

### Previously, from Episode 50

... At that moment, nothing would have given Miguel greater pleasure than to say who he was. But if he did that, David would call The Sect, and they would turn against him and Lydia for sure. So he held his tongue and contented himself to just savour the fear and impotent anger in his enemy's voice.

'Who the fuck are you? Listen, don't hurt her, okay? I'm coming. I'm on my way, alright? Whatever you want, you're in charge. I get it. Just don't ...'

Miguel sniggered. *Oh yes, he thought, I'm in charge, puta!* He closed the phone. *And I'm gonna have a real good time with Lisa while we wait for your bitch ass to come home and die.*

'Well?' said Gerald. 'How did it go?'

'*Perfecto.*' Miguel stroked the back of a finger down Lisa's cheek, enjoying how she didn't even blink. 'Everything is going exactly to plan.'

### Episode 51

'He's coming?'

'Yeah.'

'Are you sure?'

'Yeah.' Miguel traced his finger down Lisa's neck to the open collar of her blouse.

'What did he say?'

Miguel looked up, annoyed by Gerald's questioning. 'He said he's coming, okay?'

'When?'

'Now! Jesus, Gerald. If I say everything is perfecto, I don't mean he's coming next Tuesday. He's leaving his house now, so he'll get the first flight out in the morning.'

'When will he get here?'

'It depends on what flight he catches, no? We checked the flights, you remember? Earliest he can be in the country is seven. He gets a fast train, he could be in Brighton by what? Eight-thirty? Nine?'

'And how long will it take for her to turn? You know, after, you bite her?'

'I don't know exactly. I was unconscious when it happened to me, but it wasn't long. An hour, maybe less, maybe a little more. So, you wanna do this now?' He nodded to Lisa.

'I don't want to do it at all, but if we're going to do it, I suppose the sooner the better.'

Gerald looked at Miguel, his expression tense. 'Are you ready?'

'Are you kidding? I'm starving. You've had your pot noodles, but all I've had is a little sip of Cynthia. Come on, let's do it. I'll wake her up.'

'What?'

'She needs to be awake if she's going to drink my blood, Gerald.'

'But she is awake.' He looked down at Lisa. She was watching Miguel, her face impassive but her eyes alert.

'No, I mean *awake*. Like she was on the phone.'

'But ... Surely there's no need for that. She doesn't have to be frightened for you to feed on her.'

'No, she doesn't *have* to be, but it'll make it more entertaining, no? We're gonna be hanging around here for a long time, *tio*. We might as well enjoy ourselves.'

'Miguel, for Christ's sake, can't you just feed from her and have done? Why does it have to involve fucking or terrifying her? We're not here to "enjoy ourselves", we've got a job to do. Do I have to remind you again why Lydia even wants me here? It's not just to chauffeur you down to the seaside, but to stop you from doing exactly this.'

Miguel rolled his eyes and sighed. 'Okay, okay, but you know, what Lydia said about you being different lately? She's right. You're not the guy you used to be. I don't even know if you have the *huevos* to be a vampire.'

'*Huevos*?' said Gerald, mystified. 'Isn't that ... eggs?'

'*Si*,' Miguel cupped his testicles. '*Huevos*. Balls.'

'Oh. Well there's nothing wrong with *my huevos*, Miguel. It's *yours* that are the problem.'

'Yeah, I got too much, and you got too little. When I get my own guardian, the first thing I'm gonna make sure of is that he likes to have a good time.'

'Oh that'll end well, I'm sure. A wonton trail of sex, death and mayhem. When this whole business is over, and Cynthia and I are finally made vampires, I think it's probably best if you and we part company.'

Despite having seen the signs of Gerald's recent unease, this came as a surprise to Miguel. He frowned. 'What?'

‘What do you mean, “what”? You carry on like that and you’re going to get caught, old son. And when you do - no offence - but I want us to be as far away from you as possible.’

‘Oh yeah?’ Miguel puffed out his chest, ‘Well that suits me fine. You think I wanna be around a couple of old age pensioners like you two?’

‘I am not an age old pensioner. I’m fifty-five! I doubt you’ll be in half as good shape as I am when you’re my age. You’ll ... ah,’ Gerald’s gusto fizzled out as the fact of Miguel’s perennial, albeit undead, youth caught up with him. ‘Oh. Well, you know what I mean.’

Miguel nodded. ‘Yeah, I know what you mean. Don’t worry. I don’t care what you do.’ His words were belied by a sudden air of sulkiness, and Gerald regretted his slip of the tongue; he hadn’t meant to say a word about his now heartfelt desire to get away from Lydia and Miguel until Lydia had got whatever it was she wanted from this master vampire she was courting. Then, hopefully, she would be able to get herself and Miguel some proper guardians, and he and Cyn could decide once and for all whether they wanted to accept the dubious pleasure of joining the ranks of the undead, or just to go back to Spain, sell up in Almacena, and move to the costas to play bowls and sip sangria in the sun like any normal ex-patriot Brit out there.

‘Come on,’ said Miguel, ‘Let’s do this.’

‘What do you want me to do?’ said Gerald.

‘Nothing. Just watch and be amazed by my self-control.’ He took Lisa’s face in his hands, stepped a foot either side of her chair, then, straddling her, he sat down on her lap. He smoothed her hair back from the right side of her neck and tilted her head slightly to the left. She yielded without resistance. He took a moment to savour the smooth white skin, focusing his attention on the feint shadowed lines of her arteries and delighting in the way that, like one of the 3-D Magic Eye pictures his parents used to stare at in magazines in the nineties, they slowly revealed themselves to him, the heat coursing within them causing them to almost glow before his eyes. He blinked, and they disappeared, but he had seen the course of the jugular. He bent his face close to it, brushing his lips over the surface of the skin, feeling her pulse strong and steady. His fangs descended, and he drew back his lips to touch their points to the vein, and then, closing his lips against the skin, he bit down into her. The blood came immediately, but he controlled the strength of the flow by keeping his fangs in place, but then slowly, he withdrew them and let the rush come.

Gerald grimaced as Miguel began to gulp, suckling greedily at Lisa's neck like a piglet at its mother's teat. How long should he let this go on, he wondered. He knew Miguel had to feed, but he also knew that the girl mustn't die: Miguel had to complete the circle of infection by feeding her his blood, and to do that she would have to be alive, and conscious in order to drink it. How many gulps was that he'd had now? Six, seven, ten? Enough, surely. He looked at Lisa, her eyes were closed but she was awake; her breathing erratic, coming in sighs and gasps; a sensual pleasure played on her features as though she were experiencing an erotic dream. He patted Miguel on the shoulder. 'That's enough, Miguel. Stop now.'

Miguel half-raised a hand in acknowledgement, but he continued to feed.

'Come on, Miguel,' Gerald patted him again, harder. 'You're going to kill her ... Mig-'

Miguel raised his face suddenly, angrily, turning on Gerald with fangs bared as blood spayed outwards from Lisa's neck. '*What?* Now you're a fucking doctor? You think you understand this situation better than me?'

Gerald, taken aback and horrified, pointed to Lisa's neck. 'Miguel. The blood, you've got to stop it.'

Miguel didn't turn to see what Gerald was indicating. He raged on, blood spilling over his lower lip and down his chin as she spoke. 'Oh, like you can tell from over there. What? You have the super hearing? You can hear her heartbeat from there with your stupid human ears? I am one with this woman. Her life is flowing into mine. You think I can't tell if she's weakening? Gerald, le'me tell you -'

'Damn it, Miguel, she's bleeding out. The artery! Do something. Close the wound!'

Miguel turned to see how Lisa's head had lolled back, opening wide the punctures in her neck for blood to pulse in one arcing jet, spattering down onto the rug, floorboards and curtains. 'Oh shit.' He pulled her head forwards, creasing her neck and staunching the blood flow. He closed his mouth over the wounds and summoned the viscous saliva, which he then swirled around the bite area with his tongue. Then he lifted his face and watched as the intermingled blood and saliva oozed and bubbled like acid over the wounds. 'It's okay,' he said. 'She's fine.'

'Really?' said Gerald, 'I'd hardly say she's fine. You almost killed her.'

'But I didn't. Look, she's alive, isn't she?'

Gerald clutched his head and dropped down onto the sofa. Was there any point in telling Miguel that yet again this was exactly the kind of screw up they had been warning

him about? He seemed almost pathologically incapable of accepting anything he considered to be criticism of himself, even when it was for his - and everyone else's - benefit. But it had to be said. Gerald sighed and turned to him. 'Yes, she's alive. Well done. But for a moment there, you lost control, and if I ...' *Watch the criticism, Gerald*, his mind warned. Gerald duly changed his tone. 'I mean, if *you* hadn't realised that and closed up the wounds, she could have bled to death.'

'Yeah, but I did realise it. In fact, I didn't need to realise coz I already knew. I was angry, okay? And I'm still fucking angry.' Miguel got up from Lisa's lap. 'Why can't you get it in your head that I know what I'm doing?'

'I don't - I mean ...' Gerald didn't like the look in Miguel's eyes. He shrugged, realising the need to surrender. 'Yes. Yes, maybe you're right. After all, you're the one who can hear her heartbeat.'

Miguel nodded, 'Yeah, I can.'

'But the thing is, I worry that you won't notice it. That she might go the same way as Alice and Monica.' He held up an appeasing hand, 'You can understand that?'

'Yeah, but that's not gonna happen. I've learned from that, Gerald. People can learn, you know?'

'Yes, I know. I know. It's just, this one is so important. I don't mean to, to diminish the deaths of the others, but they didn't ...' *Matter?* The voice in his head suggested. *No. They mattered. They all matter.* 'I don't know, but it's just, as I say, this one is important - to Lydia's plan.'

'I know. And that's why I'm being careful.'

Miguel said this against the backdrop of the blood spattered cream curtains without a trace of irony. Gerald might have laughed had he not been so tired. He looked around. Should they clean up? The varnished wooden floor between Lisa and the curtains was diffuse with gouts and droplets of blood, and the rug beneath her was sodden with it. What if some of it seeped through? Would it reach the ceiling of the flat below?

'I'll get a mop,' he said. 'Clean up some of this mess.'

'What are you talking about, clean up?' said Miguel, incredulous. 'Let's get on with it. She's only half way done.'

'But the blood,' said Gerald pointing to the floor. 'What if it leaks into the downstairs flat?'

Miguel looked then shook his head. 'Don't worry about it. It takes a lot more than that to soak through into a ceiling.'

'How do you know?'

He grinned. 'I'm an estate agent, remember? I seen water spills a lot worse than this and they didn't go through to stain the ceiling. And anyway, I still gotta feed her my blood, and there's probably gonna be some spills from that too, no?'

'I ... Yes,' Gerald nodded, almost in a daze, 'Yes, I suppose so.'

'Look, man, you need sleep. You look like you're gonna pass out any minute.'

'Yes, it has ... Has been a long day. But I'll be alright.'

'Okay.' Miguel picked up the chef's knife from the floor. 'Then I cut myself first.' He held the sharp edge of the blade to his wrist. It was razor sharp. He hesitated.

'What's the matter?'

'I don't need to make a big cut, right? I can just do a little one.'

'You're asking me? How should I know? How much do you have to give her?'

'I don't know, Lydia didn't say.'

'Well, I suppose at least a couple of mouthfuls.'

'So, a big cut, then?'

'Big-ish, yes,' Then it was Gerald's turn to smile. 'Why? Feeling squeamish?'

'What is squeamish?'

'Jelly legged; you don't want to cut yourself. Can't say I blame you, it's a big knife. Cut too deep and you'll make a right mess of yourself.'

Miguel nodded, 'I know, right? It's squeamish - *I'm* squeamish. Only crazy people cut their wrists.'

'Do you want me to do it?'

'You can't do it; you're not a vampire.'

'No, I mean cut *you*. I can hold your wrist as I cut and apply an even pressure. As long as you hold still, I'll probably do a better job than you would.'

Miguel again touched the edge of the blade to the pale underside of his wrist where the thin skin revealed the veins and tendons beneath. He increased the pressure, and immediately felt both faint and nauseated. A prickly sweat broke out across most of his body, including the hand which held the knife. He gasped and handed the knife to Gerald. 'I can't. Jesus, I'm a fucking vampire and I can't cut myself.'

Gerald took the knife. 'I don't think cutting oneself is a necessary part of the vampire job description, Miguel. Here, give me your hand, I'll do it.'

Miguel thrust out his arm, and closing his eyes tightly, turned his face away. 'Be careful.'

'Course I'll be careful. No point chopping your hand off, is there?' Gerald took Miguel's arm and held him firmly just above the wrist. Then, turning the underside of the wrist up to the light, with his other hand he drew the blade gently but firmly across it, opening a thin, shallow red line from which blood immediately began to flow. 'There you go.'

Due to the sharpness of the blade, Miguel had felt little more than a sharp pressure on his wrist, and as Gerald released him he was both surprised, and relieved, to see his blood pouring from the precise incision. 'Hey, good job, man. You should've been a surgeon.'

'Oh, it's easy when it's not your own flesh, isn't it? Just like slicing any other piece of meat.'

Miguel turned back to Lisa, who still looked at him with eyes filled with a dreamy eagerness. 'Okay, Lisa, I'm gonna give you something to drink now and you're gonna like it, okay?'

'Okay.'

'Put your head back and open your mouth.'

Lisa did as he commanded.

Miguel brought his bleeding wrist to her mouth. The blood flowed onto her closed lips and down over her chin. Clearly she didn't understand that this was the "drink" he was referring to. 'Come on, open your mouth, bitch. Drink me.'

Lisa opened her mouth, the blood flowed inside and she began to drink. Miguel and Gerald watched, fascinated; she drank dutifully, as ordered, her face registering neither distaste nor pleasure. When she had swallowed three or four mouthfuls Gerald said, 'That's probably enough, don't you think?'

'Si,' Miguel nodded and took his arm back. 'Good girl, Lisa. You like that?'

Lisa didn't reply, but she licked her lips.

'I'd take that as a yes,' said Gerald.

Miguel put his wrist to his own mouth and lapped his saliva onto the wound. He was surprised to find his own blood had a bitter taste to it, a sharp tang that made him grimace. 'Ugh!'

'What is it?' asked Gerald.

'My blood. I don't taste good.'

'Well, that makes sense. If you did, you might start feeding on yourself. Can't be a good thing. You might accidentally drain yourself to death. Either that or go mad.'

Miguel dropped a goober of saliva onto his wrist and rubbed it over the wound. 'Yeah, maybe, but then when I was a kid, the priests used to tell us wanking would make us go mad and blind. That wasn't true.'

'Well, not blind, anyway,' Gerald chuckled.

Miguel wasn't listening; he was too absorbed by the bubbling viscous goo on his wound.

'Listen, Miguel, hadn't you better tell her what to do when David arrives?'

'What? Oh, yeah, I guess. Probably it's gonna be instinctive; she'll be hungry, he'll be food, but yeah, I'll tell her.' He took another chair from the dining table, placed it in front of Lisa and sat down to face her. She gazed into his eyes, and again Miguel regretted not being able to take advantage of that oh-so willing demeanour. His eye followed a drop of blood as it fell from her chin to add to the soaking crimson stain on her white blouse. We really should take that off, he thought.

As though reading his mind, Gerald said, 'Miguel ...'

'Yeah yeah. Okay, Lisa, listen. Later on, you're gonna be feeling very hungry. Like, serious hunger pain, worse than you've ever had in your life. But it's okay, because David is gonna make that all better for you. All you gotta do is kiss him on the neck the same way as I kissed you, and then nature's gonna do the rest. Once you done that, the hunger's gonna stop, the pain will go away, and you and David can be together again. Not just for now, but forever. Forever, you understand?'

Lisa nodded. 'Forever.'

'Okay good. But now, I want you to go to sleep again, because you want to be fresh and beautiful for him when he arrives, no?'

Lisa nodded.

'Okay, *chica*. Go to sleep now.' He drew a hand down over her eyes. 'Sleep.'

Gerald let out a sigh of relief to see Lisa return to instantaneous slumber. 'Okay, so, it's done. Now all we need to do is wait for her to die, so to speak, and then jab her with the

Fentanyl. What do you want to do, take it in turns sitting with her and monitoring her pulse?’

‘Later, amigo. I need to feed again. I just lost a lot of blood.’

Gerald frowned. ‘What? From her? You can’t! You could interfere with the process.’

‘Don’t be stupid. The next stage for her is in the digestion - the stomach, not the veins. I only need a pint or so.’

‘No, Miguel! You can’t.’ Gerald stepped between Miguel and Lisa. ‘I absolutely forbid it.’

‘You *what*? Who the fuck do you think you are, Gerald? You’re not *el jefe* here, man. If anyone is, it’s me; I’m the vampire, you’re the guardian.’

‘It’s got nothing to do with ... *What*? What did you call me?’

‘You’re the guardian, the assistant. What else do you think? You think we’re *equal*?’ He laughed. ‘I don’t think so, *tio*.’

Controlling his rage, Gerald said, ‘Miguel, it’s got nothing to do with who’s a vampire and who’s not. It’s about fucking up a whole night’s work, about killing a girl for nothing. I won’t have it, you hear? You’ll stick to the plan, and that’s final.’

‘Fuck you, man,’ Miguel shoved Gerald aside, only intending him to move a couple of feet, but sending him reeling onto the sofa. He hid his surprise and acted as if it had been his intention. ‘I’m hungry, okay? I gotta feed. So it’s either her, or you.’

‘Bullshit!’ Gerald hissed. ‘I’ve seen you and Lydia function just fine on a lot less than you took from her, *and* you’ve drunk from Cynthia, too.’

‘Yeah, but like I just told you, I’ve just bled, haven’t I? I’m weak.’

Gerald got to his feet. ‘You just swatted me across the room like a fly. That doesn’t seem weak to me.’

‘Well I feel weak to *me*. You think when we “function” on a little blood we are okay? We’re not. We’re hungry.’

‘Well you’ll have to stay hungry now, too, won’t you? Because you’re not having any more of her - or me.’

‘Oh no? How about I just take some of you? I think you can spare it, fat boy.’

‘You wouldn’t dare. And I am not fat!’

‘Yeah, you’re fat. You could spare three pints of blood and you’d be able to “function” just fine.’ He took a step towards Gerald. ‘You know how easy it would be for me to

fascinate you, Gerald? I could feed on you all I want and have you sing me a song while I do it. You wouldn't even know it was happening. And then, I could fuck her, too, have myself a pretty good night in.'

Gerald turned his face away sharply, averting his eyes from any possible contact with Miguel's. He was right: he could do all those things. Gerald had been afraid that something like this could happen, that either Miguel or Lydia might one night just turn on him or Cynthia. As humans they had been equals, any favours or acts of help and support were done in the spirit of friendship. However, since Lydia and Miguel had become vampires, that equal status had disappeared; from the moment they had turned up at the Bensons' house, freshly undead, and with their food slave, Monica, in tow, all of them had been maintaining an illusion that things were still the same between them, that hiding corpses in arroyos or builders' skips was no greater an imposition than asking to borrow a cup of sugar or a DVD box set. But all the time there had been a very large elephant in the room, too terrifying to look at directly, because if you did, it might notice you too, and it was this: Gerald and Cynthia were food.

'Yeah, that would make this long boring night go a little faster all right,' said Miguel. 'Look at me, Gerald.'

But Gerald was looking at the large knife on the table. He'd put it there after slicing Miguel's wrist. He grabbed it up, and keeping his eyes averted, held it before him, the point of the blade aimed at Miguel's chest. 'No! Don't be ridiculous, Miguel. Look, you've had your little joke and yes, it's funny, but forgive me for not laughing because ... I'm not entirely sure it *is* a joke.'

'Come on, why don't you look at me, Gerald?'

'You know damn well why. You just threatened to fascinate me.'

'I was kidding.'

'Were you?'

'Of course I was, what do you think I am? A monster? Here, give me the knife.' Miguel took a playful swipe for Gerald's hand, but Gerald drew it back sharply.

'Keep away!'

'Shhh, Gerald, you'll wake the neighbours. You don't wanna endanger the mission, do you? What will Lydia say then?' He took another step closer.

Gerald slashed the air in front of Miguel's face. 'Get - G ...' Gerald seemed to choke on the word as his body suddenly stiffened. The hand that wasn't holding the knife went to his chest. 'Jesus!'

'What is it? That Pot Noodle coming back to haunt you?'

Gerald's face contorted in agony. He dropped the knife and seized the table top for support. 'My heart ...'

Miguel's smile faded. 'Gerald?'

'Call ... an ambulance,' Gerald gasped. He couldn't breathe. He felt himself sliding away from the table to the floor. Then Miguel had him and was steering him to the sofa. Gerald clung to him. 'I'm having ... heart attack ... Miguel, call ... call an ambulance.'

Miguel guided Gerald's collapse onto the sofa then stood back to look at him. His face was a rictus of agony. He was clutching at his chest, clawing at it, as if trying to dig out his heart. 'Oh Jesus, Gerald, we can't call an ambulance, man. Look around: we're half way through murdering someone.'

'I don't give a - ' Gerald sucked in another tight breath then spat out, 'Fuck!' He thumped the seat cushion beside him, 'Ambulance! For God's sss - '

'*Madre de dios,*' Miguel muttered, now frightened and desperate. But then a thought occurred to him: maybe he could stop the heart attack with fascination. Mind over matter, like those people who walk on burning coals. He dropped to his knees before Gerald and took his face in his hands. 'Gerald, open your eyes. Look at me.' Gerald's eyes were two twisted pits in a face screwed tight with agony. Miguel's fingers and thumbs sought for purchase around his eyes, then on finding it, prized them apart. He brought his face level with Gerald's and fixed his eyes. 'Gerald. Relax, amigo. Relax. Your heart is okay, yeah? It's beating again. You can feel it, beating, beating.'

Gerald heaved and undulated on the sofa, his breathing still coming in short tortured gasps.

It wasn't working. Or was it? Maybe it took time to settle down. But Miguel couldn't afford to wait and hope. If Gerald died, neither Cynthia nor Lydia would ever believe it was because he'd just happened to have a heart attack. Lydia was mad enough at him as it was without him having Gerald's death hanging over him, too. But he couldn't call an ambulance, that was insane. But if he didn't get him to a hospital, Gerald would surely die. There was nothing else for it: he reached a hand into Gerald's trouser pockets, groping for

the car keys. When he found them he pulled them out then turned and crawled back to Lisa. She was still asleep, her breaths slow and even. He clutched her wrist and found her pulse. It was fast. Did that mean she was dying, or had she already died and had now come back? Shit! He didn't have time for this. He turned back to Gerald and his foot came down on the knife, he skidded, almost losing his footing. Furious, he kicked it aside and it spun across the smooth wooden floor to disappear beneath the sofa. He then went back to Gerald and recovered the syringe and the bottle of Fentanyl from the pockets of his jacket. He pulled the cap off the syringe and threw it aside, then with trembling hands, unscrewed the bottle and drew 5 ml of the drug into the syringe. He screwed the bottle closed and pocketed it, then held the syringe up before his eyes and flicked it for air bubbles as he had seen doctors and nurses do in movies. Then he went to Lisa. Lydia said to wait till she came back from the change - but she wasn't a doctor, and she definitely wasn't a vampire doctor - she didn't know what to do any better than he did. But he didn't know! If he injected her now and she wasn't dead yet, would it still work when she came back?

*Yes!* his mind screamed. *It'll still be in her fucking bloodstream! Just do it! You can take Gerald to the hospital and finish this off when you get back.* He didn't argue. He took her arm, found a vein, and injected her.

He paused for a second to see if there was any reaction from her, but she remained exactly the same. *'Perfecto!'*

Then he spun on his heel back to Gerald, who was still alive, but now breathing in short rapid breaths. That had to be an improvement, Miguel thought. He scooped an arm behind Gerald's shoulders and eased him forwards and then up to his feet. 'Come on, Gerald. We're gonna get you to a hospital, okay?'

'Okay,' Gerald croaked. But then he was still fascinated, so he was bound to oblige.

Carrying practically all of Gerald's weight, Miguel hefted him out of the room and into the hall. By the front door was a mirror mounted on the wall. Miguel stopped, arrested by the sight of his face; it was covered in blood. He should wash, but there wasn't any time.

It'll be okay, he assured himself. It's *la madragura*, the early hours of the morning; it's dark, and you'll be in a car. No one will see us. He exited the flat, remembering to close the front door softly behind him, then as quietly as he could, hurried downstairs. Gerald couldn't walk so his feet dragged, bumping and scraping on the stairs until Miguel lifted him into his arms, carrying as a groom might carry his bride over the threshold.

When he got down to the front door, Miguel opened it and peered out cautiously to see if the way back to the car was clear. It was, but he could hear distant laughter approaching, a group of young men and women. One he could fascinate, but this sounded like at least three or four people.

Gerald wheezed in his arms, impelling him onwards. Miguel carried him outside. He saw the laughing group; they were further down the street on the opposite side to where Gerald had parked the car. Miguel calculated that if he ran, he could get to the car before the group. He pulled the front door closed and trotted down the steps to the street. A whooping cry from a woman in the group and the loud laughter that followed suggested to Miguel they were drunk. He ran down the pavement to the car, Gerald's head and feet bobbing wildly as he went. When he got to the car he stopped as something on the windscreen caught his eye. It was pinned under one of the windscreen wipers, a document in a clear plastic bag. He leaned close to inspect it. It was a parking fine.

*'Put a de madre!'*

'Oi - oi!' called a man from the other side of the road.

'Wassat?' a woman asked.

Miguel looked over at them. The group, who were in their twenties, were now almost level opposite and were watching him with interest. There were four of them. None of them had coats, and their light clothing suggested they had been nightclubbing.

'Oh my God, he's been sick on himself!' cried one of the women, touching her chin to mirror what she saw as the dark wetness on Miguel's chin.

'Ere, you alright, mate?' asked one of the men.

'Yeah,' Miguel nodded. 'Yeah, she's right. I was sick.'

'Been on the red wine, have ya?' the man's joke drew laughter from his friends. 'What about yer mate? He looks well fucked.'

'It's okay, he's just tired.' Miguel fished out the car keys. 'I'm taking him home.'

'He don't sound alright,' said the other women. 'He got asthma or something?'

'Yeah, something like that. I'm taking him to hospital.' Miguel snatched the parking fine from under the windscreen.

'You sure? I mean, you must be pretty pissed. Ere, hang on,' the man started digging in his pocket. 'I can call you a cab.'

'No, I'm okay. I can manage.' Miguel opened the back door and fed Gerald onto the seat. 'Thanks.'

The answer seemed to nonplus the group for a moment but the moment passed when one of the women announced, 'Come on, I'm bursting for a piss.' And with that, they resumed their journey, moving on with the blithe cheer of drunks like the whole encounter had never happened.

Relieved, Miguel got in to the car and started it. 'Don't worry, Gerald. We're gonna get you to a hospital, okay.'

Gerald tried to reply in words, but the tightness in his chest would only permit him a brief constricted moan.

Being a top of the range hire car, the BMW was equipped with satellite navigation. Miguel had never used the technology before, but earlier that night, he had watched as Gerald entered David's postcode to expedite their journey down. Miguel had asked him about it, and Gerald, who had one in his car back in Spain, had explained how it worked. Miguel remembered how there was a menu from which you could locate nearby public amenities. He opened this and selected hospitals, and a few moments later was presented with the location of Brighton's Royal Sussex County Hospital. He selected it; the computer triangulated the journey; then a male voice stated that he should drive to the bottom of the street and turn left onto the road that ran along the seafront.

'Okay, amigo. Let's go.'

When confronted with a dark view ahead through a car's windscreen, a human driver will always turn on the headlights. However, a vampire doesn't see a dark view ahead, and with the plentiful street lighting enhancing it, Miguel's nocturnal vision made it possible for him to see clearly all the way to the end of the street. Being nocturnal, he had grown accustomed to this new view of the world, and being distracted as he was by Gerald's wheezing - quite possibly expiring - presence in the back seat, his once automatic driver impulse to turn on the headlights completely abandoned him. So when the BMW pulled out onto the road, it was running dark.

'Don't worry, Gerald. We're gonna get you there in no time.' Miguel glanced at the sat-nav for the estimated journey time and added: 'Nine minutes. No time, right? All you gotta do is stay with me, amigo. Stay with me, you hear?'

'Yeah,' Gerald wheezed. 'Stay ... Stay with you.'

The pinging and flashing of the dashboard headlight warning signal went unnoticed as Miguel drove at high speed to the end of the street, where the sat-nav guide announced: 'At the junction turn left onto the A259.'

Miguel stopped at the junction. The traffic was lighter than it had been on their way down earlier that night, but there were still plenty of cars and taxis going to and fro along the seafront with its many bars, clubs and hotels. When a break in the traffic came, Miguel put his foot down and the BMW roared out onto the main road. He was too focused on the traffic ahead - two lanes going east, two lanes going west - to notice the continued pinging of the headlight warning signal. He cut back and forth between lanes, shaving seconds off his journey that though pointless, made him at least feel that he was doing something to counter the other drivers who were all dutifully obeying the 30 mph speed limit.

'Come on, man. Come on!'

Then came a set of changing traffic lights ahead; the car in front of him slowing down, but the other lane clear; Miguel swung into the second lane and accelerated through the lights as they changed from amber to red.

'Yes! That's more like it.'

Pedestrians waved at him, shouting, pointing to the front of the car. He couldn't hear them but knew it had to be rebuke for his running the light. Pussies. He drove on in this fashion without incident - except for the moment when he had to veer sharply to miss a drunken jaywalker who ran out ahead of him. The idiot had been full of abuse as Miguel drove away, like it had been Miguel's fault that the accident almost happened. This led to much head-shaking from Miguel, and one way conversation with Gerald as to what an asshole the guy was. But now the sat-nav guy was telling him to drive straight on at the coming roundabout.

Roundabout?

Miguel craned his head to try and look past the cars in front for signage. Cars were dividing into the two lanes according to where they were headed beyond the roundabout. Sat-nav guy was saying he should take the right lane, but that wasn't how English roundabouts worked; you had to take the left lane and follow the road around clockwise till you -

'At the roundabout ahead, take the right lane for the A259,' announced the sat-nav.

'What are you talking about?' shouted Miguel. It was crunch time. Trusting his instincts over the advice of the machine, he took the left lane. Cars pulled steadily out onto the junction, and only when he was one car away from having to do so himself did he notice that he should have obeyed his guide. It wasn't a traditional roundabout at all. The right lane traffic was pulling out straight across the junction, and his lane was bound to turn left - and in very much the wrong direction for the hospital. Miguel slammed his hands on the wheel. 'Fuck! Stupid fucking British roads!'

The sat-nav guy was now telling him how he should adjust his course to eventually resume a route to the hospital, but Miguel was having none of it. 'Shut up, *puta!* I'll tell you which fucking way we're going!' And when a break in the traffic came he - and the taxi in the correct lane to his right - pulled out. Miguel put his foot down and swerved hard to cut in front of the taxi. He almost made it, but the taxi shunted into the BMW's right tail light with just enough force to tip the Beamer off course, sending the front of it into traffic headed in the opposite direction. Miguel pulled hard on the wheel to pull it back on course, but the oncoming car - another taxi - was driving at him like he was invisible. It slammed into the front grille and spun the BMW around and to a halt as Miguel's foot came off the accelerator and his head thumped against the driver's window. When he righted himself in his seat it was to see the drivers of the cars he had collided with getting out of their vehicles. He was boxed in, both by damaged taxis and their angry drivers.

'Shit!' he cried. He turned and looked down onto the back seat where Gerald had fallen face down into the foot well. 'Gerald! You okay?'

Gerald groaned.

'Listen, I gotta get out of here, man! If the police catch me, I'm a dead man. Don't worry. You'll be okay. There's taxis all over the place. One of them will take you to hospital.' He opened his door, 'I'm sorry, Gerald, but I gotta go. For the mission, yeah? You understand.'

He got out of the car and came face to face with one of the fuming taxi drivers. The man was about to let fly a torrent of abuse when Miguel cut him off with a punch to his stomach, jackknifing him and sending him crumpled and gasping to the tarmac. Miguel swung round to point at the second man, who had stopped, taken aback. 'Fuck off, man! You didn't see me, understand?' He looked the man squarely in the eyes. 'You didn't see me.'

'I didn't see you,' the man repeated.

Miguel didn't wait for any further confirmation. He started running, away from the thin crowd of gawking, drunken, homeward-bound nightclub punters and down a ramp to the seafront. At the bottom of the ramp he turned back at a shout of 'Oi!'

It was the taxi driver he had punched. He thrust a pointing finger at Miguel and shouted, 'Where do you think you're going?'

Miguel turned and ran onto the beach, his feet crunching through the shifting shingle as he fled onward in the direction he had been intending to drive, eastward. But this was the wrong way. He had to get back to Lansdowne Place to secure Lisa and the trap for David in the morning. He stopped and turned back, only to see the taxi driver pointing him out to two police officers.

'No,' the plaintive cry fell from his lips. 'This isn't fair.'

Then the police started down the ramp after him.

Miguel turned and ran, running away from the street lighting down to where the waves crashed upon the hissing, sighing shore. There it was darkest. There he at least stood a chance of losing them - or if it came to it, killing them.

'Oh, man,' he muttered as he stumble-ran through the sucking shingle, 'I am in so much trouble.'