

Some Eyes Eat You

By Jake Reynolds

By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes.
Macbeth (4,1)

Some eyes eat you, the children said. Day after day, in every park and market stall, they always said the same. Some eyes eat you.

And would any adult fall victim to the fears surrounding an ancient goblin in a derelict house? The contradiction with rationality was too significant to be taken seriously by any ordinary person.

Madame Vastra, the Great Detective, the Silurian who, some say, defiled the honour of her own kind by engaging in intimate relations with one of the usurpers of planet Earth, was no ordinary person.



Commander Strax – Strax the Strong, Strax the Slaughterer, Strax the Subordinate – sat back in his favourite armchair. Allegedly once built for a lord of impressive width and slightly disappointing height, it held him comfortably. The previous owner of the chair was never to be discussed, however; neither Vastra nor Jenny wanted a repeat of the ordeal they faced last time after remarking on the height of a Sontaran.

‘For the last time,’ he had urged, ‘Sontarans are not *short*. We merely took every bipedal species and put you on the torture rack before you had the intelligence to understand what was happening.’

Jenny would smile and nod to humour him. Vastra would continue the pointless debate until her wife’s hand on her arm signalled for her to let it go.

This time, however, Strax wasn’t in the mood for petty arguments. His head was barely visible over the paper wingspan of the copy of *The Times* he was reading. Jenny stood at the opposite end of the room impatiently; hands on hips, eyebrows raised. The paper lowered and Strax scowled.

‘No mention of any goblins or carnivorous eyes,’ he muttered.

‘We’ve been through this. Of course there ain’t. You know why that is, Strax? Because people don’t listen to kids round here.’

‘Then why do you? They are imbeciles.’

‘Because they are *not* imbeciles,’ Vastra exclaimed, carrying a vase into the room and replacing it with another. Strax grumbled and turned the next page.

‘What now?’ Jenny asked, exasperated.

‘I haven’t read this page yet,’ he replied defiantly.

‘For crying out loud...’

‘Can you even read, Strax?’ Vastra asked, a hint of curiosity in her intonations, laced generously with a rhetorical drawl. Vexed, he crushed the paper into a ball and threw it onto the fire, refusing to answer her question. Vastra glided over to an antique rocking chair next to Strax and sat down. Her eyes fixed on him briefly before moving to Jenny. She cocked her head to one side. ‘Jenny, please continue.’

Smiling, Jenny took a crumpled piece of paper from her pocket and placed it on the table. It was rare for her to stand while the others were seated; Vastra could often stand for twenty-hour periods without any complaints. Quite impressive for a species that have spent so long sleeping, Jenny always thought.

'Some eyes eat you,' she said. Vastra smiled on the inside; the way 'you' became 'yah' with that slightly childlike, slightly nasal voice always amused her. 'That's what all the kids are saying,' she continued. 'All week I've heard it down at the market. They tell all these stories about a goblin...'

'Are you quite sure they haven't just studied *Goblin Market* at school and it's gone to their heads?' Vastra queried. She doubted it herself, but it was a nice opportunity to acknowledge contemporary culture, as though she still held onto the belief that she knew the Earth better than any human.

She dwindled, as the fair full moon doth turn/To swift decay and burn/Her fire away.

'Quite sure, ma'am. See, all them kids you see at the market, they don't seem the school type.'

'Training to be warriors,' Strax mused, nodding slowly. 'Wise.'

'The place they all talk about is Alstone Place. Big old house. Like a tower, I heard one of them say.'

'I haven't heard of it,' Vastra frowned.

'Why do you hold these pink balls of flesh in such high regard?' Strax asked, appalled. 'They wouldn't know the difference between the top and bottom of a Toxic Rot Tumbler.' Vastra waved her hand to silence him, before gently massaging her forehead. She narrowed her eyes.

'I definitely haven't heard of it. Alstone Place, Alstone Place...'

'That's the thing, ma'am.' Jenny was trying to force back a smile. 'It's in Scotland.'

Strax rolled his eyes as Vastra's widened. She stood up immediately, moving her head from left to right in infinitesimal motions as she thought.

'It's rubbish, then,' Strax deduced. 'No point.'

'Quite the contrary, Strax,' she said. 'Quite the contrary.' This time, Jenny sat down as Vastra took her usual pacing route of the room. Around the table, past the fireplace, up by the corner of peeling wallpaper as though she were inspecting it...

'If that place were in London we could put it down to local rumours and wish fulfilment,' Vastra reasoned. 'But Scotland? That must mean something.'

'That clear message, too,' Jenny interrupted. 'Some eyes eat you. What do you think it means, ma'am?'

'Plasma bats have eyes that eat people,' Strax said helpfully. Vastra nodded in his direction.

'That, or something more interesting,' she said. 'A message that has stayed intact from Scotland to London...' A smile curved her lips. 'Strax, fetch Timothy Horseradish. Tell him we aim to depart for Scotland. First thing tomorrow morning, if possible.'

Strax slept soundly that night (sleep talking and battle crying aside), as did Jenny. The words of the childish tale, however, kept Vastra up until the early hours of the morning.

Some eyes eat you.

The clarity of the phrase was fresh and terrifying; it seemed to haunt Vastra, as though it had concisely targeted all of her fears, of which there were few. The fact that the woman beside her was peacefully asleep did not help

matters. It made her feel alone, if only for a moment. She was far more human than she would ever let on.

As the night beat on, like oars against a violent ocean, Alstone Place stood framed by moonlight. It was a dark place, so dark it made the midnight sky look like a summer evening. The house was slightly crooked, as though it had been cobbled together by a bored giant with blunt nails. The wrought iron gate separating the house from the winding road through the mountains that led up to it creaked open.

Goblins do not oil their gates.

A figure had dared to cross the gates of Alstone Place. The black material held around the bony frame could have been a lady's shawl or a gentleman's cape. Either way, the wind found its way into the crevices and blew fiercely, giving the material the look of a bloated man intent on buttoning up his jacket.

This one was brave; their stride never faltered and their gait was consistent – until they reached the front door. *Alstone Place* was carved crudely on the grimy oak door. Each letter bore right through the wood like a deep wound. Yet when they stood in front of the door, they knew not what to do next. How should one approach such a scenario? The brave walk through the mountains was done. The courage in his or her heart was unmatched, yet now they had reached the front door of the nationwide myth.

There it was painted, below the crude sign: *some eyes eat you*.

Should one storm in, as if they expect this place to be home to nobody? Should one kick the door down, knock politely, wait with a weapon until the famous goblin deserts his hiding place?

The figure's pale, outstretched hand was female. She knocked, for she was English.

While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping, as of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.

The dreaded goblin of Alstone Place knew much of gothic literature; he had studied it and used it to give his abode a fear that was awfully particular, so he had heard, to the Victorian era. He rose from his catafalque and was behind the door in moments. Just a few inches of wood separated the inquisitive woman and her death.

The dreaded door opened, and he stood completely obscured in fine black material. It floated around his frame, giving no clues as to whether he really was a goblin or perhaps just a miserly old gentleman who kept toys that were accidentally thrown up the mountains and into his grounds.

The black material, just like hers. Like they were doubles.

The goblin's head cocked to one side, and he disappeared back into the realms of darkness that he called his home. Yet the woman was more than adventurous, so she followed him into the depths of her own crypt. She walked through the narrow hall of wood, creaking as though it were alive and turning its face towards her, perhaps raising an eyebrow in acknowledgement of her courage and stupidity.

Up the two flights of stairs she walked, taking note of the number of moth corpses, husks of what they once were, that littered the iron steps.

The goblin walked with purpose; he would feast that night.

He sat her down in the great dining room, where the chandelier was laced with the silk nooses woven by the spiders that could brave the face of the goblin. The chairs were pillowed with dust, and even a dainty young thing like her sent a cloud of filth billowing.

‘You rarely have guests, then.’ By making light of a situation that terrified her, she thought she’d gain the upper hand; the goblin has heard it all before.

‘I rarely have guests as pretty as yourself.’ By repeating certain words she used, he knew he would unnerve her. His plan worked; she shuffled in her seat, moving back ever so slightly.

And so the goblin took a gloved hand to the velvet hood that concealed all of his face, and swiftly lifted it.

Some eyes eat you.

The eyes were ravenous and bare; it was like the bright light of a dying sun had been condensed into two pinpoint pupils. Two pinpoint pupils that were going to eat her up.

She half-vomited dizzily as soon as she saw his eyes, before standing so quickly that her ornate throne toppled to the floor and sent a mushroom cloud of dust around her ankles. As she blindly moved back towards the furthest wall, she was quite certain that those eyes of his were indeed feasting on her. Even rationality couldn’t protest.

‘Some eyes eat you,’ he scoffed, his voice resonant as though he was trapped within a cave; he was himself a haunted house. He stood just as quickly, yet no dust rose for the goblin, for the dust was comprised of the skin cells of all his previous victims – previous victims who still feared him beyond death.

Her trembling hand felt a window latch, and with a melodramatic gesture she was able to swing it open. She hadn’t even been aware that the back of Alstone Place hid the freezing sea. Giddy like a newborn foal, she swung a leg over one side of the window. She looked; it was a long way to fall. She would surely die.

‘You will fall to the ocean,’ he observed. ‘The rocks will break your bones. I will only lick them clean.’

I looked upon the sea, it was to be my grave.

She would rather have died a thousand deaths than have those monstrous green eyes on her face any longer. He was fast, but she was quicker.

She fell down like a rag doll, doing pathetic somersaults in the air, before she fell into the sea as a wave broke against the back of the house. The goblin leaned over and saw her body for a brief moment before the sea swallowed it. He would go hungry that night; he was livid.



A few days later, they arrived in the north of Scotland. Strax left the carriage and walked over to Timothy Horseradish, the unemployed young gentleman who helped the Paternoster Trio on several of their adventures. Naturally, the young man was desperate for a healthy sum after taking the three all the way up to the bizarre roads of Scotland; he eagerly turned to Strax, hand outstretched. Strax took his hand and shook it.

'I pay you in honour,' he said, nodding curtly.

'I'd prefer a couple of guineas,' he muttered.

'That's humanity for you,' Strax sighed as the other two left the carriage and felt the bitter cold air of Scotland scar their nostrils. 'No need for the veil, ma'am,' he proudly announced. 'I've heard that the inhabitants of Scot-Land are like hideous mutants.'

'I think I'll keep it on for now, Strax.' Vastra slipped Timothy the money he needed, and he was off to stay in a nearby inn until their business was finished. The three looked upon this tiny town by the sea, observing the not-too-distant peak of Alstone Place among what seemed to be a hill, mountain and cliff rolled into one.

Jenny's surprisingly extensive list of contacts (those who, she said ambiguously, owed her favours) had allowed the three to stay in Helsing Cottage thanks to the warmth and kindness of a Mrs McCrae and her crotchety husband Andrew.

That evening, the three sat in the living room, all fully aware that the crackling of the fire could never block out the thunderous rain hammering on the windowpanes, as if it was beckoning them. Are you scared? Do you fear him? Come out; come out, wherever you are!

Andrew stared perplexed at Strax. 'You say you're Turkish?' he asked.

'That is correct,' Strax said, audibly disgruntled. Andrew met this response with a satisfactory 'hm' and returned to the book he was reading. Pouring tea into ornate little cups, Mrs McCrae frowned at Vastra.

'You can take that veil off, my love,' she assured her. 'We see all sorts round here. Mrs Lyon down the road's got this awful big boil on her face. We're awful polite round here.'

'You're very kind, Mrs McCrae. But I'm perfectly fine, thank you.'

'Suit yourself,' she shrugged.

'So,' Vastra said, taking a cup and passing it to Jenny. 'What can you tell us about the goblin?'

Andrew picked up the local paper on the floor and silently brandished the front page, raising his eyebrows.

'Yes, that is a newspaper,' Strax observed, looking a little lost. Andrew simply attacked the headline with his finger: 'SOME EYES EAT YOU: THE ALSTONE GOBLIN?'

Pretending to understand, Strax nodded robotically.

'Awful business,' Mrs McCrae sighed. And, sitting down in an armchair that held her like God's hand, she gave her account of the goblin's reign of terror.

Six months ago, Alstone Place was struck by a freak thunderstorm, and received significant damage. The top parts of the building fell apart and the elderly owner, Lord Alstone, was trapped under rubble and killed. The Alstone police (a bunch of wee boys, Andrew interjected) cordoned off the area, deeming it unsafe for the public.

A month later, one morning, the residents of Alstone awoke to see that the top of the building had been restored, albeit haphazardly. Who on Earth could have restored the building in just one night? And how did they get past the keep out signs? British people couldn't just ignore a keep out sign. Strax helpfully

pointed out that Scottish people were delusional and genetically flawed. This was met by a severe scowl from Andrew.

A policeman had wandered up to the house and never returned. The same happened again and again until the policemen of Alstone were picked off like cherries from a tree for the goblin to pop into his mouth. It got to the point where it became a town law that nobody would disobey.

Nobody but children.

Yes, the haunted house of Alstone where no grown-ups ever returned from became a thing of town legend for the children. Expeditions to the house were apparently frequent, yet the fact that the children had lived to tell their allegedly true story suggested a dash or two of hyperbole.

The most ambitious of the children – or, rather, the children who desired popularity the most – had reached the door of Alstone Place and had read the crude message on the door: some eyes eat you. A message like that instilled sheer glee and utter horror in every child. The phrase was easy to remember, terrifying to picture and had vague links to the fairy tales that they were told by their parents when they were even younger. The goblin was cunning; by toying with fairy tales it knew that the fear would drive the children insane. Every night, Mrs McCrae insisted, one could hear the whimpers, cries and howls of children who could not sleep out of fear for the goblin. ‘His eyes will eat me,’ they crooned. ‘His eyes will eat me up.’

Even when the town assembled its own small army of strong men, sleeves rolled up, it was not enough. The five men were never seen again. One of them was Mrs McCrae’s son.

‘He’d never hurt a soul,’ she cried. ‘Unless they were scaring children.’

Jenny felt a pang deep in her stomach. Sometimes life with Vastra and Strax alienated her from the wondrous aspects of humanity.

Two weeks later, the goblin claimed his first child. Little Bobby Doherty was ten and far too adventurous for his own good. His shoes were mockingly nailed to the goblin’s door when people came to see if the ‘some eyes eat you’ rumours were true. After that event, it was the children who spread the story across Scotland and down to England. That simple phrase was never lost in translation. When you’re playing Chinese whispers, some things will never be misheard.

Again, Vastra couldn’t sleep that night.

By five o’clock the next morning, Vastra was fully dressed and was absent-mindedly sharpening her nodachi outside. It was a bleak morning and it would be a bleak day. Mrs McCrae joined her as she took the milk bottles out, and they both looked up to Alstone Place.

‘I don’t think you should do it,’ Mrs McCrae sighed. ‘I really don’t.’

‘I must,’ Vastra said – and believed. ‘Could you do me a favour, Mrs McCrae?’

‘What is it, my dear?’ Mrs McCrae was not the sort of woman to agree to a favour before she knew what it was.

‘Could you wake up Mr. Strax?’

‘Certainly.’

Twenty minutes later, Strax was stood by Vastra in his full armour. ‘I had a brilliant dream,’ he said.

'Oh,' Vastra said absent-mindedly, as though talking to a child who spoke incessantly.

'I slaughtered cowardice.'

'You can't slaughter concepts, Strax.'

'I did.' A long pause followed. Strax cleared his throat. 'It was wise not waking the boy,' he said. 'He'd only slow us down.'

'This creature is operating on a very human level. I'm protecting Jenny by making sure she stays here.'

'Did he – she – not express a desire to accompany us?'

'Yes, she did.'

'So you are ignoring her wishes.'

'That's right, Strax.'

Strax exhaled loudly. He didn't bother trying to understand. 'Right then. We'd better go.'

Vastra looked up at the curtained window that separated her from her wife, and nodded. The two set off, walking side by side and not saying a word.

In four hours, they were close. 'Nearly ten o'clock,' Vastra said, checking a small pocket watch. 'And still dark.'

'That's Scot-Land for you.'

The mountain was relatively easy to climb, which made the whole affair all the more strange. All that was needed to reach the place was stamina. For Strax, it was a brief stroll.

'Goblins, eh? I've been thinking about all goblin races across the universe, ma'am. Now, we have the Mud Goblins of the Buber Belt... nasty bunch, but nothing a Sontaran cannot handle. Then we've got the Goblins of the Starburst Empire, of course. They've upgraded recently – they have storm swords. I think they won an intergalactic singing competition, you see. Big prize. Still, nothing a Sontaran cannot handle. Ah! The Green Goblin. I have scanned every database and heard a lot about this treacherous ogre. Rumour has it that this one throws grenades shaped like pumpkins. Very interesting. Still, no match for a...'

'Strax,' Vastra snapped. 'Please. Stop. This journey isn't as easy for me as it is for you.'

'I appreciate that, ma'am. But the journey is over.' Strax gestured over to Alstone Place, which awaited them down a long, winding road. Everything about the journey was perfectly tailored to put people off guard. The anticipation of the place had eaten away at Vastra for days; now she was here, the strange absence of fear put her in more danger than she had ever been in.

Moments later, the knock at the door. The wood quivered; was it scared? Could a goblin have feared a Sontaran knock?

'Now stay calm, Strax,' Vastra whispered, her voice quavering.

'Stay calm yourself.'

The door creaked open, and they cautiously stepped into darkness.

'Where are they?' Jenny asked, tucking strands of hair behind her ears as Mrs McCrae folded her apron and tossed it onto the work surface. 'Madame Vastra and Strax,' she clarified. 'Where have they gone?'

'To Alstone Place, my love,' she frowned. 'You remember?'

'They didn't wake me.'

'Oh.'

'They were supposed to.'

'Oh.'

'So I'm gonna head off now.'

'Oh, I wouldn't advise it, my love. Awful place. It's safer here. I'm sure your friends just wanted to you to be safe. Don't take it so much to heart. Here, I'm just about to put the kettle on. You like tea, don't you?'

Jenny sat down, deflated. She nodded robotically. Why had she been left? The case that was hers, the case that she had proposed, had been taken out of her hands. She looked out the window. The morning was dark.

Vastra and Strax walked down the hallway and towards the staircase. Vastra placed a hand on Strax's shoulder.

'I think something's down here, Strax.'

'There are many things down here, ma'am. Chairs, for one. I can also see doilies. You're going to have to be more specific.'

'The goblin,' she hissed. 'I think he's down here. And he may be taunting you.'

Strax's eyes widened. He nodded curtly, and crept to the side of the staircase and into a thinly cobwebbed room. Once he was out of sight, Vastra ascended the staircase. Her dress cleaned the dirt as she walked.

There were more moth corpses this time. All pristine, like little art exhibitions.

She had sent Strax away so that she could face fear alone. Vastra subscribed to the idea that fear is best hidden. The trembling of her hand on the cool marble banister disappointed her; what was this? A Silurian trembling at the thought of nationwide superstition? At the thought of a 'goblin'?

But then that voice at the back of her mind reasoned with her. It told her that she had good reason to be afraid, since this was far more than just a goblin.

His figure stood in the doorway, thickly veiled in the material that floated around him. Reaching the top of the stairs, Vastra cocked her head to the side.

The goblin extended an arm and gestured towards a door. 'Shall we?' His voice was cold like metal.

Outside, all the while, the clouds were crying.

Strax lifted up a doily and pointed his gun at the table menacingly. Nothing. Again.

'I think you may have been mistaken, ma'am,' he said aloud, presuming that Vastra was still cowering at the bottom of the stairs. But he had little time to await her response, since his voice startled somebody lurking in the room.

Immediately, Strax cocked his gun.

'Show yourself!' he cried. 'I am armed and short-tempered! Don't be a coward; face your inevitable obliteration with honour!'

A pale hand clasped the edge of the tablecloth, as a bedraggled woman hoisted herself from the floor.

'Please don't shoot,' she croaked. Her voice was broken and her clothes were rags. She looked like a skeleton.

She had survived the ravages of the ocean after all.

The dining room had been dusted. Goodness knows how long the goblin had spent clearing the thick layers of grime that had previously coated every surface. Yet as Vastra calmly sat opposite the veiled figure, the pristine nature of the place unnerved her.

Slowly, he threw back his hood. Vastra struggled to breathe but managed to meet his gaze. Those eyes, as green as nettles. Eyes that framed her and swelled like bulbous paper lanterns. In the centre of each, a perforation in time and space itself for savage pupils.

Some eyes eat you. Yet Vastra refused to be eaten by the eyes of her own kind. As the Silurian opposite her cracked his lips with a smile, she felt blood rush to her head.

‘Well,’ he said, arching his tongue against the back of his front teeth, ‘That would be cannibalism.’

‘What is your name?’

‘Zopek. I know who you are. Madame Vastra. *The Great Detective*. The ape sympathiser...’ He leaned forward, pressing his fingertips onto the table. ‘The dirt on the soles of our feet.’

Vastra had become so accustomed to life with Jenny and Strax that she almost thought of herself as the last Silurian. The thought of millions lying dormant beneath her feet made her feel uneasy. The presence of another in front of her robbed her of who she thought she was.

And as the great door to that place closed, Vastra had no doubt that Zopek intended to kill her there.

Strax sat opposite the woman, frowning as he cast his eyes over her. After hurling herself out of Alstone Place and into the crashing waves below, she told the story of how a perfectly timed wave carried her over the rocks and into a tiny crevice. She slept there for several nights, she told Strax, her clothes catching on jagged rocks and her body wrinkling from the constant sting of seawater. Her rock pool, she called it. Once the waves had calmed down, she had managed to swim the short distance around the rocks and back to land. There, she had knocked defiantly and entered the house once more.

‘Why?’ Strax asked, perplexed.

‘Because I was not a victim of the goblin,’ she reasoned, ‘I was a survivor. I had a second chance.’ Strax admired that.

Upon opening the door to the animated corpse, Zopek didn’t help her as she collapsed upon entry. In fact, she woke up on the floor in the room she was sat in now, telling her story. She assumed that he had let her in so that her family would presume her to be dead.

‘Why on earth didn’t he murder you for himself?’ Strax questioned, alarmed at how the goblin had missed out on such a perfect opportunity.

‘Because the Alstone goblin only feasts,’ she said. ‘I woke up with this.’ She slipped back her sleeve and showed Strax a faint bite mark on her arm. It was withered and faint, like a dash of scarlet watercolour. He had bitten, but not eaten. ‘I had lost much weight and my skin had been toughened by the ocean. And even if I had tasted nice, there’s barely anything on me. I’m all bone.’

Strax nodded. ‘You do look as though you would taste foul.’

‘Thank you, kind stranger.’

‘What do I call you, boy?’

'Rosie. And I'm a girl.'

'Rosie, in the name of Sontar, I will save you.' Standing up, he turned to talk to Vastra. But she wasn't there. 'But first,' he said, 'I must consult with my companion.'

'Your companion?'

'Madame Vastra, the Great Detective. You may have heard of her from my book, *The Paternoster Tales: A Lizard, a Boy and Their Handsome Butler*.'

'No, I have not. Sorry.'

'No matter. I haven't written the book yet.' He poked his head out of the room and looked around, before noticing the trail where Vastra's dress had cleaned the staircase. 'Rosie,' he muttered, 'Wait outside.'

'No,' she replied. 'If I go outside, you come with me. If your friend has gone upstairs then I'm sorry – but she's dead.'

'You didn't die! And look at you! These doilies are stronger than you are.'

'My survival was determined by chance. I should never have come here. The same goes for you. If you charge up there now, he'll kill you on the spot.'

'But this is a Sontar-K 430!' Strax whined, brandishing his gun. 'I replaced the acid cartridges just for this!'

'It does not matter,' she said. 'You need to be clever. You told me you are a warrior, so let's be tactical.'

Nodding his head reluctantly, Strax walked back into the room, and the two began to devise a plan.

'I know the stories of you,' Zopek drawled, leaning back in his chair and tracing the outlines of his serrated teeth with a gloved finger. 'We were both rudely awoken. You by humanity, me by a storm.'

'Precisely. Humans have done nothing to you.'

'They stole our planet.'

'And now it is theirs.'

'What happened to you?' he asked, patronising her with a wry smile. 'You've become so human. It's hideous.'

Vastra stood up and started pacing slowly around the room. 'So a storm woke you.'

'The lightning struck the place and it fell down. I rebuilt it.'

'You've done a terrible job.'

'And you know, I thought, 'why should I just turn around and go back to sleep?' I didn't want to just let it lie. So I came out from under the rocks and I saw the dead man squeezed between walls like an accordion. I laughed and laughed and laughed. And then I declared myself to be his rightful heir.'

'People have died. Innocent people.'

'I'll get there. This place, you see, it had a vast library. I read every book and then singled out the ones that were designed to send shivers down their spines. Then I singled out all of the books that were illustrated and simple – the fairy tales. And then I took the vampires and demons and goblins and I put them into fairy tales. And then I decorated the place so delicately that no aspect of it would put an ape at ease. And then I carved out the words that would terrify anyone and everyone on my front door.' He traced the words with his finger in the air. 'Some eyes eat you, Vastra. They eat you up. And then you set off a trigger in their little minds, you see. So when the inquisitive come over, you hide your

eyes. You build everything up to that reveal. Then, when they see them, half of their reaction is purely psychological.'

'The eyes of a Silurian are powerful as it is.'

'Yes, but not powerful enough alone to make people's legs buckle, or to make them vomit, or to make them burst into tears and cry for their mothers. Which is why you need to play these games with them, Vastra. It's a joy.'

Then, the floor beneath them winced, and a dull thud was heard from below. It was as though someone was knocking from beneath the floorboards.

'What's that?' Vastra asked. Zopek shrugged.

'Bats?'

Not bats exactly, but Strax stood on a chair with a broom, aggressively poking the ceiling as Rosie headed for the stairs.

'I fail to understand all of this,' Vastra exclaimed. 'When you could have woken up your brothers and ignited a revolution.'

'My history is weak. Are we in a period of revolution?'

'That is not my point. Why act alone? Learning the ways of humanity so that you can keep them close?'

Zopek removed his gloves and tossed them on to the table. 'Are you asking me this because you liked to think you were the only one? The only one who knew them, who knew their literature and their minds?'

'I'm married to one,' Vastra said, smirking to rouse him from his state of smug self-confidence. And it worked. He stood up and calmly walked over to her, as the thudding of the floor got more and more desperate. He was a good three or four inches taller than her, and she promised herself to match his gaze. His eyes weren't weapons any more.

He smiled, laughed, and aggressively spat in her face. 'Vermin,' he sneered. 'Filthy, filthy vermin.'

Then, a knock at the dining room door. A confident knock. A knock that Zopek knew, but had forgotten from where. As he opened the door, a flash of black told both he and Vastra that someone had ran away.

He walked out and looked to the left, as Rosie ran as fast as she could along the hallway. He cricked his neck and opened his mouth as wide as it would go, ready to strike her down, ready for target practise... when a colossal punch to the back of the head left him unconscious on the floor.

'She wouldn't let me use the gun,' Strax moaned, peering around the doorframe and shrugging at Vastra.



Downstairs, Zopek sat tied tightly to a wrought iron chair. Even his neck was restrained so that he could not turn to glare at Rosie, who stood behind him at the back of the room.

Strax observed and admired his own handiwork. Learning every intricate knot known is an arduous feat when you only have three stubby digits on either hand. Zopek eyed him with disdain and curiosity. How low this warrior must have come, he thought, to be tying innocent people to chairs. 'This is humiliating,'

he announced. 'Not just for me, but for you.' He looked to Vastra. 'And what now? Do you call for the police? Tell them not to bother with the hats. Tough as hide.'

'We are not associated with the police, Zopek,' she said coolly. 'We operate alone.'

'Like a cult,' Strax added.

'No, not like a cult.'

Strax scowled. 'Like a cult,' he whispered, assuming that by saying it quietly enough it would become true.

'Girl,' Zopek croaked, trying to test the ropes around his neck to no avail. 'Show yourself to me, girl.' Rosie stood scared at the back of the room. 'You know why my eyes made you giddy?' He closed them briefly as he spoke, the eyelids quivering with ecstasy. 'Our ancestors bore a third eye on their foreheads. Genetics have more or less removed that eye. But the power, girl, of three eyes is never lost. The two we are left with could cut through steel.'

'They could not,' Vastra sneered as if talking to a melodramatic child. Zopek turned to her. 'They could if we had the steel long enough.'

'This is no time for nonsense,' Strax declared. 'Remain quiet whilst we discuss how to dispose of you. If I may put in a vote, ma'am, it would be to make the cretin drown in a two-inch puddle of acid. Deadly, humiliating and an economic use of resources. I know the latter is important to you, ma'am.' Vastra waved his suggestion away idly. 'Why acid, Strax? Why always acid?'

No, she thought, not this time. She was already a traitor among her own kind. She felt as though she had to talk to Zopek, to come to an agreement, in order to ensure that she did not become an enemy of the Silurians. She calmly walked over to Strax and whispered in his ear.

'Take her home,' she said. Strax frowned.

'The girl?'

'Yes. Take her back down. Make sure that she is safe. If she is not local, take her to Helsing Cottage. Take good care of her. Remind her how brave she has been.'

'Do you understand what you are asking of me?'

'I understand perfectly clearly,' she snapped through gritted teeth. 'And you will do as I ask. She is top priority, Strax. I am entrusting you with our top priority.'

'I am a Sontaran,' he seethed. 'My duty lies here with Kojak.' She didn't bother to correct him; she merely repeated her request and reminded him of her hospitality at Paternoster Row. Finally, he gave in. 'With me,' he muttered, taking Rosie by the elbow and leading her out of the room.

'I shan't see you again,' Vastra told her. 'And I can guarantee you shan't see Zopek. If anyone asks about the events of today, you tell them of the Great Detective, and you give away nothing more of my nature. Do you understand?' She nodded meekly, her head turned to the side to avoid Zopek's gaze. 'Good,' Vastra said, as Rosie and Strax left the house and braced the bitter cold winds of Scotland. 'God help you,' Rosie whimpered as the door opened.

But no Gods could help her now.

'That's brave,' Zopek said. 'Assuming she won't see these eyes again. Assuming anyone will live to tell the events of today.'

'Your death,' she announced, matching his asparagus spear green eyes with the shallow water cyan of her own, 'is a foregone conclusion.'

Strax half-carried the weak girl across the path leading towards her freedom. As they passed through the cold gates of Alstone Place, she stopped momentarily and wrapped her hands around the black bars. 'Like bones,' she said. 'Like black bones.'

The walk was, for her, long and gruelling. Strax insisted that they take an unknown path down over the more steep and rocky terrain. When Rosie protested, he promised to keep her safe, holding her in his arms when he knew that the rocks could cut into her flesh like butter. When she asked for the time, Strax admitted he did not know. It was eerily dark; it looked like midnight but the time he had spent at Alstone Place only seemed to be a matter of hours.

'You say you are Turkish,' she said weakly as he carried her over a particularly steep decline. 'But that is a lie.'

'No it's not,' he murmured absent-mindedly as he leapt over the rocks like an outcast creature over the Swiss Alps.

'It must be. No, Mr Strax, you are not of this world. Do not patronise me. I have seen the goblin and now I have seen your associate.'

He gave in and told her of his nature, and of how a mysterious man called the Doctor had forced him to become a nurse after he performed acts that were, as he put it, 'controversial to some.'

'What did you do?' she asked.

'It is of no matter to you,' he replied gruffly. Yet in his head he refused to forget it.

He had been on a lone mission to destroy the rural farming towns of Hotuska, a planet known for its agriculture and passivity. Like Quakers, Rosie said. The particular region of Hotsuka to which Strax had been assigned, the goldenland of Hotsiki, was almost perfectly flat and could be easily destroyed by just one Sontaran. The mission was too easy for Strax; he should have been out in the asteroid belts of O-G5 or in the acrid swamps of Illunix Minus. Instead, he had been cast aside in favour of more genetically pure Sontarans.

He had been a member of what history came to call the Great Taxin Blunder, whereby a set of cloning units set up on the barren wasteland of Taxin were built and utilised without any awareness of the fact that the air was polluted with A45K-, a chemical that interfered with the clone batches. As a result, the Sontarans were ever so slightly weaker than usual. To any other race, this difference wasn't noticeable. To Sontarans, it was cause for mockery and shame. Strax was one of the shunted Sontarans, regularly assigned to basic missions and completing them with a burning pride and desire to be respected and recognised by his own kind.

So there Strax was, striding through the knee-high tealweed with his weapon primed. He marched through the first few towns with ease, striking every man and woman down with infinitesimal flicks of his wrist. The huts and shacks came down like matchsticks. But in the town of Hotsana, the people walked with heavier footsteps. They stood with more audacity and eyed the lone Sontaran with courage. Cautious, Strax had cocked his gun and walked slowly, until he came across the blue box that stood in the centre of the town like a pillar of defiance.

Out of the box came a man - a man who was despised across Sontar. Shots were fired. Nobody else died that day. Strax awoke, disorientated, a week later with an exhaustive list of battles to attend to.

The Doctor knew Strax would not read the small print. When he arrived at the first battle of Aesca, it was not until the last moment, when he was ready to fight, that he was told he was now a nurse.

The embarrassment and crippling shame was worse than any battle wound.



'Untie me,' Zopek said calmly. 'Untie me now.' The orbs of his eyes swelled and the pupils quivered like a taut bowstring. Vastra was unsure of what exactly she should do next. 'Do you intend to kill me?' she asked, regretting the question from the moment it left her lips. Like a fox, he assured her. He promised not to feast, though. That would be dishonourable.

'Then why on earth should I let you go?'

'Because it won't be long until I can let myself go. And by that time I will be furious. And, you know, Vastra, my blood will be red hot.' He corrected himself: 'White hot. White hot.'

A Silurian with hot blood; he had obsessed so much over mankind he had forgotten his own anatomy.

Vastra agreed, on one condition. 'We shall end this in the place you played predator. Not here. We will go in, lock the door and conclude your fairy tale in the dining room.' Yes, the dining room. The room where he feasted. His very own funerary banquet hall.

Nodding, he stayed ever so still as the ropes fell to his ankles like fat dead snakes.

They glided silently out of the room and up the stairs to his room of desecration. Upon entering, he drew a brass key from the folds of his cloak and locked the door. Vastra didn't know how it was possible, but the room was now coated in centimetres of dust. Just moments before it had been pristine. It was as though centuries had passed. He placed the key in the middle of the table. 'For our race,' he said, taking his seat. 'There are conditions we should be able to agree on: one of us shall take that key and leave this room. The other will be a corpse in his or her very own throne.'

'You are obsessed,' she noted, 'with death.' Zopek merely leaned back in his chair and drew a circle in the dust. And, with alarming agility, leapt from his seat and propelled himself across the table. Vastra had enough time to stand and move from her chair (being on the edge of one's seat can be useful after all) as the feared goblin fell to the floor with splintered wood, which toppled around him like old bones. There he was, on the floor, a mess. His cloak created a black pool around him. Vastra stood over him. Her face revealed nothing. She had the upper hand.

Eventually, Strax and Rosie reached the outskirts of Alstone. She was alarmingly ill. Her skin was tinged with blue and she had not eaten in far too long. He shoulder barged the door of Helsing Cottage down and placed Rosie's frail, unconscious body in front of the fire. Mrs McCrae immediately put the kettle on as Andrew frowned at the notable absence of a front door. 'I can't believe you're alive,' Mrs McCrae said, flapping her hands and dithering from one room to the next. 'It's a miracle. It's a miracle, Andrew. Good grief. A miracle here, in this home. Goodness gracious.' Her husband, ignoring her, peered over his paper to look at the girl. 'Is the lass okay?' he asked. Strax looked around for any strange ornaments before realising that Andrew was talking about the girl.

'Hypothermia,' Strax muttered. 'She'll be embarrassed when she's recovered. It's practically tropical out there.'

'Hypothermia?' Mrs McCrae's voice could have shattered windows. 'Get a doctor, get a doctor!'

'Mrs McCrae, you insult me,' Strax cried, 'I am a nurse.' Andrew slowly shook his head. He'd heard it all now. 'And,' Strax continued, 'we're going to have to remove her clothes.'

Andrew shrunk a little behind his paper.

Zopek stood in one elegant motion, his crow-black clothes now laced pathetically with dust. He cricked his neck and gently bent down to pick up a chair leg. He tested its strength in the grip of his fingers as Vastra carefully made her way round to the other side of the table. 'Brute force is not necessary, Zopek. Are you deliberately playing the fool?'

'You have no idea,' he said, bringing the chair leg up to his mouth, 'Just how dead they'd all want you, down below.'

'On the contrary, I have quite a good idea.'

'They don't even know, yet. Blissfully ignorant. I'm fighting the battle for them.' He believed every word he uttered. 'I am a hero.' He placed the stump of the chair leg in his mouth and, with his lower teeth, shaved off entire strips of wood, eyeing Vastra like a ravenous dog, until the end of the leg was perfectly pointed. A stake, it appeared. A stake for her heart.

Wrapped in dry blankets and towels, Rosie had regained a little colour, even if her lips were still a little bluer than Strax would have liked. Mrs McCrae hovered around like an anxious fly, eager to make everything well. She had even put out a plate of biscuits. Perhaps she assumed that dried oats softened the throbbing pains of chilblains. Rosie lay quite still, blinking heavily and shivering. 'That's right,' Strax said. 'Keep shivering, you little bag of bones.'

'Shall I run her a bath?' Mrs McCrae asked. 'A nice hot bath? Hm?'

'Mrs McCrae,' Strax spat, either disgusted or enraged. 'Are you mentally deficient?'

'Is – is that a no?'

'It is completely and definitely a 'no'. It's like you *want* the boy's blood vessels to dilate. If we put him in a bath, his blood pressure would plummet further than a rot vulture. I know cardiac arrest is allegedly frequent in Scotland, but as a nurse it is my duty to try and prevent it. Come on, Mrs McCrae. I know how your fleshy bodies work better than you do.' Sighing, he tightened the towels.

'What happened?' Andrew asked, out of the blue. Strax turned. 'At Alstone Place, I mean. Was she on her way up?'

'She had escaped. I bravely chose to carry her back to safety.'

'I don't think I recognise her.'

'Well, I doubt you can see the entire town from your armchair, Mr McCrae.' Mrs McCrae smirked at that. Andrew pretended he hadn't heard.

'Just interested, that's all. Do you think a swig of brandy will warm her up?'

Strax just sighed to himself. 'It's a wonder any of you are alive at all.'

The table had been dented where the stake had missed Vastra's flailing limbs by centimetres. She backed up against the furthest wall from the door. 'Scotland,' she said, buying time. 'A poor choice of residence for a Silurian. Horribly cold.'

'Not my choice,' Zopek drawled, stalking his prey from the other side of the room. 'I did not choose where I woke up. Dense clothing, closed windows... I manage perfectly well. Now stop speaking idly.'

'I was simply curious,' Vastra said, slowly and subtly unhinging the window latch behind her. 'And you do know,' she said, nodding at the stake, 'that in human folklore wooden stakes are designed for vampires. Have you understood *any* of the literature you took from the dead man's library? Any at all?'

His expression was sour. 'Well, for starters your clothing is particularly vampiric. Particularly the veil you use to hide your face. Out of shame, I suppose.'

'And what do you base this on, exactly?'

'Bram Stoker's novel.'

'Which you have read?'

'Of course.'

'Odd.' She smiled. 'Odd, since it isn't published for another, oh, nine years?' Zopek lowered his head but maintained eye contact. It is always said that keeping eye contact with a predator is unwise, and is seen as an invitation to conflict. Vastra did not care. 'Furthermore,' she said, gently propping the large window open, 'Stoker pays no such attention to cloaks or veils – or even high collars, for that matter.' She was doing what she loved: outsmarting an opponent with the knowledge of a civilisation that wasn't her own. 'Those intricacies only came about in later stage productions. Is your knowledge really as extensive as you like to think, Zopek? Or have you just heard vague stories and outlines?'

'Aren't you dull,' he observed. 'Vampiric or not, a stake to the heart is quite the image, don't you think? Quite the image to be plastered over their little newspapers. And you never know, Vastra...' He waved the stake elegantly as he spoke and it cut the dust-polluted air like a machete, 'people may arrive, see a dead reptile and announce it as the corpse of the Alstone goblin. They'll hardly assume the existence of another. Then I'll be free, Vastra. I can make my way across every ocean and start all over again. Scandinavia is ripe for folklore. I may go there.'

He walked over to her, stake in hand. She bravely stood her ground, her gloved hand still holding onto the window. He walked until he stood directly in front of her, until she could smell his rancid, hot breath. Breath like rotten meat; pieces of cartilage lodged between his teeth. He bowed his head until his mouth was by her ear, and held her right arm with his right hand. Now was the time.

She would take them both down to the rocks below, and no wave would save them. If the rocks didn't kill them, their dense clothes would drag them down and they would die of the extreme cold. She closed her eyes, inhaled sharply and prepared to throw the window back and pull Zopek down with her.

Yet he was a step ahead. He took the window latch, opened it a good half-metre or so, and violently slammed it back on Vastra's fingers. She immediately fell to the side and onto the floor, as the window trembled slightly and the roaring ocean could be heard below.

Strax now held the bemused, and now conscious, Rosie in a strange and intimate embrace on the floor. 'What are you...?'

'Body heat is valuable in your condition,' he explained. 'You will come to thank me later.'

Evidently uncomfortable, Rosie tried to gently push Strax off as she spoke to him. 'I'm actually feeling a lot better, Mr Strax. Far better than before.'

'The human body can be deceptive,' he said.

'Oh, just get off her,' Andrew said, scowling. Today had been bizarre enough already. Grumbling, Strax eventually got to his feet. Rosie sat up weakly. 'Stew,' Mrs McCrae said, clicking her fingers. 'I'll make stew.'

'Mrs McCrae,' Strax said, exasperated, 'Now is not the time for procreation. Besides, even if a child were to be conceived, you would have no way of knowing whether it is male or female until birth. Naming it Stu is a little premature. Imagine if it was a boy.'

Mrs McCrae half smiled, half grimaced, unsure if this was a joke. She then nodded towards Rosie. 'I'll make some stew,' she clarified, pottering off to the kitchen. 'I'd suggest food,' Strax said. 'Something high in protein for the bo- girl. Cow flesh may be appropriate. Some vegetables, too, for minerals. Perhaps a soup. No, thicker. Thicker than soup. Broth.' He nodded to himself before heading for the open doorway. 'Mr Strax,' Rosie called out, 'where are you going? You should stay.'

'It is my duty to help Madame Vastra,' he said. 'There may still be time to save her. If she is dead, however, I shall bring back evidence for you.'

'Don't,' Andrew growled. Ignoring him, Strax left the house, messily propped the unhinged door against the frame, and set out to revisit Alstone Place once more.

Vastra had never understood the human idiom of one's life flashing before one's eyes before death. Naturally, she had heard it countless times from nervy survivors who chatter incessantly to avoid focusing on their trauma. As she sat, helpless, before Zopek, she didn't see her life flash before her eyes at all. The only visual she was focusing on was that of her soon-to-be killer, stood before her, holding the stake above his head as though he were an Aztec about to sacrifice a lamb. Oh, she thought, humans were simpler back then. Simpler still even further back, when Jews sacrificed their lambs to God. Back then humans truly were apes; concerned with survival instincts and carnal desires. Yet they had evolved to question greater things and grew more and more layers; they were harder to understand. The speciesism towards humanity was no longer fair, since they had achieved so much in such a little amount of time. Just at this time, in this decade, she had seen the economic boom of the country she lived in. She had witnessed

humans paving their own futures in railways and she had been living during the heart of the second great industrial revolution. She had seen cities multiply like bacteria and she had watched skyscrapers pop up and rake the clouds. How could apes have done that? And how could apes be so modest with it all?

The real 'ape', the real creature fuelled by hatred and violence, stood before her. It was her own kind. Their only claim to the planet was that they were there first. And so what? Millions of years had passed and that claim was now irrelevant. Look at what the humans have done, she thought. They are not the barbaric savages here; it is you and I that are slowly fitting that template. As the ceremonial dagger hovered over her, she thought herself more human than Silurian.

Experiences and emotions rippled from within her chest like a confused firework. Hatred surged furiously and came into fierce contact with love and hope. Anger was a canal, shame was a river and anxiety was as loud as the ocean outside. Her body didn't feel like her own; her brain told her to get up but she couldn't. Her hands scrabbled around on the floorboards uselessly. Her legs felt numb. The stake came down. She was to die.

But at that moment, an ear-splitting crack distracted both her and Zopek, as the locked door came crashing down. A figure stood in the doorway, obscured by the explosion of dust the fallen door had created. Soon the dust settled.

'What the hell d'you think you're doing to my wife?' Jenny asked venomously, her hair tied tight in a bun.

Outside the house, Timothy Horseradish sat by his cart, whistling idly. The horses grunted. He and Jenny had faced many difficulties gracing the ascent to Alstone Place, but had eventually managed it.

She had marched over to the local inn and hammered on the door. Bring me Timothy Horseradish, she had said.

She had paid him a generous sum, knowing that to leave her behind in such a way, Vastra must have been dealing with something dangerous and particular to her. She had always been private, but never in such a defiant way.

She paid almost no attention to the sign as she strode into the house. *Some eyes eat you.*

Without hesitating a moment longer, Jenny leapt up onto the table and ran across it. Not entirely necessary, of course, but she knew it would buy her precious milliseconds in confusing Zopek. Reaching the end of the table, she jumped off and grabbed Zopek. He waved the stake around blindly, still in shock. Even Silurians are taken aback by the element of surprise. All he could do was turn to stare right into her eyes. 'Some eyes eat you,' he managed to wheeze as Jenny pushed him towards the open window. 'Some eyes eat you! Some eyes eat you!'

His method wasn't working, yet this one was human. He failed to understand, especially since she stared right at him. 'Some eyes eat you!' he screamed again, one last time. Nothing. He tightened his grip on the stake, ready to wedge it in-between her shoulders, but it was too late - if only the dining room were a little longer. His back hit the window, it opened, he fell. His final roar would not leave Jenny's ears for weeks.

A crack and a gurgle and all was quiet. The waves crashed as they had done before. Zopek was gone, victim to the jagged rocks and the bitter cold sea. Jenny fell to the floor and held Vastra in her arms. They didn't talk for what felt like an age.

The one thing Vastra had forgotten was that Jenny would never have been under any threat from Zopek. If one human were going to be oblivious to the fierce power of a Silurian's eyes, it would be the woman who spends a lot of her time gazing into them. 'Jenny,' Vastra said aloud, to confirm her presence. 'Jenny.' Saying it comforted her. All was well. She had been saved. 'Jennifer.'

'Oi, none of that,' she quipped. 'Let's stick with Jenny.' A broken, breathy laugh from them both. At times like these, these quiet and vulnerable moments, their relationship came before formality. 'You shouldn't have left me behind,' she said gently.

'I know. I know.'

'Who was he?'

'Didn't know him. He knew me.' She finally made it to her feet, with Jenny's assistance. 'He was going to kill me in the name of my own species.' She repeated that fact over and over in her head. That affected her the most.

Jenny walked over to the table and picked up the key, looking at the gaping doorway. 'D'you think we'll need this?'

Vastra smiled. 'Did you get bored of picking locks?'

At that moment, another figure appeared in the doorway: Strax, wielding his gun and licking his lips. He frowned at the lack of a door, frowned even more at the open window and dropped his gun in irritation upon noticing Jenny and the absence of Zopek. 'For the love of Sontar,' he whined. 'What are you doing here?'

'Jenny saved my life,' Vastra pointed out.

'Well what did you do that for? That was my job.'

'You would've been late,' Jenny quipped.

'I saw the Horseradish boy with his cart outside. I assumed the lizard had arranged for him to pick him up and take him away. I may have removed the wheels from the vehicle. But I assume...'

'That he was my lift here,' Jenny replied. 'Yeah.' A brief pause followed. Strax looked around. 'Now what?' he asked. 'What of this place? Can we knock it down? Please?'

'And risk waking up even more of my people?'

'Sounds like a plan.'

'No, Strax. Leave the building. Let the people of Alstone do what they wish with it.'

And they did. As Vastra and Jenny returned to Alstone Place, gave their thanks to the McCraes and wished Rosie all the best, Mrs McCrae suggested the idea of turning the building into some kind of memorial. 'For the... well, you know,' she said uncomfortably. Vastra told her it was a touching and fitting idea. She then turned to Andrew.

'Tomorrow's newspaper,' she ensured him, 'will be rife with the news that the Alstone Goblin is dead. The threat has been eliminated. Eyes *cannot* eat you, of course. But do not believe everything you read.' She turned back and bowed her head to Mrs McCrae. 'I am sorry for your loss. But there shall be no more.'

‘Oh, come here,’ Mrs McCrae said, a lump growing in her throat as she held Vastra in a tight embrace. Strax frowned. ‘No, Mrs McCrae,’ he said. ‘Madame Vastra is not in need of body heat transfer.’

Not long after, they departed. Strax was made to fix Timothy’s cart, and the four of them rode back to London as dawn began to break, casting bullet holes of light over the silent roads.