent popping out like it still does at times when her emotions run high.

“I reckoned you were beatin’ my door down at two in tha mornin’ to catch a jaywalker what went ‘cross my street.”

He was not amused. “Please ma’am. I’m here to fetch Madam Vastra and I can’t leave until she agrees to come with me.”

Jenny put her hands on her hips. “Fine,” she said. “We’ll follow you in our carriage.” She slammed the door in his face before he could offer any protest.

“Vastra, love, you have to get up.” Vastra hissed and curled tighter into a ball. “Come on, love. I wouldn’t do this if it wasn’t necessary. I don’t want you going out any more than you do, but there’s been another murder.”

Somehow those words managed to seep into Vastra’s brain, through the fever—or in Vastra’s case
hypothermia—and haze of her illness. “I will kill this man,” she slurred.

“Come on, love.” Jenny was so gentle and comforting; but at the same time she was stern and cut Vastra no slack when duty called. “We need to get you dressed and to the garage now. Parker will be here in a jiff to hitch the horses. And I’ve got a pot of coals ready to put in the carriage to keep you a bit warmer.” Of course the real reason Jenny insisted on following in their own carriage is so she could sit beside Vastra and wrap a blanket around them and allow the Silurian to draw from her body heat. This was not something she could do in the carriage with a detective.

It took longer than normal, but not as long as Jenny expected to get Vastra up, dressed, and into the carriage. The pot of coals in addition to wrapping them both up in a wool blanket kept Vastra warmer than she would have been otherwise.

“I should have been out there, patrolling,” Vastra growled. “I could have stopped him.”

“No, Vastra, you wouldn’t have,” Jenny said. “We are headed to Berner Street, south of Commerce Road. Tonight you were set to patrol between Hanbury and Whitechapel—well north of that location. Even if you had risked your health and been out there tonight you wouldn’t have seen him.”

“You do not know that,” Vastra spat back. “You do not know how he arrived south of Commerce Road. Perhaps he passed through Hanbury and Whitechapel.”

“We can’t speculate on what might have been, Vastra,” Jenny was done coddling her lover. “This is where we are now and you need to accept it. You are about to go out into the damp cold where all your male colleagues are gathered and most of whom want to see you fail. Get your chin up and get your head in the case. Lang and Abberline are your only friends out there. Don’t let those other detectives see you weak.”

The stern talking to was just what Vastra needed to pull her out of her self-pity and snap her into investigator mode. And just in time. Parker pulled to a stop at number 40 Berner Street amid a flurry of activity. A large crowd had gathered and more detectives were on the scene than ever before. Vastra stepped out of the carriage, unaided, and approached the large wooden gates—now closed to reduce gawking—where Lang, Abberline, and Taylor stood waiting.

“Madam,” Abberline said.

“Madam,” Lang followed.

Taylor nodded.

“Gentlemen.” Vastra coughed. It was wet and mucus filled, and quite frankly, unsettling.

Jenny walked up and stood behind and to the right of Vastra.

“We hear you are under the weather, Madam,” Abberline said. “If you prefer, we can brief you tomorrow.” Abberline knew he would be able to get a sample of cloth to Vastra tomorrow for her to see if it was the same killer. They were fairly certain it was, but this body was markedly different than the ones before it.

“Nonsense,” Vastra said, “I did not come all this way simply to be turned back home now.”

“Very well,” Lang said. He turned and approached the gates. Abberline, Vastra, Jenny, and Taylor all followed along. The uniformed officer standing guard opened the gate to let them through. Lang stopped just inside and turned to confront Vastra. “Madam, do you think it is a good idea for
her to witness the body?”

Vastra stared through her veil at Lang. “She is assisting me tonight and is not faint of heart, Superintendent, I assure you.”

Lang didn’t argue. “As you wish, Madam.”

The small cart was parked in the yard, but the horse had been taken to a nearby stable so as not to interfere with the investigation. It had been going crazy ever since it sensed the dead body. Several lanterns hung throughout the yard casting flickering light upon the scene.

Vastra saw the body. The victim was on her back, her legs drawn up but the only visible injury was a massive slice to the throat. “There is only the one injury.” She looked to Lang and Abberline as if they had answers.

Taylor spoke up. “Louis Diemschutz drove his cart into the yard just before one a.m. He said something spooked his horse; but he didn’t see or hear anything until he lit the lantern. That’s when he saw the body. He shook her to see if she was still alive and he said she was still warm and bleeding.”

“He almost caught our killer in the act,” Vastra said.

“Or became an unintended victim himself,” Lang added.

“Best we can surmise,” Abberline added, “the killer went up these stairs and climbed onto the roof and got away. It’s the only other logical way out. Mr. Diemschutz never saw anyone. The killer was gone in a flash.”

Jenny was taking notes as fast as she could write.

“Was she a prostitute?” Vastra asked.

“Yes,” Abberline said. “The beat cop who patrols this area said her name is Elizabeth and this is her regular station. She frequently ‘entertains’ men in the yard here as it’s dark and private. Mr. Diemschutz has kicked her out on numerous occasions; but he said that even if he locks his gate, she knows how to pick it and let herself in. He no longer bothers locking up.”

“This is all consistent with the pattern displayed by the killer of the previous two murders,” Taylor said. “He just didn’t get to finish with this one. We have no reason to believe this isn’t the same killer.”

Vastra stepped up to the body and knelt down. She took in as much air as her weakened lungs would allow; and she was able to pull the familiar scent off the body.

“Yes,” she said, standing back up, “I concur with your assessment. If only Mr. Diemschutz had been a few minutes earlier, perhaps we would have caught our mystery murderer red handed.”

A mounted uniformed officer came riding up and a rapid pace. “Superintendent Lang,” he shouted before the horse even came to a halt. “Where is Superintendent Lang?” He was barking at another officer near the scene.

“He’s in the yard,” the officer said, “investigating.”
Lang heard the commotion and came out to see what was the matter—Abberline, Vastra, Jenny, and Taylor in tow.

“Superintendent,” the officer said upon seeing him exit the yard. He dismounted his horse and saluted Lang. “Sir. There’s been another body found.”

The gravity of the situation hit everyone on the scene like a ton of bricks. Whispers and murmurs spread throughout the gathering crowd, now with a few reporters.

Lang grabbed the officer by the shoulder and pulled him into the yard for some privacy. Abberline, Vastra, Jenny, and Taylor joined him. “Constable, you should know better than to announce news of that magnitude in front of a large crowd of people. Especially with the newspaper reporters here.”

“Sorry, Sir,” he said. “I didn’t think.”

“It’s alright, son,” Lang said, calming the young man’s nerves a bit. “Tell us what you know.”

“A body was discovered just over a half mile west in Mitre Square by PC Edward Watkins. He immediately got assistance from a nearby night watchman who he asked to get word to you. He locked the scene down and has not let anyone near the body. From what I was told, it’s the same murderer.”

“Two in one night?” Abberline said.

“Perhaps there wouldn’t have been if he had been allowed to finish what he started with this one,” Taylor said.

“I agree,” Vastra said. “I do not believe he set out to commit two murders tonight. I also predict we will find this body more mutilated than any before it.” Vastra coughed again, fluid was building in her lungs.

“Why do you say that?” Lang asked.

Vastra could not tell Lang or Taylor that she had smelled the confidence in the killer. That she had detected pheromones on this victim that were his, yet slightly different than before. “I suspect he is gaining confidence. He is evading police and even tonight he evaded capture despite being caught in the act. He would have been brimming with adrenaline when he left here and on the lookout for a new victim to finish what he started. He could not even get more than half a mile away before he struck again.”

“I agree with Madam Vastra,” Taylor said.

“Alright, Madam, you come with me,” Lang said. “Abberline, you and Taylor stay here. Interview all the witnesses you can find tonight and keep this yard closed. I want a guard at the gates until daylight when we can properly see what’s going on. And don’t speak to the press!”

“Yes Sir,” Abberline and Taylor said. Although the spike in Taylor’s pheromones told Vastra he felt slighted by not being picked to go with Lang to the new scene.

“Would you like to ride with us, Sir,” Jenny asked Lang. She didn’t want him along, she wanted to be able to hold Vastra and warm her with her body heat; but it would have been exceedingly rude not to offer.

“Thank you, Miss Flint. But I have a carriage,” he said.
“Then I suppose we’ll meet you there,” Jenny smiled and was grateful for the brief time she’d get with Vastra.

They climbed into the carriage and Jenny retrieved a parcel from near the pot of dying coals. She unwrapped the wool to reveal a glass flask encased in a sterling silver design of vines. “Here, drink this,” Jenny handed the flask to Vastra.

“What is it?” Vastra examined the darkened liquid.

“What do you think it is?” Jenny asked. “I’ve kept it warm near the coals; but if you don’t drink it soon it will be no good. Now drink.”

Vastra did as she was told. The warm, thick liquid felt good filling her stomach. “Thank you, love.” She was ever so grateful of all the ways Jenny found to accommodate her Silurian needs.

*****

Arriving at Mitre Street, the carriages had to fight to get through the crowd of onlookers that had already gathered. “Clear the street,” the driver of the police carriage yelled.

Jenny peeped out the window to see the throng of onlookers. Several newspaper men were there attempting to get any scrap of information ahead of the other reporters. Photographers snapped photos of the carriages arriving on scene. “There’s photographers. And reporters.”

“I shall not appear weak,” Vastra assured her. “Though I will rely on you to take notes.”

“Of course, love,” Jenny smiled and placed a kiss on Vastra’s cheek before the Silurian’s veil was lowered and the carriage door opened. Her scales were cold and all Jenny cared about was getting her home and back in her warm bed.

Vastra exited the carriage, unassisted. Jenny followed. A line of uniformed officer’s held the crowd at bay behind the carriages. “Superintendent Vastra,” a reporter yelled, trying to get her attention. She ignored him. “Superintendent Lang,” a photographer yelled. A chorus of “Madam” and “Detective” filled the night air and all went unanswered.

PC Edward Watkins, the policeman who discovered the body, met Lang and Vastra before they entered Mitre Square. “Superintendent. Madam,” he said, shaking each of their hands in turn. “Prepare yourself, this is quite the scene,’ he warned. “Pardon me, miss,” he said, looking at Jenny. “I’m not sure you ought to go in there.”

Jenny spoke up before either Vastra or Lang. “Thank you for your concern, Constable. But I assure you, it is unwarranted.”

“As you wish,” he said and turned to escort the three newcomers into the square.

Before they even laid eyes on the body, even with Vastra’s dulled sense of smell, the metallic twang of blood and the putrid stench of partially digested food assaulted her senses.

The scene was shocking.

The body of a middle-aged woman lay on the ground, on her back. Her dress was pushed up above
her abdomen, exposing a naked torso. Right away it was evident this was the most brutal of the murders Vastra attributed to this killer—this “Jack the Ripper” as one paper had dubbed him. And she was sure this moniker would stick after tonight.

Walking around the body, careful not to step in the blood or upon any clue, Vastra spoke aloud and Jenny took notes. “There is damage to the face. The nose and lips appear to be bloody as if beaten with a fist. The throat has been cut with savage force. The cut is deep. The abdomen is opened and intestines have been extracted and placed upon the right shoulder. A piece of intestine is laid along the left side of the body.

“At this point it cannot be determined what, if any, internal organs are present or missing. There is a lack of blood spray up on the ground or nearby walls. It is possible the cut was not to an artery, but to a vein. This would cause a slow release of blood, not a spray. Or, it is possible this victim was killed elsewhere and carried here, though unlikely.”

Vastra knelt on the right side of the body to pick up the scent of the killer. There was no doubt it was the same man who had killed three other women within the Whitechapel area, but she had to be sure. Taking in the air as best she could through the veil she found the scent she was looking for. “The right ear has been significantly cut. Almost severed, but I do not believe the intent was to remove it. I believe the victim was fighting and this was a missed attempt at cutting her throat. He was in a hurry, and sloppy.” Jenny hurriedly took notes.

“He almost got caught just moments before,” Lang said. “He found this woman quickly and was already agitated.”

Vastra took in another draw of air and pulled it across her tongue. She picked up the intricacies of his pheromones. “He was angry,” she said, “and desperate. He had unfinished business and wasted no time killing her. This is why she was brutalized and hit in the face. He needed to overcome her quickly.” Vastra stood and the motion almost made her black out. Luckily, Jenny was the only one who noticed. And she resisted the urge to rush to her lover’s side and catch her. But Vastra couldn’t appear weak, so she held fast off to the side.

But Vastra knew she needed to get home before she ended up on the front pages of the paper as the detective who passed out at a crime scene. She knew the act would be misinterpreted as the stereotype of the weak human female who couldn’t withstand the sight of blood. “I must return home and prepare notes for tomorrow’s briefing,” she said. “Make sure the photographer takes photos for me as well as the Yard.”

“Very well, Madam,” Lang said. He knew Vastra was ill and he didn’t dare impede her request to return home.

Once safely inside the carriage Vastra collapsed onto Jenny for warmth.

*****

The short man walked hurriedly and distracted north to his apartment above the shops on Dover Street. As he passed beneath the street lamps, a glint of light reflected off the stainless steel scalpel clutched in his right hand. No one paid attention to the short man as he mumbled his frustration under his breath. Had anyone taken just one moment to look at him they would have seen the blood, the scalpel, the rage in his eyes. But as always he was invisible, inconsequential.
Slamming the door, he stomped across the floor. “Filthy whores!” he spat, and threw the scalpel into the sink. As he washed the blood off his hands he glared in disgust at the conditions of his dwelling. It was little more than a hovel. He should be living in a mansion. He should have servants. He was a surgeon! He shouldn’t have to scrape a living doing alterations and petty tailoring from his home. But this is where he was. Since losing his medical license he had to improvise and he had always had a knack for sewing.

Then immediate guilt set in. “Forgive me, Father,” he prayed aloud and grasped the edge of the sink in anger. “I try to do your work. I try to clean the streets and take away their sins. But I could be so much more useful if you had seen fit for me to remain a doctor. I had everything I needed and women came to me, sought me out, to rid them of their sin. Sneaking them into the surgery theatre at night was so easy. Everyone trusts a surgeon. Everyone looks up to a surgeon! Surgeons are not ignored!”

As he spoke aloud he scrubbed the blood and grime from his hands as though he was preparing for surgery. If he didn’t stop soon, he would rub the skin raw. “That’s it,” he said at the epiphany, “I have to start my own practice. If The London won’t let me work for them, I must start my own practice where I can save these women’s souls. A secret practice. Father, thank you. Through this hardship you have shown me the light and the light has shown me the way.”

He fell to his knees. His hands, grasped together and raised above his head. “Your wisdom is great, Father. I will not fail you. I will operate again and save the wretched and the soiled from an eternity of torment. Through you I am strong. Through you, I shall help the weak and the vain. I shall cleanse the wicked. I shall save their souls.”

Tears streamed down his face as he felt filled with the light and love of the Father. Steadfast in his purpose, his mind raced. He began to think of all the things he would need to reproduce a surgery theatre.

He came to his feet. “But I have no have money,” he continued to talk to himself as he wrung his hands and paced aimlessly across the floor.

“You don’t need a lot of money,” he said to himself. “Just enough to get started.”

“Yes. It doesn’t have to be perfect. Just good enough. Just enough to do the job. It isn’t a hard job. And these women will not expect perfection, only salvation. I just need a bit. A bit of money to get started.”

He continued to pace back and forth—plotting, scheming. He spoke to himself, answering himself. Convincing himself of his righteousness.

“Yes. Just enough to get started,” his sinister side said. “Just enough to begin your calling.”

“But where? Where do I get the funds?” He appeared to be talking himself into a course of action.

“You know someone with money,” he said to himself. “You just have to take it.”

A realization came to him. He did know someone with money. Too much money, and ill deserved, in his opinion. “But, she’s so meddlesome. Sticking her nose in my business.”

“But she has money. And you need it more than her. You’ve seen how she lives. Servants and drivers and that fancy house.”

“Yes, why should she have those things,” he was convincing himself. “Why should she have all the things I am owed yet I am left to suffer.”
“Exactly,” he said. “And her lifestyle. You cannot abide by her lifestyle.”

“Dreadful,” he said. “How does she get away with it? Fraud!”

“Exactly! Fraudulent and meddlesome! She will be the end of you if you do not act!” His sinister side was taking over. It was making sense and convincing him of his path.

“Yes. I shall take what she has and I will take care of her. I will take care of her servant and her driver if I must. They all deserve to be sacrificed if they attempt to get in the way of the salvation I am to bring upon this town! To this Country!”

“Go to her. Go now. Show her your strength and then take what she has. She is no match for you.”

The short man retrieved a small bag from the bedside drawer and stormed out of the apartment.

Chapter End Notes

Follow me on Twitter @masters_jd for fanfic updates. Let me know you read my work here on AO3, and you could receive a sneak peak into some of my fanfiction or original works. Interested in being my beta? Let me know.

https://twitter.com/masters_jd
After back to back botched murders that left Jack the Ripper frustrated and unfulfilled. He sought means to open his own practice in London where he could perform his "Godly work" in private. But Vastra wasn't about to let this murderer fulfill his heinous plans.

Thank you all for reading this work and sticking with me from the beginning. I know it's been a long haul, but this gets my story up to where Vastra and Jenny were first brought into the WhoVerse in the episode "A good man goes to war".

This story may be ending, but I have so many more Vastra/Jenny adventures planned for my next one. Tune in for more adventures from your favorite Silurian Detective and her rogue wife.

Reaching in his coat pocket and stroking the scalpel, his security blanket, he mustered up the courage to make his presence known. He climbed the steps to the front door and let out a deep breath he'd been holding since the cab dropped him off. Seizing the brass knocker in his small hand, he gave it three firm raps on the front door.

"Arthur," an older woman said flatly upon answering the door. She was wearing a full woolen dress and looked every bit a proper, high society lady. "If you had given me notice I would have had tea ready for you." She turned on her heel and walked away without as much as a "nice to see you" to her son.

Momentarily stunned that his mother (not the butler or maid) had opened the door, Arthur followed and closed the door behind him. "Mother," he called to her. "Mother, where is Gregory and Annabelle? Why did you answer the door yourself?" To say he hadn't worried a little about the family finances since his father passed was an understatement. And money was the only reason he was here today.

"I am capable of answering my own door, Arthur," she spat back without turning to properly address him. "But if you must know, Gregory has matters to deal with regarding the carriage and Annabelle is doing the shopping at the moment." Her tone was exasperated.

"I’m sorry, Mother," he tried to apologize for setting his mother’s mood to that of annoyed. “I just haven’t heard any news from home lately and didn’t know.”

“And whose fault is that?” she snapped, finally stopping to acknowledge her son.

“Clearly the fault is mine, Mother; but I’ve told you there is no way to contact you with the work
“I’m doing.”

“Ah, yes,” she said. A smirk grew across her face. “You are wasting that medical license playing doctor to heathens in barbaric countries.”

“I am doing the Lord’s work,” he defended himself and further perpetuated a lie he had concocted to keep his mother from knowing the truth about getting fired from The London and losing his license to practice surgery in Great Britain.

“Can the Lord not see fit to provide at least one telegraph or postal service in whatever jungle you have found yourself in over the past half a year?”

“I wanted to surprise you, Mother,” he lied. “I thought you would be happy to see me after such a long absence.”

“I will be happy when you stop traipsing around the globe giving away what I paid so much money for you to acquire!”

“You mean what father paid so much money for,” he mumbled under his breath.

“What did you say, Arthur?” his mother asked. “You always did have a problem speaking up for yourself.”

“I said ‘I am’,” he lied.

“You are what?”

They entered the kitchen and his mother put on the kettle and arranged some biscuits on a platter for tea.

“I am going to put my medical license to use as you and Father intended,” he said.

She shot him a look. “Then you will be resuming your post at The London and not returning to Africa?”

“Well, I… I” he stammered, unsure of himself and fully intimidated by his mother. “I wish to open a practice in London.”

She stopped preparing the tea service and turned to look suspiciously at her son. “A practice?” she scoffed. “That is so expensive. Why not just resume your position with The London?”

“It is expensive,” he agreed, “but this way all the money I earn will stay with me. If I work for The London they will dictate my salary and I will not live up to my full potential. They will take their cut off the top, leaving me with pennies. I may as well remain in Africa working for room and board!” He thought that would hook her.

His mother seemed skeptical and she eyed her son up and down. The train ride from London to Glasgow had taken two days. And the cramped conditions his economy ticket afforded him were abhorrent. As such, Arthur could be described as disheveled, at best. He was unshaven and seemed anxious. He was up to something, she just didn’t know what. She continued to sort the tea service.

He sensed her hesitancy and tried to calm himself and speak with a more civil tongue. “I thought perhaps you could move back to London.” She perked up at the notion. “I know you loathe it here, Mother. I remember how much you hated it when Father drug you up here from our beautiful home in London. You had so many friends,” he continued. “You were so respected and everyone
desired an invitation to your annual charity gala.”

He had to butter her up. She would be hesitant to part with any more money toward his profession. But if he could convince her that investing in him would benefit her, he was more likely to see the money he needed.

“That’s why I would also consider Paris,” he sweetened the offer. “I know you’ve always wanted to live there. And you belong there, Mother. You belong with the Paris elite. Not in this damp, gray, pitiful excuse for a city.”

“Oh, Paris,” she said with glee. The glint in her eyes was the thing he was waiting for.

“Yes, Mother,” he smiled. He now only needed to reel her in. “Imagine it. You would be well provided for with funds from my practice. You could continue your art, make so many new friends, your galas in London would pale in comparison to what you could do in Paris. Imagine the guest list.”

With the water boiling, they walked to the study for tea. Arthur carried the tray as Mother led the way.

“Oh how I miss my galas,” she said, remembering fondly how she was the belle of the ball and all the socialites flocked to her with praises and accolades in hopes of receiving an invitation for next year. “These dullards in Glasgow wouldn’t know art if it jumped off the canvas and attacked them.”

“I know, Mother,” he smiled. She was buying the hype. “I never understood why Father drug you all the way up here to this dull, gray social desert to waste away and have your talent go unappreciated for so long.”

He could care less about her “talent.” She had no talent. The only reason she had friends was because she had money. Everyone who clamored to get an invitation to one of her galas was simply looking for front row seats to mock and criticize her “art.” Her events were so popular because the rich socialite women of London longed for a good laugh. And the parties were always deliciously catered.

Here, in Glasgow, she was the pinnacle of the miserably small socialite circle she had created. She both loved and hated it at the same time. It was a mockery of what she had in London; and these people didn’t know the difference. But Cora did. And she longed for more. She longed for London or even better, Paris. But first she needed to find a suitor with a strong heart and a large bank account. That hadn’t worked out; but maybe this was her chance.

“Mother, all I need is a small loan,” the short man began his pitch. “A small loan to secure the office and equipment. After that I can begin seeing patients and then I can purchase our old home. Or a better one!”

Cora’s eyes lit up.

“I will have it furnished and decorated to your specifications and then send word back to you that all is ready. You will come home and all will be as it was. Better even.”


“I’m sure a few thousand dollars from Father’s trust would be sufficient to begin arrangements.”

Cora choked on her tea. “A few thousand?” She dabbed the corners of her mouth with her towel.
“That is quite a lot of money, Arthur.”

“I know, Mother,” he said. He put his cup down and moved over to join her on the settee. Taking her hands in his, he attempted to woo her. “I know it is a lot of money. But imagine the return on your investment.”

“I shall have to consider your proposal,” she said as she sipped her tea. “I will speak with the accountant next week and see what is possible.”

“Next week?” he said, angrily. “But mother, the sooner I can start the sooner I can get you away from here and back to London.”

Though the thought of resuming her former life was almost too exciting to contain, she couldn’t let Arthur know that. No. She had to figure out a way for Arthur to become her new cash cow. It was the only way to continue her extravagant lifestyle. She straightened up and cleared her throat. “Arthur, I said I will have to consider your proposal and I will speak to the accountant next week. I simply cannot hand you money after the last time when you said you were looking for work, but instead ran off to give your talents away for free on the Dark Continent.”

“But, mother!” he exclaimed.

“That is final, Arthur. Now, go to your room and settle in. I have some chores for you; as long as you are here you will earn your keep. So go get changed and come down later. Everything is as you left it.”

*****

With the bout of hypothermia finally subsiding, Vastra was ready to resume the investigation of this “Jack the Ripper” in earnest. She threw the newspaper down in disgust at all the publicity this case was getting. Especially the unflattering publicity of her and the Yard.

“These newspapers should be warning people to stay vigilant and report suspicious persons to Scotland Yard. Not criticizing the efforts to capture this murderer,” Vastra scowled. “And how dare they suggest that because I am not a human male I am incapable of solving this crime?”

“To be fair, they didn’t say you weren’t human,” Jenny said, trying to add some humor to the situation. Vastra was not amused.

“Are these all the photographs from the two latest murder scenes?” Vastra asked.

“All the clerk delivered, so I assume so,” Jenny replied.

“I cannot believe I slept for two whole days!” Vastra said, disappointed that her body had failed her. “What if he had struck again?”

“But he didn’t,” Jenny reassured her. “And at least you weren’t as sick as last time when you were out for weeks.”

“He will strike again,” Vastra said, ignoring Jenny’s attempts to make her feel better. “It is just a matter of time before the exhilaration of these murders wears off and he will be right back out there. And mark my words, it will be sooner rather than later.”
“Well, you’re all better now,” Jenny tried to reassure Vastra. “And we’ll be ready.”

“Will we? How can we be? We know nothing of the perpetrator other than his scent. And only I know that. So far all we have managed to do is document his murders. We are no closer to discovering whom he is or how to capture him.” Vastra was being hard on herself and taking her anger out on Jenny. Watching Jenny’s face fall in disappointment, she let out an exasperated sigh. “What do we know about the victims of 30 September?”

Jenny put her feelings aside and got to work updating Vastra. “The first victim was Elizabeth Stride. She was a prostitute who worked exclusively on Berner Street where she was killed. She lived in a common lodging-house in Spitalfields. Unmarried. Children either grown or no longer in her care.”

Vastra studied the pictures from the crime scene, now tacked to the rolling board she had grown to rely on with her detective work.

“Second victim is Catherine Eddowes,” Jenny continued to catch Vastra up, “also lived in a common lodging-house, Spitalfields; but not the same one as Miss Stride. Her common law husband John Kelly was questioned by Lang and released as not a suspect.”

“Of course he is not a suspect,” Vastra spat. “He did not do this. That man, that ape, ‘Jack the Ripper’ did this. And this poor woman just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.” Vastra paused momentarily to calm her temper. “Has Lang or Abberline commented further on either murder, other than the obvious gruesome nature of the crimes?”

“Not really,” Jenny said. “But I have something for you.” She smiled at Vastra. She pulled her hand from her apron pocket and held it toward Vastra. It was closed in a loose fist and she was obviously hiding something inside she intended to pass along.

“What do you have there?” Vastra asked. “This is no time to be giving me presents, Jenny.”

“Oh, I think you’ll like this one.” Jenny smiled bigger.

Vastra extended an open hand, palm up, and nodded for Jenny to drop whatever she was holding. A white handkerchief fell from Jenny’s hand into Vastra’s. It was tied to keep its treasure held securely inside. Tiny, reddish-brown specks, almost invisible to the naked human eye, stained the fabric from liquid that had seeped through.

The scent hit Vastra’s sensitive tongue instantly. The metallic taste of blood, the soap used to launder the handkerchief, and pheromones from someone not in this room. “Jenny?” Vastra looked to her partner and back to the parcel resting in her palm. She untied the knot and exposed the prize inside: a sterling silver thimble.

“Jenny, where did you get this?”

“At the Eddowes crime scene,” she said. “I went by after I picked up the file notes from Abberline. I found it against a wall, close to where the victim had been laying. I didn’t know if it was important, but I picked it up with my kerchief. I didn’t touch it. Detectives must have overlooked it.”

Vastra continued to take in the scents from the object. She was so fascinated with what this meant she didn’t even criticize the incompetence of the detectives who overlooked this vital piece of evidence.

“I thought it might be hers,” Jenny said. “But if it is, there’s no evidence that she was doing any
seamstress work for money. I spoke with some of the women around the lodging-house and none of them knew of her doing any work of that type.”

“It is his,” Vastra stated with utmost certainty.

“His?”

“Yes. Our murderer is a tailor.”

*****

Arthur paced the length of the new Persian rug that lay upon the floor of his room. A reminder of the wealth his mother had at her disposal and that he did not. He abhorred her lifestyle—flaunting money that wasn’t really hers. Money she had only acquired through marriage. Money that should be his as the only heir of his father.

She had not worked a day in her life. Had not earned a single shilling of the family wealth. And here she was, spending it on rugs to be laid out in rooms that were never used. On art that should never have even been created. On servants who wait on her every need as she greedily spent the inheritance that should be his.

“Arthur,” his mother called from the sitting room like a common hooligan. “I’ve prepared tea.”

“Where’s Annabelle?” he asked. “Why hasn’t she prepared tea? Why are you doing all of her duties? You’ve made supper all week as well.”

“I have given Annabelle the week off.”

“The week off? While I am visiting? Shouldn’t she be here this week of all weeks?” he asked.

“She had a family emergency and had to take her leave,” Cora said.

“And Gregory? Did he too have a family emergency? I have noticed he has yet to return with the carriage. And now you have me fetching wood from the shed.”

Cora scoffed. “It would do you good to earn your keep while you are here,” she said. “The carriage was repaired yesterday and I have sent Gregory to Edinburgh.”

“Edinburgh? Whatever for?”

“To purchase supplies for the party I am throwing this weekend,” she said.

“Party? Party!” the short man was visibly angry. “And what has the accountant said? Hmmm? You seem to have money to throw away. Has he told you how much you can spare to help me start up our new lives in London?”

“So you have decided on London have you?” Cora snipped. “Is Paris off the table then?”


“See,” Cora started, “this is why I didn’t just hand you the money. You are impulsive and emotional.” But this was not why she hadn’t handed him the money. She had ulterior motives of
her own. If she couldn’t snag a new husband to keep the money flowing in, perhaps it was time her son took up the slack. If she could stall him long enough and convince him to move to Glasgow and take care of her, she could be spared the expense of moving back to London. And although Glasgow wasn’t as posh as London or Paris, she had risen to the pinnacle of the social ladder. And it was better to be the biggest fish in a smaller pond than just another grouper in London or a guppy in Paris. This is what she had reconciled over the past few days.

Arthur sulked with his arms crossed and his nose crinkled.

“The party will be fun. And filled with the Glasgow elite. I want you to meet some ladies. It’s about time you settled down. And there will be other doctors there. Perhaps you can speak with them about getting on at the hospital. I’m sure they would love to have you, what with your experience at The London and your philanthropy abroad.”

Arthur was furious. He needed his mother’s money—not her social connections. And he certainly did not need her wasting it on elaborate parties that he didn’t intend to go to. “I appreciate the sentiment, mother. But the sooner you can give me the funds, the sooner I can begin building our new lives in either London or Paris. Or if you wish, Milan or Madrid.”

“Why would I want to move to Madrid?” Cora asked.

“The point is, mother,” his patience was growing thin, “I can get you out of this hell hole and back to civilization. And I can do it faster if you just give me the money.”

“We will speak of this again next week, after the party. But right now I need to go to the market. Please be a good lad and hail me a cab, would you dear boy.”

Arthur scowled at Cora. “Why don’t I go with you?” He hoped to lessen her spending and talk her out of this party nonsense.

“I am perfectly fine to go on my own, thank you,” she said. She threw in a final jab. “That cab isn’t going to hail itself.”

*****

Jenny pulled the small notebook from her trouser pocket and wrote down the name and address of the tailor shop. This was the fifty-fourth entry and she still had several days before she covered the area Vastra had assigned her. The task was tedious and beneath her skills; but it had to be done. One thing she had learned assisting Vastra with her investigations was that most of the time, most of the work was menial. That didn’t make it any less important. And it required speaking with the locals and winning their trust—something Vastra was simply not adept at.

“What if he’s in there?” Jenny wondered. “What if that’s him, right there?” She looked at the man inside the shop who was meticulously measuring and recording dimensions of a pair of trousers. “That can’t be him,” she convinced herself. “He looks harmless. He’s small as me.” She paused. “But I’m not harmless.”

“Miss, you a’right?” asked a man on the street.

“Wut?” Jenny looked up at the man, confused.
“You were talking to yourself,” the man said. “And you’re wearing men’s trousers. Are you a’right?”

“Oi,” Jenny got defensive. “Mind your business and move along. Official police investigation going on here.” She clearly wasn’t officially on the Yard payroll or acknowledged as staff; but she was tired of people telling her what she could and couldn’t wear. And saying that was easier than getting into another argument.

The man inside the shop was watching since Jenny raised her voice. He paid her little attention and went right back to work as soon as she made eye contact with him again.

*****

Jenny finished placing the last pin on the custom map she had given Vastra at the beginning of the investigation.

“That is all of them?” Vastra asked.

“All of the tailors in and around Whitechapel, yes,” Jenny beamed. “You have your work cut out for you.” There were over a hundred pins. Some represented tailor shops. Some were laundries that offered tailoring and alteration services. Still others were suit shops with a tailor on staff. “I wish I could help with this part.”

“Unless you develop a Silurian tongue, I am afraid this task is all mine.” Vastra’s assignment now was to visit each location on the list and see if she could pick up the scent of the killer. “I suspect this will take the better part of the week. I will be limited to business hours and as always I am sure the humans that run the store will attempt to engage me in conversation-especially once they recognize me and know I am working on this case.”

“Are you going to tell Abberline?” Jenny asked. Abberline knew Vastra’s secret, that she could track the killer using her sensitive Silurian tongue. “About the thimble?”

“No,” Vastra answered. “The Yard is pursuing other leads and theories. I will notify Abberline when I have located the killer’s scent. Until then the thimble and the tailor lead are ours alone.” Jenny smiled. She was glad Vastra seemed pleased with the evidence.

“You still think he’s just showing up at work like nothing has happened? As if he is just a normal person that hasn’t killed four women?” Jenny asked. “Four women that we know of.”

“What else would he do?” Vastra asked. “Murderers have to make a living like everyone else. They have normal lives most of the time. Then every so often they kill. My bet is that he is working as we speak, sewing up someone’s trousers, and thinking about his next victim.”

*****

“Mother!” Arthur yelled. “Do you really expect me to mend all of these clothes for you?”
“Yes, Arthur,” she smiled. “As long as you are here I will put you to work.”

“Where is Annabelle?” he asked. “She should be darning your socks and replacing these buttons. These are the hands of a surgeon and you’d have me as your common tailor!”

“If you are a surgeon then where are your patients?” Cora quipped. “Until you get a job I will put you to work as long as you are here. Now get busy with those garments. I have more waiting in the other wardrobe.”

Cora had been especially full of herself since the party. Though it paled in comparison to the ones she threw in London; it was still extravagant enough to make Arthur nervous about how much of his inheritance she had spent.

“But you will speak with the accountant this week?” Arthur asked.

“Hrumph,” Cora dismissed the question. “Just be a good lad and do your chores.”

*****

Vastra, exhausted from a week of scouting tailors, laundries, and suit shops, fell into the chaise in her office. “I feel as though I have been to every tailor in London!”

“Not even close, love,” Jenny said as she brought in tea to warm Vastra’s insides.

“We will need to expand our search area,” Vastra said without getting up or seeming to care one iota for the warm tea Jenny was pouring up.

“Maybe not,” Jenny smiled. “I have new information.” This got Vastra’s attention. “But now that I think about it, I’m not sure it’s better. No, it’s definitely worse.” Her smile disappeared.

Vastra sat up. How bad could it be? It was already like looking for a needle in a haystack, and London wasn’t getting any smaller. So really, it couldn’t get worse. “Out with it then.”

“We haven’t entertained the fact that this tailor could be working from home,” Jenny said. “I was visiting the butcher on Park Street and I noticed a women taking trousers and whatnot into the stairwell of the apartment above the shop. I asked the butcher what was going on, and he said a little old lady lived up there and did alterations and mending to pay her rent.”

“So it is worse,” Vastra said and fell back into the chaise. “Our ‘tailor’ could be anywhere. Not just shops. But working from his own home. Jenny you have just expanded our search area one hundred fold!”

“It may not be as bad as you think,” Jenny tried to reassure her. She sat down the tea and joined Vastra on the chaise. “You’ve always believed our murderer lived somewhat close to the crime scenes. You theorized that when he left the Stride scene he was headed home and he happened onto Miss Eddowes along the way.”

Jenny stood up and walked over to the rolling board where they had mapped out the area. She pulled a piece of red yarn from her apron pocket and secured one end around the pin that marked Elizabeth Stride’s murder scene. “So what if we,” she then pulled the string toward Catherine Eddowes’ murder scene and wrapped he yarn around that pin as well, “keep pulling this string in
that direction and concentrate our efforts there?” She then took a pen from the tray and drew a
large circle on the map to the northwest of where the second victim was discovered. “Using your
theory, my guess is he’s somewhere around here. We haven’t focused in this area because it has
few shops and is mostly residential. And all we have to do is knock on every door until we find
him.” Jenny smiled, proud of herself.

Vastra wasn’t convinced. “It is merely a theory that he resides in that area—as you said. I could be
wrong and we will waste time knocking on every door.”

“We won’t actually knock on every door, you daft lizard,” Jenny said, making her way back to
Vastra and the chaise. It seemed nothing was going to pull Vastra from her foul mood—a challenge
Jenny welcomed whole-heartedly. She stood in front of Vastra, pulled her skirt up just enough for
the mobility necessary to put one knee on either side of Vastra’s legs and straddle her lap. She
placed a soft, warm palm on either side of Vastra’s cool, scaled face. “I’ll start asking the locals
about home tailors, and you’ll just walk around and put that lovely Silurian tongue to good use.”
Jenny smiled a wicked smile and placed a tender kiss on Vastra’s lips. “This is the best theory we
have, and we’re ahead of the Yard on this one. So I say we go for it.”

Vastra reached up and grabbed Jenny and pulled her into her. “You always do know how to cheer
me up.”

*****

It was the middle of October. Jack the Ripper hadn’t struck since the double murder on 30
September. And neither Vastra nor the Yard was any closer to finding a suspect. However, with
renewed vigor, Jenny and Vastra took to the streets for a full search of the area Jenny had circled
on the map.

By the middle of the afternoon Jenny had recorded a dozen or more tailors and seamstresses who
worked from their homes. She ruled out the females, of course, shortening her list to five suspects
for Vastra to investigate. As she turned onto a new street, a carriage pulled alongside her. An
excited Vastra opened the door. “Get in, Jenny. I have found him!”

“So what do we do now?” Jenny asked, as they peered from the carriage to the apartment above the
shop on Dover Street.

“We wait until dark. And if he has not arrived home by then, we break in.”

*****

Vastra stood guard as Jenny picked the lock. The smell of stale sweat and blood hit Vastra’s tongue
the second the door was cracked. And there it was, the unmistakable scent of Jack the Ripper’s
pheromone signature.

They searched the single room apartment without disturbing anything. They didn’t want to tip him
off that they had found him.

“He has not been here in days, perhaps weeks,” Vastra said as she inspected the unfinished articles
of clothing that lay in wait for tailoring. “Is it possible that he fled town after his botched double
murder?”
“Vastra,” Jenny called from the sink. “There’s a scalpel in here.”

Vastra snaked her long tongue from her mouth and inspected the blade. It had been washed clean, and scents so rarely lingered on surgical steel. Something caught her attention. It was a cloth. She snapped her tongue to the piece of fabric and took in all the scents—Jack the Ripper’s, Eddowes’, and Stride’s.

Vastra’s eyes darkened and Jenny knew the significance of this reaction.

“This will require ‘round the clock surveillance,” Vastra said. “Rally some of your more trustworthy spies and bid them one shilling each to linger in the vicinity and fetch me immediately upon our man’s arrival. I shall endeavor tomorrow to learn his name.”

*****

“I am meeting the accountant on the morrow and we will discuss what is feasible for starting your own practice here in Glasgow,” Cora said.

“Very good, I shall accompany you.”

“No, Arthur,” Cora said. “I think I am quite capable of handling my own affairs. I have been on my own since your father died and you saw fit to flee the country.” She never tired of throwing that in his face. That he had abandoned her in her time of need. That he chose to give up a lucrative career as a surgeon and go volunteer with savages—although that wasn’t actually the case, but she didn’t know. She thought she could guilt her only son, her only offspring into supporting her. But she hadn’t counted on the fact that he too had an agenda. And his desire to “save the souls of the wretched” outweighed her desire to be taken care of.

“As you wish, Mother.”

The next morning Cora left in a taxi, leaving Arthur with a list of chores and mounting anxiety. Unrolling the leather case that held the scalpels, Arthur’s breath hitched. The sight of his blades always made him feel a sense of excitement. Touching the sharp edges, feeling the cool steel on his fingertips made him shiver with the kind of excitement usually reserved for lovers. It had been sixteen days since his last kill. And although it was thorough, it was unsatisfying.

The first attempt—interrupted. The second attempt—so much rage he barely remembered it. He longed to feel the blade as it found its way through layers of skin and tissue. There was nothing quite like feeling the different amounts of resistance each type of tissue provided. His patience was wearing thin. But if his mother would finance a clinic in Glasgow, although he preferred London, no need to look a gift horse in the mouth.

“Mrs. Cora.” A sweet, Scottish, female voice rang out from downstairs. “I stopped by to see if you needed anything. Mrs. Cora?”

Shoving the scalpel in his trouser pocket, Arthur ran downstairs.

“May I help you?” Arthur asked before rounding a corner and almost bowling right into poor Annabelle.

“Oh!” Annabelle said, startled. She pulled back from the short man. “Arthur? Arthur, is that you? I
haven’t seen you in so long.”

“Hello, Annabelle,” he said. He was never particularly fond of Annabelle. When his parents first moved to Glasgow he had attempted to court Annabelle, despite her being their maid. She was attractive and seemed virtuous and pure—the kind of woman he coveted. But she had rejected his advances. Now, she was just a reminder of the money his mother was throwing away. “How is your family?”

A confused look spread across Annabelle’s face. Arthur had never asked about her family, and she saw no reason as to why he would be asking now. “They are well.”

“Good to hear. Mother said you had a family emergency.” He smiled a crooked, forced smile. “I suppose it all worked out alright.”

“Family emergency?” Annabelle was well and truly confused. “Heavens no. I’ve been working for the McLeroys. Ever since your mother had to severely limit my pay I’ve been forced to seek work elsewhere. I just thought I would check on her since I haven’t been around this month. Perhaps you misheard. Mr. McLeroy did have an episode of fever a bit ago. But he’s much better now.”

Arthur played with the scalpel in his pocket. “Yes, I suppose that’s it. Do come have a spot of tea. Mother is away at the accountant’s. She has graciously agreed to finance a medical practice for me here in Glasgow.” Arthur smiled at Annabelle and followed her to the kitchen.

“I don’t know how she can afford that,” Annabelle said as she prepared things for tea. Although she was the guest, old habits die hard and she knew her way around this house as if it were her own.

“Whatever do you mean?” Arthur tried to hold the smile fixed in place.

“Mrs. Cora had to let myself and Gregory go some months back. I still come by, when I can, and help out. As does Gregory, especially for things like firewood. Things your mother can’t do on her own. But she’s not had the funds to pay us for half a year now.”

Arthur struggled to maintain his smile. But his lips quivered with rage in the corners. His fingers mindlessly fondled the scalpel in his pocket and he suddenly sliced his fingertip. “Ouch.”

The tea kettle whistled and masked his outburst. “Are you alright, Arthur?”

“Yes, quite. The kettle just startled me.”

Arthur mulled over options and let his anger toward his mother grow. He clutched the scalpel, tempted to take his anger out on the poor innocent Annabelle. But he decided against it. He wanted all his wrath to go to his mother.

“I’ve just remembered I cannot entertain guests at the moment,” Arthur said, just as Annabelle was about to serve tea.

“Oh?”

“Yes, dreadfully sorry,” Arthur said as he attempted to stop the bleeding from his finger; his hand still hiding the wound in his trouser pocket. “And I will look after Mother now. Tell Gregory that his services are no longer needed. Neither are yours, Annabelle.”

“But Arthur,” Annabelle said as Arthur pushed her toward the door with his left hand, “I love Mrs. Cora and I help her because I want to.”
“Not anymore!” Arthur said, and slammed the door in her face. “I will help her now!”

*****

“Are you sure?” Abberline asked.

“Quite,” Vastra assured him. “His scent dominates the apartment. There was a scalpel and a cloth with his scent along with that of his last two victims. He has not been home in a while. I suspect he left town after his last outing. He was probably humiliated and frustrated and needed to not be reminded of his failures.”

“Where do you presume he went?”

“I do not presume. But upon meeting with the shopkeeper below his apartment I now know the name of our ‘Jack the Ripper’.”

Abberline gasped. “You do?”

“Arthur Harris,” Vastra smiled, her veil removed while dining in the usual private room at the Rose Kettle Tea Room.

“Hmmm,” Abberline looked perplexed. “Not an uncommon name. Most likely we will encounter multiple men of that name in our search.”

“Indeed,” Vastra agreed. “Narrow down any findings by occupation. Our Mr. Harris is working as a tailor, but the use of the scalpel and the precision of his carvings, suggest to me that he was once a doctor. Probably a surgeon.”

“I’ll head back to the Yard and start looking through case files for anyone named Arthur Harris. But it will take some time given that I won’t be able to explain how I came about the name.”

“Very well,” Vastra said. “I will go to the registry department and see if I can find information on the doctors who are registered to practice in London.”

*****

Arthur bided his time. Despite every fiber of his being practically vibrating the words “kill her,” Arthur bided his time. Ever since his mother had gotten back from the accountant’s office two days ago, when, upon her arrival, she notified Arthur that the accountant had called in sick with a respiratory disorder. “He will not be in until next Monday and I shall see him then.” Arthur knew it was a lie. He bided his time. But time was up.

“Why did you not move back to London after father died?” Arthur asked. He and his mother sat in the parlor having evening tea and each reading a book.

“Excuse me?” Cora asked. She tried to make it sound as if she didn’t hear the question.

“You heard me, mother. Why have you remained her in Glasgow when you had such a grand life in
London? I assumed you missed it. That you couldn’t wait to get back to it.”

“Well, Arthur, you wouldn’t understand.”

“Why wouldn’t I understand, mother?”

“Because you’ve never been in love, Arthur,” Cora said.

He wondered what her angle was. He knew why she hadn’t moved back. She was flat broke. He had visited the accountant the day before. The accountant she had sworn was ill and unavailable until next week. The numbers man showed him the books of his father’s estate. Arthur’s father was practically penniless by the time he died. Cora had drained his accounts, what she could get to, trying to recreate the life she had in London.

“You father did have other accounts,” the accountant told him. “Ones she wasn’t allowed to get to. Still isn’t. She receives a weekly allowance from these accounts, per your father’s will.” Arthur took the liberty of playing the heir card and emptied out his mother’s allowance accounts. He now had everything he had come to Scotland for.

“Love? What do you know of love?” he spat at her. “That’s not why you didn’t move back, mother.”

“I don’t know what you mean,” Cora played dumb.

“You know exactly what I mean. I visited the accountant yesterday, mother. He told me everything. How could you do that to Father?” Arthur rose from the chair he had occupied across from his mother. He slowly pulled the scalpel from his trouser pocket and clutched it in his hand. “How could you do that to ME!”

With the controlled precision of a surgeon, Arthur severed his mother’s trachea in one swift motion. The action was intentional, calculated. In this state, she couldn’t speak, she couldn’t breathe, she couldn’t call for help. She would be forced to listen and to suffer as she died.

“You spent MY money,” Arthur yelled. His mother crawled on the floor trying to get away from him. He followed, looming over her. “That was MY money, mother. I was his son and his fortune was supposed to go to ME!”

He kicked her in the ribs, toppling her to the floor, and ensuring she could not leave the parlor.

“You were going to use me as your cash cow to fund your extravagant lifestyle!”

Cora wanted to speak. She wanted to shout at her son that he was a hypocrite and a liar. That he had only been trying to use her as well to fund his ridiculous notion of starting a private practice.

As if he knew what she was thinking, he smiled at her. “Oh, I didn’t want your money to start a practice, mother. I wanted it so I could continue to rid the horrid women of London of their ability to defile themselves and keep filling the streets with bastard children born out of wedlock and who are blinded to God!”

Cora’s eyes grew wide. She didn’t know exactly what her son was ranting about, but she was terrified of what he had become.

“Jack the Ripper, mother. That’s what they call me in London. A bold moniker for sure. Strikes fear in the women. You can always count on the press to make you into something bigger than you really are. More fantastic. I’m simply doing God’s work.”
Cora was now gasping for air. She was suffocating. Arthur just looked at her in disgust.

He wiped her blood from his blade and replaced it in his pocket.

“Goodbye, mother.” With that, he closed the door to the parlor and locked it. He could hear the last gurgling sounds of his mother gasping in vain. He drew a bath and soaked in the hot water, humming and smiling.

*****

“I hope you had better luck than I did,” Abberline said to Vastra upon her entry into the private tea room at the Rose Kettle.

“What did you find?” she asked.

“Quite nothing,” Abberline admitted.

“Then I say I indeed bested you,” Vastra threw her veil back and smiled. “Arthur Harris, aka Jack the Ripper, practiced surgery at The London until such time his medical license was revoked and he was forbidden from practising in all of Great Britain.”

“Why was it revoked?” Abberline asked.

“He had a habit of admitting women of a particular nature into his surgery theatre to rid them of unwanted embryos. On more than one occasion the patient died due to his practice of removing all of her female organs and not being careful about stopping the bleeding.”

“Good lord,” Abberline gasped. “Why didn’t the Yard hear of this?”

“I can only suspect that the London did not want their reputation tarnished. They decided to handle the matter themselves. His official dismissal notice cited ‘incompetency’ as the reason he lost his license. But I was able to dig deeper and find the unofficial report, or at least enough of it to understand.”

“And thus we inherit Jack the Ripper!” Abberline slammed his fist onto the table so hard it spurred a server to enter the private room to check on them. Abberline shooed her away as Vastra diverted her uncovered face from view. “Are we any closer to locating this fiend?”

“The file also contained the name of his next of kin. Father, Hubert Harris, deceased. Mother, Cora Harris, very much alive and residing in Glasgow. I shall leave for Scotland at once.”

“No,” Abberline said. “I’ll telegraph a friend in the police there. I’ll ask him to check in on my friend Cora, that I hadn’t heard from her in a month or so. It’ll be faster.”

“Very well,” Vastra nodded. “If he is with her, however, we will need to set off straight away.”

*****
A frantic knock on the front door awakened Jenny. Abberline busted through the door, not waiting for an invitation. “I need to see Vastra, now. I’ll wait in her office and I’ll get a fire going in there for her.”

“Very kind of you,” Jenny smiled. “She’ll be sluggish and cold.”

After fifteen minutes Vastra made it down the stairs. The fire Abberline built had done an adequate job of heating the room and she quickly made her way toward it.

“I know it is important, so out with it.” She was too cold to be polite.

“Cora Harris has been murdered, her throat slashed in her own home. Her accountant said her son, Arthur Harris, visited him three weeks ago and cleaned out his father’s remaining accounts. Cora’s servants verified Arthur arrived at Mrs. Harris’ home on 1 October.”

“Dear god,” Vastra said. “When was Mrs. Harris murdered?”

“My friend in the police said she was discovered two weeks ago, but she had been deceased for quite some time before they found her. Since it seemed an isolated occurrence, they did not inquire about other similar cases.”

“Surely they know about our own cases here in London,” Vastra said. “Jack the Ripper is in every newspaper in all of Great Britain.”

“They did not link them because Mrs. Harris was not a prostitute. Nor did they think Jack the Ripper would be so far away from London.”

“Did you tell them Arthur was our Jack the Ripper?” Vastra asked.

“No,” Abberline said. “I would not be able to divulge how I arrived at the conclusion that Arthur was our suspect. So I felt it best we handle this off the books.”

Vastra understood his meaning. He was giving her permission to pursue Jack the Ripper on her own, and deal with him in her own way. “Where is he now?”

“He fled Glasgow. He could be anywhere, though I suspect he will return to London.”

“I shall continue to survey his apartment. There’s no reason he will not return there if he does return to London.”

****

The train screeched to a stop in the station. “Last stop, London. Everyone must deboard,” the Conductor said. The train had been delayed, as they always seemed to be, by unexpected maintenance at Oxford station.

It was the middle of the night, 8 November. Exactly three weeks to the day when he killed his mother in the parlor of her Glasgow home.

Arthur shielded his face from the gas lamps, which gave off enough light to easily be recognized should anyone be looking for him. He couldn’t be certain that his exploits across Great Britain over the past three weeks hadn’t been linked and the police were on the lookout. But the fact that he
only saw two bobbies patrolling the platform assured him that the police force was as incompetent as ever and had not yet communicated regarding his killing spree. Alive with hope, he disappeared into the night to find his next victim.

Arriving in Spitalfields, Arthur methodically walked up and down each street in search of the right victim. He was at home. He was comfortable. And he was confident. He could take his time; not be hasty like he was in Edinburgh, New Castle, Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, or Oxford over the past three weeks. No, he could satisfy his cravings with all the discipline and ritual his obsession demanded.

“Two pence for a bagpipe in the alley,” a random prostitute propositioned Arthur.

“Vulgar harlot,” he growled under his breath. This was his twelfth proposition since he entered Spitalfields. Each more vile than the other.

“Five pence buys you a private room for an hour.”

Arthur stopped in his tracks. He turned to look at the redhead that stood leaned against a wall on Dorset Street. She wasn’t particularly pretty or ugly; she was ordinary. But she spoke with learning and not in that dreadful cockney accent so many in this part of London were prone to. She had gone to school or been taught at home. So how did she wind up here? He didn’t really care to find out, but it still crossed his mind.

Inside the prostitute’s room, she stacked the money the short man had given her on a small table and turned to face him, “So what’s your…”

Before she could finish her thought a blade cut deep into her throat. She fell, lifeless, within seconds. The slash severed her jugular vein, aortic artery, windpipe, esophagus, and all soft tissue down to her cervical spine. It was as if all Arthur’s anger fueled the blow.

Arthur picked her up and placed her on the bed, posing her like a doll. He took his time cutting and carving away at his victim. Removing organs, one by one, he laid them around the body—draping her in visceral robes.

“You should keep a memento,” a voice said to him.

“No,” he replied. “There is no need for that.”

“Sure there is,” he told himself. “Keep the heart. As a reminder of how much you care.”

“Of course.”

He placed the heart in his coat pocket and stood beside his masterpiece, soaking in all the vile perfection he had created. He was soaked in blood and bile and all the other contents of that woman. His dark clothes would mask some of it, but he needed to get cleaned up soon. Somehow he registered this need and exited 13 Miller’s Court and headed out, just an hour before sunrise.

Vastra was restless and impatient in the carriage. But the cold, wet November weather forced her hand. She had little choice than to remain put and peer out of the curtains every so often. Occasionally she saw Jenny’s little spies, all children of young age, pass by and gaze up at the apartment window for signs that the occupant had returned. She was happy to see she was still getting her shilling’s worth!

“It will be light in an hour,” she said aloud to herself. “I am wasting my time sitting here.” Hoping out of the carriage she let Parker know her intentions. “I have to stretch my legs. Wait here and I
shall be back soon for you to take me home.” She set out walking toward the Whitechapel District.

Crossing Hit Street, Vastra spun around as the scent of her quarry filled her nose and mouth. She threw her veil back, risking being seen, but she did not care. The putrid stench that Jack the Ripper left trailing down the street was ripe with his latest victim.

“He has struck again!”

Vastra single mindedly followed the trail her prey laid. He was headed toward the Thames. This could work to her advantage. Through the twisting, turning alleyways, ignoring the barkers for the opium dens, brothels, and gambling halls, Vastra remained focused. Finally, she spotted her quarry looking out over the water in a secluded part of the docks near the livestock yards and rendering plant.

“Be gone, Madame,” the short man said upon seeing Vastra’s veiled figure approaching him. “My lust has already been slaked this evening.”

“But what about mine?” Vastra asked. “Are you the only one who deserves satisfaction? Jack?”

Arthur turned on his heel. “You have me confused with another. My name is Arthur.”

“You go by many names, Arthur Harris.” Vastra approached to within a yard of her quarry. She wanted to lull him into false security. Stand within his striking distance. She wanted him to pull the blade so she could have the satisfaction of taking his weapon from him. “Though most Londoners would know you by your moniker, Jack the Ripper.”

“Ah yes,” Arthur said. A sense of recognition in his tone. “You are the one the papers call the Great Female Detective. Last headline I read you were being made a fool of by this Jack the Ripper. Are you so desperate to cast blame on me?”

He was cool, calm. Confident because of his recent conquest.

“Even if I am who you say I am, you have no proof or else you would be arresting me right now. Are you arresting me, Madame?”

“Not as much,” Vastra said. “You see. Like you, I have a mysterious side. A side so few ever see. But unlike you, I have figured out how to use my talents to fit into human society. Then, every so often, I get to indulge in a favorite pastime and hunt abhorrent humans like prey.”

“I am no one’s prey.”

“You have been my prey for many months now, Arthur Harris. The chase has been slow, slower than my liking, but here we are, nonetheless. I have captured you and you will you will be devoured!”

Arthur pulled his scalpel. He wasn’t about to be taken by a woman.

Vastra pulled her veil back, revealing her Silurian features to the short man. He froze in fear. She seized the opportunity and whipped her tongue out, stinging him in the wrist and causing him to drop his weapon.

He backed away. Vastra followed. She kicked the scalpel into the river. “You will not be needing that any longer.”
“What are you? No one will believe you,” Arthur bellowed. “You have no proof. You are a monster.”

Vastra snaked her tongue out, this time slowly and methodical. “I have all the proof I need. And by the smell of your right coat pocket, you have retained evidence of the murder you have committed tonight.”

Arthur was shaking. He was powerless against Vastra. He had lost all advantage. Pulling the heart of his latest victim from his pocket, he begged Vastra for mercy. “Please. I am just trying to cure these women of their vile sins.”

“You are a murderer. And you will die, here, tonight for what you have done.”

“Go ahead,” he laughed. “You kill me and leave me for a passing bobbie to find. The heart will be linked to my most recent masterpiece and I will live forever. I will be known forever as the world’s greatest killer.”

“No,” Vastra said flatly. “I will not have you die a martyr to anyone who would follow you. No. I will drink my fill of your warm blood and then feed you to the hogs. By the time the workers arrive there will be nothing left. Jack the Ripper will disappear into gossip, a failure. There will be nothing left of you or your story.”

“No. Please. I beg you.”

“I will show you the same mercy you showed your victims.” With a snap of her wrist, Vastra unsheathed her tanto and loosed the blade. It stuck true, buried deep within Arthur’s neck. She would have liked to have taken her time with him. To make him suffer for his crimes, but it was nearly daylight. She had to be quick and deliberate.

Arthur gasped and grasped at the blade. He stumbled backwards and tripped over a coil of rope. Vastra moved to stand over him. To lord over her fallen prey. Reaching down, she pulled the blade from Arthur’s neck. Blood rushed out and pooled beneath the body. It reminded Vastra of all the scenes he had left in his wake.

Leaning down, she drank of his blood as it flowed from his neck. Warm and metallic it was her first taste of human blood in a long time. Drinking her fill, she hoisted the body over her shoulder and headed for the nearest swine yard.

***

The carriage pulled up to Paternoster Row, number thirteen, and Vastra calmly exited like it was any other day. “Thank you, Parker. I won’t be needing you again today.”

“Yes m’lady,” he answered and drove the carriage around to the ally to unhitch and settle the horse.

“You look to be in an exceptionally good mood, love,” Jenny said, meeting Vastra at the door.

“Send a telegram to Inspector Abberline at the Yard. Jack the Ripper has claimed his last victim.”

“You found him?” Jenny asked.

“Yes,” Vastra said. “But not before he killed again. It was the blood in his clothes that alerted me. I could smell it from two streets away. Then I picked up his pheromones. Unmistakable. I confronted him on the docks. He resisted, I did not.”
“Congratulations, love. However, a matter has arisen in the drawing room.”

Vastra’s expression was a mixture of confusion and concern. Jenny wasn’t easily shaken, but Vastra could sense from her pheromones that something odd was at hand.

They walked into the drawing room, Vastra still shedding outer layers of clothing. “It just appeared,” Jenny said, “what does it mean?”

“It means,” Vastra started, “that a very old debt is to be repaid.”

Vastra turned to her very capable partner.

“Pack the cases, Jenny. And we’ll need the swords.”

Chapter End Notes

You'll probably notice some of the dialog between Vastra and Jenny didn't exactly line up with what was said in the episode "A good man goes to war” but that's intentional. I never liked the idea of Vastra eating humans. It just seems a bit much. But I did have her snack on a little human blood, so...

End Notes

Feedback/reviews encouraged and appreciated. Your comments inspire me to continue the work. Thank you.

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