

Hera, Love & Revenge by Jenny Fox

Chapter 7

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“Too bad,” he whispers. “I could have kept a cute one like you as a pet...”

A pet? Another chill crawls down my spine. I don't know what that fucker's thinking about, but that's a huge no. I finally manage to utter a faint, pathetic hiss, but he chuckles. He's only steps away now. I'm screaming for Bart or Richard to show up, but it's all in my head, not a single sound comes out of my mouth.

“Thanks for leaving some for me,” he chuckles, stepping right in front of me. “I'll enjoy them right after I get rid of y-”

He suddenly disappears out of my sight. In the blink of an eye, I just have time to see a black shadow before the guy is violently thrown against the opposite wall, the bricks making a horrible sound. The pressure I felt until a second ago is gone, and Bart appears. He grabs the guy by the throat, pulls him away from the wall for just a second before brutally slamming him against it again. I can hear the guy's skull break in at least a dozen places, and he croaks, his throat crushed under Bart's clutches.

“What was that you said you were about to do to my little sis, exactly?” He tilts his head with a furious look.

The guy's eyes open wide in horror as he realizes his mistake. He glances at me, then back to Bart. There's nothing left of the guy that was terrorizing me seconds ago. I'm still shaking, but I'm also fucking relieved, and a bit impressed at how easily Bart just destroyed the guy's throat and crushed his dominance. A bit scared, too, but I'm glad he's on my side... The stranger pathetically tries to grab Bartholomew's hand to have him release his grip, but even I can tell that's not going to happen. The difference in strength is far worse than he and I.

“I...” He wheezes. “I didn't... The S-scotsman...”

...The Scotsman? Does he mean Richard?

“Yes, you pathetic piece of vampire shit,” hisses Bart. “She's a Heartgraves, and the Scotsman's back. So you'd better scam the fuck back to whichever shithole you came out from, and if I ever get sight of your pathetic mug again, anywhere near London or near us, I'm wiping those streets with your fucking intestines. Are we clear?”

The guy can barely wheeze some faint approval, but the terror in his eyes is good enough. Bart slowly lets go, still glaring furiously at him, and we watch the guy vanish at record speed. I let out a sigh.

"...You alright, Baby?"

"Don't you ever be late again," I mutter, almost a cry.

I try to wipe the blood off my face, but my hands are still shaking. I don't want to imagine what would have happened if he had been just a minute late... Bart walks up to me, and takes out another tissue to help me out.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't think you'd be unlucky enough to cross paths with this kind..."

"What kind is that?"

"The scum of vampires," he scoffs. "Scavengers. Those guys are pathetic. They hunt easy targets, leave a mess behind them and usually target young vampires like you to kill them and have less competition, or worse, force them to do their deeds. They are partially the reason why there aren't as many vampires as before."

I faintly nod. I had no idea...

"Are there many?" I ask, my voice a bit raspier than I would have wanted it.

"Normally, no. But he probably thought he could have a good time while the local Overlord wasn't around."

"...The Scotsman he mentioned, is it Richard?"

"Yeah, that's one of the names they know him by. Though I'm pretty sure he's older than that..."

What does that mean? ...He can't possibly mean older than actual Scotland? Bart turns around to go and check on the two guys I left like that. He grabs them to look at their necks, and chuckles.

"You did this?"

"I managed to stop myself on the first one," I protested, slightly hurt.

"What about the second one?"

I get worried for a second, but I realize I can hear the passed out guy's heartbeat. I shake my head.

"I can't tell if I would have been able to stop, to be honest. I was getting to the good part when the other bastard startled me."

"Fair enough. Having two preys at hand was a good move. ...Your hunger's still to be trained, but you did a good job at charming them, Baby. You got a knack for this."

"Is it supposed to be hard? Not to gloat but it felt rather instinctive to me..."

"It depends on the vamp," Bart shrugs. "Some are better at holding back their thirst, some have talent for charm, others for domination. Some have it all, some never get good at any. From what I've seen, you're faring alright."

While he takes care of the two guys, checking on the injuries I made and charming them to go home without a complaint nor a word, I can't help but stare at the wrecked wall on our left. Everything happened so fast, and I still feel chills about it... I have never felt so powerless, and it was terrifying.

"Bart, how old was he?"

"What?"

"That guy, the one who tried to attack me?"

"Oh... I dunno, maybe a century old. I've never seen him before. Why?"

"...Because I never want to be that helpless again."

He smiles, but doesn't say anything. I just wrap my arms around myself. I print that image of the destroyed wall in my head, I want to remember what just happened if I ever get weak. Both guys gone, Bart walks back to me, putting an arm around my shoulders.

"Come on Baby Vamp, I think you got enough action for today. Let's go home."

I couldn't agree more. This meeting with another vampire cooled me down big time. I walk back with Bart, letting him guide me in silence while I reminisce about what happened. He doesn't seem to mind the silence, but it takes me all the journey back to really calm down. The streets are calm, and I guess the air is cold on this October night. London is quiet where it's not buzzing with nightlife, and I can't help but glance around at each new street we step in.

"Relax, Hera," Bart sighs. "I swear nobody else will try to pull that crap on you again. That bastard will spread the word that Richard's back, all the vermin are going to flee the City as fast as they can."

"...Is Richard that powerful?"

"He's an Overlord," he shrugs, as if that explained it all. "No vampire in their sane mind wants to piss off one, trust me."

"...What about those who created that guy? Don't they all have... their own Overlord?"

"You catch on quickly. ...But it's more complicated than that. First, not everyone cares like Richard does about our "family". Some Overlords actually create vampires without thinking twice, or worse, just to drop their offspring on another Overlord's territory, their way to piss each other off without fighting directly. Imagine if you had woken up without Richard around, left to your own devices. ...Scary, right? Well, it's that easy."

Scary indeed. I would have probably just hid in the streets of New York, hunting like a beast, slave of my thirst and with nobody to guide me, or protect me, at the mercy of older vampires. It's terrifying to imagine...

"So London is Richard's territory?"

"London?" Bart chuckles. "He's the Scotsman, Hera. Richard's territory is all of Britain."

...Then what was he doing in New York City? From what I can gather so far, he left long enough for other vampires to crawl into his home city, but why? What pushed him to go overseas? I hesitate to ask Bart, but he seemed already shocked that Richard had gone to New York, he probably doesn't know either. Cata doesn't seem like she'd pry into the Patriarch's matters either. ...Perhaps I should ask Richard himself? He sort of dodged the question once already...

While I'm lost in my thoughts, we reach the house, and Bart opens the door for me. Cata is still in the kitchen when we walk in, cooking something else, but the cookies are nowhere to be seen. What did she do with them? Does she ever stop cooking?

"How was it?" She asks with a bright smile.

"She's a killer!" Chuckles Bart.

Her expression drops.

"Oh my god, really?"

"Chill, Cata, I'm joking!" He rolls his eyes. "Baby did just fine for her first day. She's got some real talent for charming too."

"Oh, that's good... I never got really good at it," Cata sighs.

"What would you use it for," Scoffs Bart. "You never leave this house anyway..."

To my surprise, Cata only makes a sorry smile, and focuses on her cooking again. It's like she just can't stop for a minute. The second she puts whatever she was baking in the oven, she grabs more utensils, visibly starting another recipe. To my surprise though, she's actually using one of the unlabelled bottles from earlier and, from the smell, I can tell it's not wine...

An awkward silence takes place next, during which Bart shrugs.

"...I'm going to shower," I mutter. "Cata, how can I get another... outfit?"

"Oh, I'll bring one for you! Any preference?"

"Anything that's nothing like this," I mutter, glancing down at my short, tight black dress. "Something comfortable, if possible."

"I'm on it!"

She walks out of the kitchen and upstairs, and Bart sighs.

"...I'm going to shower too," he groans.

We both walk out, but split ways after going upstairs, each to our own room. ...Does that mean the room I woke up in is going to be mine from now on? I need to double-check with Cata. I make a stop to check the wardrobe, but it's empty. Shit, do I get to do some shopping later? I want to have my own clothes, I can't keep borrowing others'.

I hop into the shower and, with much relief take a good shower, erasing all the traces and remaining smell of blood off my skin. I try turning the temperature hot or cold, but the only clue to tell where it's at is the steam... Damn, I really can't feel a thing. I don't spend too much time in there, just enough to smell like the peach soap and wash my hair. When I step out, I grab a couple of towels to wrap my hair and body in, and find the clothes Cata left for me on the bed. She visibly handpicked a couple of outfits, probably from my fellow female vampires' bedrooms again... I go for denim jeans and a simple black knitted sleeveless turtleneck top. Funny how I'm attracted to darker colors now...

Once dressed up, I can't help but glance in the mirror again. My face looks a bit more colored, but I can't tell if it's from the blood I drank, or the shower's heat. My hair is so freaking long... I kind of want to cut it soon. I need to ask Cata about that appointment she mentioned.

I step out of my bedroom. I wonder what time it is... I kind of miss having a phone. Everything is rather quiet, aside from Cata back to her cooking downstairs, and Bart's shower still running above. ...Should I try exploring a bit? Nobody said anything about anywhere in the house being off-limits, and rooms that I shouldn't go in will be locked anyway, right? I decide to walk around, still intrigued by all the rooms. After climbing the stairs to the next floor, I realize there's sound coming from one of the rooms, something soft at regular intervals. I can't help but walk over, a bit intrigued. None of the rooms have any names on them, or anything to signal it's occupied. The noise, again. It's coming from a room upstairs. Is it Richard? I climb to the last floor, finding the door behind which it's coming from. It's so faint, but after a few seconds, I hear it again. I knock.

"...Richard?"

I hear steps, and someone comes to open it. To my surprise, it's not Richard, but a female vampire, with the palest skin I've ever seen under her Victorian style

clothes. Behind her, I get a glimpse at her room... and it's like I'm looking at a library. There are books. Just books, everywhere, from floor to ceiling, on every piece of furniture. There's one in her hand too, but I can't read the title. She frowns behind her round glasses, and stares at me with an upset expression.

"...Who are you?" She asks coldly.

"...I'm Hera. I'm new."

"What do you want?" She retorts, just as coldly.

"I was just... looking around?"

"Well, that's my room. Bye."

She slams the door almost on my nose. I grimace. Guess I should not have tried this door...

"That was Agnes."

I jump.

At the end of the corridor, Richard just appeared. How silent was he that I didn't even notice him stepping out of his room... He smiles at me, and walks over, his grey hair shining everytime he walks under a window pierced by the moonlight. I immediately feel calmer from his presence. He walks up close and smiles down on me.

"I'm sorry," I mutter.

"She doesn't like being bothered while she's in the midst of a book," he says softly. "You'll see she's much better company when she's done with it."

I feel like it's a bit too late for that, but I don't reply anything back.

"How was your first hunt with Bartholomew?"

"I think I did alright... Except for some bad company we had."

His smile fades. He suddenly takes something out of his pocket, and grabs my hand to put it on my right hand's middle finger. ...A ring? It's not a feminine one at all, but a thick golden ring. I look at it from up close. It's a black insignia, with a golden cross inside a heart on it, with a diamond at the center. I've seen that symbol before... Richard has the exact same ring.

"It's not exactly my style," I mutter, a bit confused.

"It's the Heartgraves insignia. If you ever get into some bad company again, show this to them."

"...I see. Thanks."

He then walks past me, and I follow after, as we're visibly headed back to the ground floor and the common rooms. Cata's expression brightens as soon as he walks in.

"Richard!"

"Good Morning, Catherina," he says, putting a kiss on her cheek. "Did you have a good night?"

Cata nods, visibly happy. I thought they would have a more equal to equal relationship, but I got it wrong. Gentle Cata suddenly seems as docile as a cat purring under her owner's pets...

"By the way, Hera, Riki will be here later today, so don't sleep late," she tells me. "Be sure to be up at six!"

Oh, I was going to ask... I nod, a bit relieved. Whatever they want to do with my current appearance, I want to change it all. Even better if it can be done before more of the Heartgraves family show up and start asking questions...

"What the fuck is that?"

Bart suddenly walks back into the room, holding his phone. I glance, and immediately, recognize some online magazine's layout, the headline clearly about my death, again. I want to roll my eyes and look away, but his furious expression tells me I have a bigger problem.

"Bartholomew," Richard warns him.

"No," he says, still staring at me. "I want to know why the fuck this is saying you actually committed suicide?"

"...Because I did," I mutter.

His jaw drops, and he turns to Richard, furious.

"You've got to be fucking kidding me!"