

Early the next morning, I stood outside a side entrance to the zoo and waited to be let in. The main entrance was not yet open but already a small queue of mothers with small children had started to form. A bus with a party of school children moved behind me in the car park. I felt conspicuous, stood alone. I looked down at myself for the fifth time. I felt light and naked without my revolver against my chest. It would be too dangerous to bring it but without it I was weaponless. I balanced up on my toes and rocked back onto my heels. I was just about to start whistling to myself with the big doors opened and a keeper appeared. Trudy looked to be in her thirties, with brown hair pulled roughly back into a ponytail, her green zoo top clean and crisp. She smiled and ushered me in, locking the doors behind me.

I had called only half an hour before arriving, speaking with Trudy and asking if I could meet with her. She had willingly agreed despite the fact that I hadn't followed the correct procedure. It was at that point in the conversation that I had given her a false name, realising that if she called to verify my identity I would be in big trouble.

'Miss Hoffman?'

'Yes, thank you so much for letting me come.'

'That's perfectly alright, we always strive to help local students. Where are you studying again?'

I named a college in Gloucestershire for her, one that I had picked out after a quick course search online.

'But I hope to move up to one of the universities around here once I'm finished,' I added.

'Excellent,' the keeper smiled at me. 'And you're writing about foxes?'

'Yes. Mainly about our own red fox but I am also interested in other foxes. Artic foxes, bat-eared foxes, and so on,' I said, running through my entire knowledge of foxes.

'Well I'm afraid we don't have any red or artic foxes but we do have a new bat-eared fox. A female named Silver. Unfortunately she's in the nocturnal house which is closed at the moment. Twilight World is part of a police investigation at the moment. I'm sure you've heard about it.'

'Yes, I did hear something about it in the news.'

'Terrible business. But the animals still need caring for so I thought you could help me feed Silver this morning? You can take some photos of her and her habitat. Did you bring your camera?' Trudy asked.

I nodded, holding up my bag.

'This is very exciting. Thank you for letting me do this.'

'That's not a problem,' she grinned, leading me into the zoo. She left me for a moment while she gathered the prepared food. When she returned she handed me a box of raw meat. I saw an eyeball and immediately looked away. I'm not naturally squeamish, I put bullets into the heads of

werewolves on a bi-monthly basis at least, but something about the blank stare of the eyeball made my stomach turn.

Trudy led me through into the nocturnal house and immediately into a side door for zoo staff only. I followed closely. The staff corridors were lit, unlike the public paths of the house and I looked around at the walls with notes and photos stuck to them.

'Silver's this way.'

'So, how long has she been out of quarantine?' I asked as we walked.

'About three weeks.'

'Can I ask you something strange?' I said slowly, unsure of whether now was the right time or not.

'Sure.'

'Did anything happen during her quarantine?'

'Like what?'

'Any...strange behaviour?'

'No. She's perfectly normal and healthy. Here she is.'

Trudy stopped at a door which she unlocked and carefully opened. I followed her closely and leaned into the enclosure. It was dark and there was no movement amongst the small hills and dips covered in grasses.

'Sometimes she's hiding,' Trudy pulled at some of the scenery in the enclosure, looking into the hidey holes created for the fox. 'Maybe she's in this one,' Trudy checked another bedding area.

'That's strange. I'll just check...come with me and we'll go around the front.' She was trying to stay calm but I could hear the panic in her voice. I followed her as she locked up the enclosure and went into the public walkways of Twilight World. We walked back towards the bat-eared fox's enclosure and I was suddenly very aware of where I was walking, desperately waiting for my eyes to adjust.

'Isn't there a light switch?'

'Yes, but I can only turn it on in the bat-eared fox section. We can't risk upsetting the other animals.'

'Has she escaped?' We turned a corner.

'I don't -' Trudy didn't finish the sentence. Her breath left her body and she stood completely still. I stopped just short of bumping into her and looked up.

In front of us, before the glass of the bat-eared fox's enclosure, was the dark silhouette of a woman with her back to us.

'Excuse me,' Trudy said. 'Twilight World is closed.'

The woman turned and my gut twisted. For a moment her eyes flashed at us. My fingers ached for my missing gun.

'Hello?' I said, moving to stand beside Trudy. The woman wore a long, white flowing dress that reflected the limited light. She had blonde hair which cascaded down her back to her buttocks. Trudy, trembling, lifted her fingers to the light switch. The room was suddenly filled with brightness and I shielded my eyes against it. When I lowered my arm, the woman was gone. Trudy advanced. 'Where did she go?' She stormed past the bat-eared fox's enclosure and into the darkness of the nocturnal house beyond. I moved forward, about to cry out to her when something made me look to my left.

'Trudy?'

'What?'

'Come here.'

Trudy reappeared.

'Did you see her?'

'Looks like your fox didn't escape,' I pointed down into the enclosure where a small bat-eared fox looked back up at me. When Trudy moved to look, the fox darted away and into the cover of a hole. Trudy began muttering to herself as she cupped her hands around her eyes and looked into the enclosure. I looked around, getting my bearings, and wondered if this was the spot where Bane had vanished.