

The Vampire Across the Hall

By Daisi Malone

As told to Leann Richards

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The Vampire across the Hall

As soon as I set eyes on the place I knew this was the apartment I was meant to buy. A small cosy corner, imperfect, a crack in the sink, some gouges in the wall and two hooks in the ceiling, but it felt right. As I gazed over the courtyard and glimpsed a thread of blue sky I decided, it was mine!

I had reached an age when it was time to grow up and leave my drunken and drug addicted friends behind. I was tired of their neediness, their demands for money, and their total disregard for my feelings. Sure I was erratic, unreliable, unsociable, depressing, crazy at times, but damn it, I had an illness, didn't they get that?

But I digress. I dumped my drunken needy friends and moved to Newtown.

People familiar with Sydney would find this ironic. Newtown is about 6 kilometres from the city centre and adjacent to Sydney University. It is also the home to every drunken, drug addled mess of old Sydney Town. But it is a haven for eccentrics and bohemians, with a little art house cinema, lots of dark cafes and most importantly, bookshops.

So I bought my little apartment, stacked it to the ceiling with books, found a corner for my lovebirds, Meep and Moop, and tried to settle in my very own slice of paradise, Daisi Malone's slice of heaven at the Presidio.

My slice of heaven is not only cosy, but noisy. Each morning around 6 the noise of shattering glass bottles echoes through the air, at 7 the first planes roar overhead and by 8 the trains are sounding their whistles and rattling the walls. At night the Indian restaurant patrons fill the air with conversation and laughter and the neighbour's various party noises ring out filling the cavernous courtyard.

I invested in ear plugs to preserve my sanity.

This was high density inner city living and in the course of my day to day activity I began to meet the neighbours. There was the nice couple with children, Mark and Anna, the maintenance man, George, and the man across the hall.

I remember it was a cool night in March when I first met Madden.

Chapter 2

Even my heavily glazed doors could not insulate the glee club noise. Once a month they sang the worst of the eighties and as the night progressed they got drunker and louder. That night I left my noisy home in a huff and visited the movies for a brief respite.

Returning around midnight, I spied a tall gaunt man in black standing outside my door. He slouched, his head bent in either pain or grief or perhaps it was just too heavy for his skinny frame. When I reached the door, he looked at me with sunken brown eyes. His face was white, his eyebrows loomed over a long nose and sharp cheekbones gave his features the aspect of a rock carving.

He looked down at my 155 centimetres and smiled slowly.

“Hello.”

“Um..Hi” I replied “Can I help you?”

“I heard screaming “; his voice was deep and rough.

“Oh? Screaming? You must mean singing. Don't worry it's the glee club.”

He grinned, a tight smile stretching his cheeks until his skin seemed almost translucent.

“Glee club?”

“Oh the fools across the courtyard, it's singing, not screaming, although it sounds like somebody's in pain.”

“I see” he replied and held out his hand. “I'm Madden by the way.

“Hi, I'm Daisy.” I grinned; he was kind of interesting in a strange way.

“It’s nice to meet you Daisi.” He smiled and turned to his door.

I walked into my apartment and immediately heard screaming. Actually it was singing, but the glee club was particularly drunk that night.

So began my weird acquaintance with Madden.

Chapter 3

One evening there was a knock on the door and there he stood. “Sorry to disturb you Daisi, but I wondered if you had any sugar.”

I laughed out loud, “Sugar? You’ve got to be kidding? C’mon in, I’ll get you a cup.”

Madden held out his hand and there surrounded by his long white fingers was a small cup, our eyes met and we both laughed.

“Take a seat” I pointed to the couch.

“Thanks” he folded his long lanky limbs onto my lounge as I took the cup and filled it with sugar. I was feeling cheeky and to keep the light mood I made a joke

“So Madden, why do I only see you at night? Are you what? Some sort of vampire or something?” I giggled.

He sprang to his feet, overturning the couch violently; I dropped the cup of sugar in shock and tiny white granules sprinkled to the floor in a light clatter. The birds chirped loudly and urgently, Madden took one threatening step towards me, I cowered, frightened out of my mind

“How did you know?” His voice boomed through my little cave, shaking the windows with its volume.

“I was joking, just joking” I stuttered, trying desperately to look behind me for a weapon of some sort. Visions of vampire movies and TV shows tumbled through my head, words like, wood, stake, cross. Madden stared directly into my eyes, I couldn’t move, my feet were nailed to the floor, but my hands were busy behind my back frantically trying to find anything for protection. Finally I found two knives and held them out in a crude cross.

Madden laughed and laughed, he took a step forward, “now don’t be silly little Daisi chain.”

I found my voice, “Are you going to eat me?”

Madden laughed louder, he doubled over in mirth and then stopped laughing abruptly.

“I just want some sugar, sugar.” He reached out and took the knives from my hand. When he lifted his gaze I could move, I stepped further away and bumped into the fridge.

“I’m sorry, I broke your cup, I’ll replace it, promise, I’ll just fill it and you can have your sugar and go away, OK? Look my cup is bigger than your cup and it will take more sugar and...” I was babbling and he knew it.

He gently took my hand and led me to the sofa.

“I’m sorry I startled you, I won’t eat you, I promise, cross my heart.” He laughed at the old saying, “Sit down. Let me explain”

I sat , careful not to upset him, my mind was racing with too many thoughts, I was terrified, I definitely wasn’t interested in explanations, I was more interested in escape.

Madden knelt down and met my eyes; a strange feeling of calm enveloped me. “No he wouldn’t eat me.” I felt strangely safe and still, his brown eyes filled my gaze and his voice surrounded me in soft musical cadences.

“Yes I am a vampire and I am compelled to tell my story to those who discover my secret. It is an old tale, a distressed human, turning to an ancient curse for comfort. Three years ago my partner, I cannot say her name, left me for another man. I was distraught, self destructive, it was my fault, I had cheated but this time she did not forgive me. I drowned my guilt in alcohol and drugs and frequented dark places. One night I was at the Sandringham hotel, you know, the one just south of here.” I nodded “A band was playing to a sweaty drunken crowd. I joined them, swaying to the grungy beat. All I could see were black t shirts, wet with sweat clinging to the slender backs of young men and women.

The band was terrible, loud drums, unturned screeching guitars, but I didn’t care, I was one with the swaying crowd. Then I saw her, a splash of red in the sea of black, the bass guitarist leading the crowd’s rhythm. She was tall, white haired, her eyes glowed, they fell upon me and all the darkness in my heart seemed to flow towards her- my pain was released in a torrent of relief and she smiled at me.

When the band finished she approached, her white hair streaming behind her like a bridal veil. “My name is Eliza” she whispered, “come”. I followed her outside, she turned and embraced me, our bodies entwined together pressed against each other, her red lips soft against mine, her eyes growing expanding....”

Madden stopped, “Am I boring you?”

I was dazed an image of a white haired woman in red embracing him like a fairytale witch danced in front of my eyes. I looked at him blankly.

He grinned, “mmm I guess not, well, long story short, we went back to my place, she was gone in the morning and I suddenly became very sensitive to sunlight.”

“Daisi?” He clicked his fingers in front of my face, “Daisi?”

Madden filled a cup with sugar. “Thanks for the sugar, Daisy chain.” And leaving the stunned Daisy on the couch, he walked out the door.

Chapter 4

It began with music, loud music, 11pm and loud and raucous sounds were emanating from the unit directly opposite my balcony. It wasn't the glee club; it was the new people, the ones who had moved in that morning, the dreaded English backpackers.

The music continued to 1 am, then the drunken guitar playing started. They had set up on the common grassed area and were playing Johnny Cash songs until three. There was no sleep that night, and I spent the next day singing “Ring of Fire,” and trying to figure out whether I was going mad or whether Madden really was a vampire.

Then came the rubbish. I was walking down the stairs a couple of days later when I saw George, the cute young maintenance man and cleaner. He was struggling with piles of rubbish which had been dumped in the lobby.

“Hi George what's up?” I asked brightly.

“Rubbish, rubbish everywhere,” He grunted “Comes from there.” He pointed towards a door.

“There?” I asked.

“Yes, Englishmen”

“Ahhh” I sighed, “backpackers.”

George grunted as he removed the rubbish and sweat glistened on his smooth dark skin,

“Still think they own the place those bloody English.”

The English backpackers quickly became the most hated people in the building. Mark and Anna lived next door to them and were furious, the English antics had disturbed their kids; everybody was fuming.

Then one night, somebody was incoherently screaming under my window. I looked at my old reliable digital clock, the red digits, 2.18 stared back, glowing in the dark. Screaming, it registered in my mind, sitting up I had one immediate thought, “Vampire.”

I looked through the window and in the courtyard below there was a strange scene.

Two slender young men were screaming, then laughing, lights were appearing around the courtyard but the screaming and laughing continued. There was no sign of Madden, just two drunken fools.

It made me angry. The anger rose through my body, my legs tensed, my stomach knotted, my chest tightened and the anger reached my head bursting to escape.

“Shut up! Shut up!” I yelled through the window.

The two drunken hooligans gazed at my head peeking out the window.

“Oh, Shut up, shut up.” They called back in a high falsetto.

“Some of us have to work in the morning.” I responded.

“Some of us have to work in the morning” they repeated mockingly.

“I’m calling the cops.”

That stopped them, one bent down and picked up something from the ground, he straightened and threw it directly at me, the window shattered.

“Shaddup you slag.” His English accent echoed through the night, and they both laughed as they staggered into the building.

I sat on my bed, the shattered pieces of my window around me and I was scared. Too scared to call the cops, and furious, too furious to think or sleep.

I got the window fixed the next day, and that evening, decided to treat myself to dinner and a movie. On the way out I paused at the lift, it was stuck, as it often was. Voices were coming from inside its doors and I could hear muffled shouts, perhaps English accents, I wasn’t sure who or what was there, but I was running late for the movie and didn’t stop to find out.

The building was eerily quiet when I returned later that night. My feet echoed through the lobby. It was just past midnight and the only thing moving was a lone, half dead cockroach that met its maker on the sole of my shoe.

I waited for the lift. It creaked and groaned and the doors opened to reveal a sight so horrifying that it haunted my nightmares for years afterwards.

The bodies were splayed full stretch in agony, the fingers bloodied where they had tried to open the doors, the eyes were wide open and staring vacantly, and their union jack t shirts were ripped and torn. It was the English backpackers.

I panicked, stifled a scream. “This was my fault, I should have rung the lift people when I left the building. I’d go to gaol, they were dead, I was dead, everything was over” and I ran around in circles for a while, not sure what to do or what to say. Then it struck me, I turned to the only person I knew would be awake at this hour.

Madden opened his door, his dark hair was tousled as if he had been sleeping, he yawned over my head. “Daisi? What time is it? What’s wrong?”

Speechless I just motioned feebly towards the lift, he frowned in confusion. I took a deep breath, “C’mon”

He followed me to the lift, the doors opened and I pointed, my throat was clogged, my stomach churning, my head explosive.

Madden fixated on the bloody fingers, he looked from them to me and then said commandingly,

“I’ll take care of this Daisi.”

“We should call the police.” I stuttered.

“Nobody in the Presidio wants the police here.” He answered, “Go home, get some rest, I’ll sort it out.”

I was too confused and frightened to do anything but obey.

Over the next few days when I passed Madden’s door a warm smell of cooking wafted past my nose. I saw him occasionally, and he looked healthier, his cheeks were fuller, his face had lost its pale hue and showed a rosy glow.

I didn’t ask questions, and nobody missed the English backpackers.

About the Author

Daisi Malone lives in the Presidio building in Newtown, Sydney Australia with her two birds, Meep and Moop.

This is her first published story. Daisi has a blog at www.daisimalone.net and is on facebook, www.facebook.com/daisimalone The second story about Daisi’s life at the Presidio in Newtown- The Murmuring Lift is now available and has been published under the name Daisi Malone.

