

Emma and the BDA

"My name is Emma and I'm a vampire."

Everyone chimes "Hello Emma" and I dip my head as if I'm a bit shy, but it's really to hide the fact that I'm finding it really hard not to laugh.

I love these guys: they've provided a whole new level of amusement for me. There have always been vampires who feel bad about what they are, who mope around in the shadows stricken with guilt at every sip of blood, but "Blood Drinkers Anonymous": that's just priceless! They have vampire hymns! I love the vampire hymns: I have one as my ring tone and it makes me giggle every time my phone rings.

"Thank you Emma." The organiser, Betty. She looks about forty and I'd bet good money she's not much older than she looks. She has that slightly nervous look a lot of the newbies get: like they're afraid someone's playing a joke on them. Sorry Betty my dear, this one's for real.

Betty smiles with extra dimples at everyone. "Now, who would like to share first this week?"

Sharing: the act of making everyone boost your ego by either a) having failed to resist and getting the loving support of the community, or b) having succeeded in denying yourself and getting the praise of the community. It's quite clear from everyone's tales of temptation and small successes that Betty is not the only new vampire here: in fact I wouldn't think anyone had been a vampire more than 50 years tops. Apart from me of course: I'm a mite older than that.

Tommy raises his hand. Turned at around 20 years old and his whole demeanour suits the kid-who-still-wets-the-bed name.

"Go ahead Tommy."

Tommy stands, shaking like a leaf and everyone murmurs support including such phrases as "we love you" and "you're safe here". I definitely do not love him and in fact would gladly rip off a few limbs if I thought it would stop his snivelling so I stay quiet. See? I can be considerate.

"I-it's been really difficult this week. At work o-one of the guys cut himself chopping onions"

Tommy works the night shift at a fast food place. I don't know what: burgers or chicken or something - what do I care? I'm never going to eat it.

"It's been so long since I've..." he swallows thickly. That he can't even say "bitten someone" confirms to me that there is no hope for him. He'll die within a few years. He'll starve himself as much as he can and then one little accident and poof! He's gone. I don't know why his maker bothered.

"I almost went right for him." Tommy's still going. "B-but I stopped myself. I had some with me so I went to the back room and got it and drank it in the loos."

Everyone's smiling and congratulating him, but no, that's not enough for Tommy-kins.

"I-I still felt so guilty! I'd wanted it so bad and there I was hiding in the gents to drink from a thermos full of blood!"

Now everyone's consoling and telling him what a brave, strong boy he is. Finally he's satisfied by their praise and slowly sits down.

"Thank you Tommy." Betty says. I wonder if she was a nursery nurse before drinking blood became so appealing. She has that sing song kind of voice.

"I'll go next."

Betty blanches and I settle myself back in my seat to try and hide how much I want to lean forward as Dave stands. This guy is great: the fact that he freaks Nurse Betty out a little is a bonus.

"You see the thing is," oh this is going to be good if he's making excuses already, "I went to the pub after we finished here. I was kind of depressed you know. So I go in there and I suddenly remember that there's no point in me drinking: you know, since it's not going to do anything." He shrugs. Yeah not getting drunk really doesn't seem so bad when you get to drink blood. "But I can't just turn right round and leave so I sit at the bar and order a JD since it's small and, you know, easy to get rid of later, and this hen party comes in. They're all over the place and they're completely wasted. This blond girl comes up to me, and she just won't leave me alone, and her friends are yelling behind us and I figure: what the hell? You know? She drags me into the loos and she's smiling and hitching up her skirt before we're even in the cubicle. She pushes me down, and I'm up for it, you know, but when I'm down there I notice the big vein there and I don't even think about it. I bite her and she's loving it so, you know, I just keeping going. By the time I'm done she's passed out - just from drinking, not me!" He adds quickly as a few of the more sensitive among us gasp. "She was properly wasted, probably wouldn't have been able to finish anyway. So I clean her up and tell one of her friends she's in there and leave."

Good boy! Mere minutes after the meeting and he's getting some. So far he's not made it the whole week between meetings without biting someone. I would applaud if I thought I could get away with it.

Betty's cheeks are a bit pink, but she meets his eyes when she speaks which shows there's some hope for her I guess. If she had been too embarrassed to meet his eyes then there would be no chance she'd make it as a vampire.

Tommy looks at the floor. His cheeks are burning and there's a certain amount of tenting he just can't hide. Bless. I knew being a vampire was beyond him, but it looks like being a human probably would have been too.

"Well Dave we all slip sometimes. What's important is that we keep trying. Other than that how have you been doing? Tell us about your successes this week."

Dave scuffs a shoe against the floor and I really wish he wouldn't. Rubber soles on lino make a noise no vampire should have to bear.

"You see, I figured since I'd already done it once it didn't make any difference if I did it again this week."

Betty sighs and yet, somehow, I find I have no sympathy for her terrible trials.

"Would you like to tell us how many times you have strayed this week?"

Dave is thoughtful for a moment.

"15 or so? I wasn't really keeping count."

I love this guy.

Everyone else in the group however is either horrified or jealous and covering it up by acting horrified. These are people who haven't drunk blood from a living human in months (years in some cases), but 15 little nibbles in a week is not such a strange thing as you might think: a tad excessive sure, but not that bad. Normally I stick to one a night, but put me in a

big club with plenty of donors who don't know any better and I've got through that many in a night before. A sip or two, here and there...like entrées: you just pick them up as they go past.

"Dave I think maybe it's time you had a sponsor. You shouldn't use one slip as a reason to give in to temptation. You don't have to give in to your baser nature. I'd like you to talk to everyone later and decide who would be best suited to help you."

I wish it could be me. What I could do with a man like that...

"Is there anyone else who would like to share with us today?"

There are a couple more. Derek, a man who was late middle aged when he was turned (to put it kindly), is tempted in particular by twenty something women and is having trouble coming to terms with his natural inclinations. I can understand where he's coming from: not the guilt-ridden bit, but it's the middle of summer and it seems everywhere you turn there's exposed skin, flushed and appetising...of course since I don't deny myself it's not a problem, but Derek is getting desperate enough to snap soon. Long live the summer.

Ann is stern woman, strict with herself to the point of cruelty. She regales us with the tales of how she punishes herself for feeling tempted and recommends it to the group as a way to stop the craving. She looks around 20-something. Derek is close to cracking.

No one else feels like sharing so we move on to prayers for strength and courage, hymns (I will not laugh, I will not laugh), and a discussion about how to bring the good news of Blood Drinkers Anonymous to all those poor vampires out there who are still suffering.

So far they've managed not to piss anyone off with their mission, but that's mostly because they haven't been able to find many vampires to pass the word on to and even these people understand that putting up posters about vampires is probably a bad idea for many reasons. They only approach vampires individually and try to get them to come to a meeting. The new ones are easiest to spot and the most likely to actually agree to come to a meeting so they think they're doing quite well. They don't realise they've barely scratched the surface of who's out there and I'm not going to enlighten them.

How did I get involved, you ask? I came looking for them of course.

They approached a newbie called Jamie who laughed in their faces, as well he might. He's a sweet thing: only been turned a year and a half and as excitable as a little puppy. Jamie, impressed with how ridiculous the whole idea was and knowing how much I love good laugh told me all about it. I don't think he was really expecting me to come along, but he'll learn soon enough that I can't let something this entertaining just pass by.

So here I am at my third meeting as it comes to a close with one last prayer and then everyone begins to disperse. Betty intercepts Dave quickly and steers him to start talking to the senior members of the group to try and get him a sponsor. Good luck with that. By the door Timmy sets out the cooler full of blood for the weekly ritual. As each person leaves they take what has been decided is a week's supply of pre-packaged, sanitised blood. And that's the problem with this place: alcoholics, drug addicts, they can give it up completely. Vampires? We need blood to live. It's not some pathetic addiction: it's food. It's like having a Water Drinkers Anonymous meeting.

Timmy doesn't look at anyone as they take the blood, as if he's ashamed of giving it to them. He should be. This blood was donated to keep humans alive, not to feed us and it sickens me a little that I have to take it. There's no point in not taking it, it can't go back to the blood banks now, since it would just be destroyed as a potentially contaminated sample. So I

take it and promise myself that I won't come to these meetings for too much longer: won't give them a reason to steal more blood from people who need it.

The blood packs go into the fridge at home. As much as I hate where it's come from I generally try to have a bit of a stock in the fridge in case I don't feel like going out to eat and this stuff has meant I haven't had to get my own for a while. Normally I get my stock from guests who are rarely conscious when I take it and always happy when they leave. I keep it in glass bottles: I tried one of the blood packs last week and it tasted strange by comparison. I guess hospitals don't have to worry about the rubbery plastic packets leaving a bad aftertaste.

My flat isn't anything special and though I could probably afford somewhere a lot nicer it's more than big enough for little old me. Though it's not quite big enough for all my books. Every wall of the hall and living room is lined with shelves packed full of books. It'll be time to offload some to my storage space again soon. A shelf catches my eye: Kafka? Tolstoy? Bleh: I've so done my dense Russians phase. I scoop up the whole lot and dump them by the front door. I might actually get around to putting them in storage some day soon.

The living room is cosy, covered in books with standard lamps and a chair with enough padding for about three. Not leather though. I've never understood how anyone could find a squeaky sweaty seat comfortable. What strikes most people about my living room is that there is no television. It's like sacrilege in this day and age not to have your whole décor pointed towards a TV, but I'm not really the "zone out in front of the TV" type. It does mean I have the freedom to put my furniture wherever I like and it's fun to watch how uncomfortable some people get when they don't have their usual crutch to stare at.

However, if my living room is bereft of technology that doesn't mean the rest of the place is. Step through to the bedroom and you step into a room with enough electronics to actually contribute to global warming in its own right. Ok so I'm exaggerating, but my main set up is almost completely hidden by all the things I have wired in and the piles of components I have lying around look pretty impressive in a geeky way. Hard drives, motherboards, various SATA and IDE cases and cables - ooh a solid state internal hard drive. I forgot I had that. It won't fit my main machine, but it might work in that other one...I put it on top of a couple of old CRT monitors and empty cases in the vain hope that I might actually be able to find it again later, then slip off my thin summer jacket and hang it on the back of my chair.

You may think it's strange that a vampire is interested in technology. After all, I was born long before anyone understood electricity let alone used it to manipulate information. It's true that a lot of older vampires don't really get it, but I've yet to meet a new thing I didn't like. Especially something with so much potential.

Neither of the two bedrooms in my flat has a bed. This is because I sleep in the cupboard. Stop that thought right there. It's an enormous walk-in, dressing room type cupboard that opens off the master bedroom (which, obviously, is where I keep my clothes) and there is a very nice bed in there (double, if you were wondering, since there was no room for king-size) far away from any windows. The bedroom windows are blacked out anyway to stop anyone getting ideas about my hardware (and because no one likes glare interrupting a perfectly good gaming session), but why take the chance. Besides, I like my cupboard. It's utterly bare apart from the bed: a blank canvas perfect for peaceful sleep.

Despite what the newbies at Blood Drinkers Anonymous might think 1am is definitely still early. For a vampire it's like the middle of the day. I contemplate going out, but I'm not

in the mood for clubs tonight. I sit at the computer instead. I leave it turned on all the time with only the monitors turned off to save some of the power it eats. I hit the button on the main monitor (I have another connected as well, but I hardly use it. Two just seems unnecessarily showy) and run my thumb across the sensor to log in. I love biometrics.

I also love the internet. There are so many people out there who forget the whole idea of inhibition as soon as they put fingers to keyboard and I'm constantly amused by what they come up with. Chatrooms annoy me, but I'm a member of any number of message boards and whenever I logon there's always someone interesting to talk to.

Recently that person has usually been breathreturning. I don't know his real name any more than he knows mine, but we seem to share a wide range of interests. We've come across each other on a lot of the same boards, and I was surprised to find he has intelligent things to say about things as different as fetish, globalisation and medical technology. At the moment though I'm more interested in the fact that it appears he has tried to hack my computer. It was a clumsy attempt at best by the looks of things. The reason I know it was him is because he didn't even try to hide his IP address: he used the same one that he comes from when he posts on message boards. I don't know what he was hoping to get out of it, but I doubt he's too happy about the virus he triggered. Shame: I quite liked talking to him.

I save a copy of the report of the attempted invasion to a mini flash drive and slip it into my coat pocket for tomorrow then go back to the web. There are other people to reply to and tales of the unexpected to uncover.

Turns out that hard drive doesn't fit anything I own any more. Seems a shame to let something like that go to waste and I owe a favour so the next night I go to see the twins.

"Hi guys, got something for you."

Two identical faces topped in identical ginger mops peer at me from the bed.

"It's Emma." One mutters.

"It's early." The face closest to me gets buried back into the pillows.

I perch delicately on a broken computer chair that threatens to topple me and the bundle of cables I'm sharing the seat with onto the floor at any moment. "Hey, you're the ones who buzzed me in."

One brother leans over the other and grabs an old glass of blood from the bedside table. By the time he's had a few gulps his brother is sitting up and taking the glass from his hands to finish it off.

Over two hundred and twenty years old and they still live like teenagers. They were turned when they were nineteen so you might think it's understandable, but vampires grow up just like everyone else, even if their bodies stay the same. These two are just lazy.

I should know. I've known Scot and Sam Connall for almost fifty years and I still can't tell them apart. They are identical down to the melanomas they get when they go out in the sun. There's nothing about technology they don't know and ever since I badgered them into teaching me the ropes we've been friends.

Well, as much as we can be. There is the rest of the world and then there is the world the twins have between themselves and I've yet to find a way those two worlds can ever meet.

"Here," I throw the hard drive onto the bed, "came out of an old notebook I pulled apart. Can you use it?"

They share a look and some communication happens that I'm not privy to.

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One head turns back to me and nods while the other brother gets out of bed and shuffles off to the kitchen. He's just wearing tight black boxers and has that lanky, slightly stretched look of someone who hasn't finished growing yet. And never will.

"We can use it. We've been piecing together something new that this might work in."

"Cool, so we even?"

One shoulder shrugs. "Why not?"

"Want some?" The brother asks from the kitchen as he comes to the doorway waving an old fashioned milk bottle full of blood. The foil cap on top is brand new and still in place, but I know the twins standards and don't fancy my chances.

"No. Thanks. I have something else for you though." My hand is in my pocket before I've finished speaking and comes out with the little flash drive. I toss it to the brother in the doorway who fumbles with it a bit as he tries to drink from the bottle at the same time.

"What is it?" The brother in the bed asks.

"Some one tried to hack my PC yesterday. Thought you might like to play with him."

"Your security worked?"

"As far as I can tell."

He throws the flash drive back to me. "Then there's nothing left to play with."

The brother in bed throws back the covers and stands. "That program we wrote should have destroyed his operating system."

The brother from the bed takes the milk bottle from his brother and drinks. He licks a blood moustache from his lip while the other continues.

"If his set up was simple enough it probably fucked his motherboard too. Maybe even fried his hard drive."

"Shit, you don't do half measures, huh?"

Matching pairs of eyes met mine disdainfully. "That was half measures."

"Emma! How have you been? I've been trying to get a hold of you."

I'm walking down a street, soaked in sickly orange streetlights as a bar lets out and a drunk tries to grab my ass. The sharp snap of one of his fingers as I remove his hand is only partly accidental. I've had every wasted idiot down this street whistling and grabbing. I'm cranky and I really wish I had checked who was calling before I answered.

"I know Charles," I say sweetly, "I've been avoiding you."

He laughs as if I'm having a joke with him though we both know I'm not and that that won't stop him trying.

"Come now Emma, don't be like that. You know we're perfect for each other."

"I know no such thing."

He sighs a long suffering sigh. I dodge a pool of fresh puke and keep moving. As soon as I get off this phone I'm going to have my teeth in someone's throat.

"Still, you'll come to my party won't you? Everyone will be there."

I doubt that, but it hardly matters. "I've already said no. What makes you think I'll change my mind?"

"Just letting you know the offer is still open."

I'm saved by a beep from my phone.

"Sorry I've got another call. Later."

I shut him off before he has a chance to answer and switch to the next call.

I really should learn to look at the caller ID first.

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"Emma? It's Betty. From BDA? We're calling an emergency meeting. Tonight. Can you make it?"

She sounds panicked, but such a radical thing as a vampire biting someone could probably make her panic and I'm still feeling cranky so I'm not in the mood to go along with the whole BDA crap.

"Is it really that important?"

"Some people are dead."

Moderately interesting.

"Fine. Give me twenty minutes."

I hang up and head into an alley, dragging the nearest drunken lout with me. This is his lucky night.

The church basement is in an uproar by the time I arrive. Tommy is in the middle of it all looking kind of dazed while half a dozen people shout over each other. Ann is berating Dave for a reason I can't fathom and Derek backs up Betty as she tries to calm everyone down. They're not having much luck, but then they're behaving like humans.

I let my eyes sink to black and pitch my voice to cut.

"Quiet."

Everyone stops and looks at me. Good. It was the result I was going for.

"Hi!" I say and step down the last few stairs. The vampires back away, all except Tommy who seems to have been numbed by the thick, clotting blood on his hands and down his front. Now that I'm up close I can see smears of pink up his arms where he's at least wiped his face.

"Someone had a fun evening. How many?"

Tommy meets my eyes and they aren't his sweet little human eyes anymore. The boy's reached his epiphany. Guess I was wrong about him not surviving.

"Three."

Colour me unimpressed. "And the problem is...?"

"Three people are dead." Betty explains as if I'm very slow.

"Are you sure?"

Ann is derisive. "Excuse me?"

"Are you sure they are dead." I say slowly, but at the blank looks I can tell I need to spell it out a bit further and turn to Tommy. "Were their hearts beating when you left?"

From the sudden surprise on his face I can tell he was too involved in the moment to even think of checking. Great. The chances of them still being alive now are probably pretty slim.

I sigh. Cleaning up after newbies is not my idea of a good time, but the greater good demands I at least have a look at the scale of the mess. The least is exactly what I'm going to do.

"Come on then Tommy."

"Where are you going?"

Betty is out of her depth. It's not endearing.

"The scene of the crime," I say in my most dramatic voice. No one even cracks a smile. Some people are too serious. "I'm going to give the place a once over, check there's nothing too obviously inexplicable for human police people to come to terms with. Tommy's coming to let me in to the building."

"I didn't lock up."

His voice is less hesitant than it was before he went on his little spree, but he's still a bit distant sounding.

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"You're still coming. It's your mess."

Dave speaks up, but he seems pretty reluctant. "Should Tommy go back? I mean don't they always say killers always return to the scene of the crime?"

"I just don't want to break the stereotype." Everyone looks at me like I have two heads. "Oh for crap's sake. This is not a big deal. I'm going there to check for signs of vampire and then I'm going to do something far more interesting with my night. I haven't decided what yet, but at this point just about anything could qualify. Now, Tommy is going to come with me like a good little boy and the rest of you are going to go home and starve yourselves. Ok?" A decidedly goth-looking girl looks like she wants to say something. I cut her off quickly. "Ok."

"I'm coming with you."

Betty is already grabbing her coat. Since no one else is making any kind of move (and I can't be bothered with arguing) I don't stop her from tagging along, but I don't wait for her either. Tommy, however, doesn't follow when I leave so I hurry back, grab his arm and drag him out with us.

No police. Good first sign. The pungent smell of blood isn't, though I doubt a human could smell it. The place is dark and there is no evidence from the front that anything unusual has happened tonight. No one is around, but we go in through the back anyway. I stick to the shadows and know as I slip through them that no casual human glance would spot me...

Unfortunately the two with me seem either oblivious or incapable of sneaking anywhere. Tommy plods along in a daze and Betty couldn't look guiltier if she was carrying a blood soaked knife in one hand and a severed head in the other.

Tommy lets us in, though he was right and the door isn't locked. The smell of blood sweeps over us like fog, but there is enough decay in the smell to not make it appetising...unless you're one of the Connall twins. After earlier tonight I wonder whether there is anything they won't drink.

I lead the young ones in. There is a short corridor that's sporting nice thick smears of blood where Tommy obviously stumbled against the wall. The kitchen at the end is in total disarray: appliances and pans everywhere and three new bodies. One almost made it to the hallway before she finally succumbed; the other two were clearly killed outright. One young man had his head nearly ripped off, while the other still looks remarkably flushed: looks like the massive hole in his skull killed him before Tommy even started feeding.

Betty squeals behind me. "What's there?"

I spin around. Idiot. "Let your eyes change you stupid woman!" My voice is pitched below human hearing, but even if she can't see a thing I can see the effect my temper has on her clearly. She stares at me and reluctantly blinks a couple of times. Her pupils grow to fill her irises and she squeals again.

I glare at her.

She stills.

Tommy appears unfazed by his kills. I suppose he's not exactly going to be surprised: he was here when they happened after all. Well all except the girl. Looks like she might have been alive before he left. His eyes are wide, dark and remorseless. Remorseless in the true sense of the word: he's not happy they are dead but he doesn't particularly feel remorse either. And why should he?

Good news and bad news. Good news is Tommy's prints will be all over this place anyway since he works here. Bad news is a finger print left in blood is kind of obviously made by the killer and there's way too much blood to think of cleaning this place. The other bad news is that the two men quite obviously were killed by something much stronger than human.

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Deal with that in a minute.

"Tommy. Where's the tape for the cameras?"

He doesn't answer, just leads me silently to a small office and points out the mini disc player. Who uses mini discs nowadays? Ah well, easy enough to get rid of that. Everything's neatly labelled so I take out the relevant discs and take them over to the deep fryer. Click it on, discs into the left over oil (what with getting killed and everything no one cleaned it out) and let it simmer while I have a think about the rest.

The oil is a good thought. Someone leaves a burner on by accident, it catches fire, another someone loses their head and pours water on it and before you know it this nicely oil-saturated environment is up in smoke. Or however the fire brigade wants to paint it: all I know is this place is gonna burn.

Betty is praying over the dead people. I wish she wouldn't, though at least she's keeping her voice low enough so as not to draw attention. I grab a can of oil as big as my torso and start slopping it about. Tommy gets the idea and joins in. Betty doesn't look happy when she realises what we are doing and goes out to the alleyway. Fine by me. We finish dousing the place, the oil in the fryer comes up to full temperature and all that's left is to turn on the grill and anything else we can find (now all covered in oil) and leave in a hurry.

I'm two streets away before I realise Tommy has gone back for Betty. They're with me quick enough and we hear the soft boom of sudden ignition in the night.

"Is that it?" Tommy asks.

"One last thing." I click open my phone and call a number I really don't want to. Charles picks up on the third ring.

See the thing is, unless the fire is up to crematorium type heat, there will still be remains and forensic science has come a long way and people don't explain away nearly as much as you might expect in this day and age. It's coming back into fashion to believe in strange things, and especially to investigate them and that could be really annoying if they find a man with his head ripped more than half off with obvious chew marks.

Best thing to do is point their attention elsewhere. Like at a big pile of money for example.

"Emma, to what do I owe the pleasure?"

Charles' voice nauseates me.

"Three corpses. Not mine before you ask, but it's a bit obvious a vampire killed them. Can you make sure the police and fire brigade don't investigate a fire on St Margaret's Street tonight too strenuously?"

"Mm? It'll cost you."

"No, it'll cost you. Hence why I'm calling."

He huffs on the other end of the phone and I have the urge to pull it away from my ear, though I know his over-freshened breath can't travel down the line. He sounds far too pleased with himself.

"Come to my party and I'll help."

"You're willing to let humans get curious about us for the sake of a party?"

"For you, anything."

I hate this man. I really really hate this man. He is well aware of this and yet he continues to fawn over me. What the hell, it's one party.

"Fine. Just call them."

"Look forward to seeing you."

I click the phone shut without preamble and turn to my little younglings.

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"Done. Act natural for as long as you can. If they start to suspect anything run for it, but there's nothing to connect you with the deaths now hopefully, so don't run unless you have to: it'll only make you look guilty."

Tommy just nods. In one night he's managed to become a vampire in spirit as well as in body. Good for him. And all it took was a couple of deaths. If only it were that easy for some people.

"You've done this before."

It's a statement, not a question, but Betty's affronted stance makes it an accusation.

"Uh...yes. Though back in the old days it was a helluva lot easier in a lot of ways."

Her arms are crossed across her chest and her nostrils flare indignantly. "You don't feel guilty at all do you?"

"Nope. Not even a little. I'm a vampire you know."

"It doesn't have to be this way. You don't have to be a monster."

"I'm not a monster, I'm a vampire."

She's in a flap now. I'm getting bored. I also kind of wish we weren't doing this in the middle of the street, but at four in the morning in the middle of a residential area there's no one about and we're keeping it low enough that only certain animals can hear us.

"No, deep down you must know it's wrong. Why else would you come to the meetings?"

I smile widely as I remember the hymns and other absurdities. "They were funny."

Before Betty can get into a proper tantrum I continue. "I'm around 300 years old. I've never doubted what I am and I'm not going to start. Your group is something that would never have happened even twenty years ago. It was different, hence amusing, hence I came. Nothing more. I don't think I'll be coming again though." I'm about to leave when I think of what had been bothering me. "Oh, and quit raiding the blood banks. Some people need that and you're perfectly capable of feeding yourselves."

I disappear into the night, the image of Betty's indignant face amusing me all the way home.

Well that was different: he hadn't expected such violent security measures. He was glad he had taken precautions. This time he'd managed to avoid any exposure, but this was a lesson: he wouldn't underestimate her in the future.

There was a soft boom in the distance. He got up and pulled the curtain back from the window. A haze of orange, filtered through black smoke, lit the night across town.