

Raucous laughter spilled out from the drinking house, a symphony of inebriation ready to be spliced. Victor thought 'this is my chance' as he spied the middle aged woman stagger towards his manhole like a newly born Colt. She was short and plump, like a well-padded cushion, reeking of musky aftershave and cheap whiskey. Under the gas lamp he saw that her wide, round face was framed by a mass of black unruly curls. Her skin hung in creased folds around her neck, as if she had shrunk inside it. The years had not been kind to her and decay was etched on a face covered in wrinkles like thin, crumpled paper. Her teeth had worn away into yellowing stumps resembling crumbling tombstones.

Victor placed his fingernails into the grooves of the cold iron screws and untwisted them. He silently lifted off the heavy metal cover. The sky was black and velvety, decorated with a full moon. The light poured down into the sewer and burst out onto the water, making it dance and shimmer. The London smog engulfed Victor, choking him. He tried not to cough - he had to stay quiet.

Victor hid in the dark and listened to the click clack of her shoes on the cobbled street draw closer. Soon she was in the alley next to him and he grabbed her. His mouth curled with revulsion as she made a defensive lunge, the skin on her arms were loose and flapped about like huge fleshy wings. It repulsed him. She yelled out, her voice high and harsh like the shriek of a seagull. Victor punched her and slammed her against the brick wall. Her bones cracked like twigs. He punched her again. Her hands were grasping at the air as she hit the cobbles. Victor's pale, skull like face split into a grin. He went to where the woman was lying and gave her a kick. Blood spewed out of her, making a vibrant pool of scarlet. He gazed at the woman with disgust, his eyes narrowing to slits.

Victor carried the woman down into the sewer. Her body was leeches of all colour, she looked almost transparent. A myriad of beady eyed rats emerged from every nook and cranny. Their hypodermic needle teeth wanted to nibble the woman like a chunk of bread. Victor stroked their silky brown hair and played with their baby pink tails like a pieces of string. He undid the woman's corset, pulled off her skirt and put it on. The blue satin reminded him of his mother's best dress. Victor felt a tugging in his brain. He was hot and clammy, every bone in his body felt weak. He curled in a ball, shuddering and shivering violently. Tears welled up in his eyes as he remembered back.

"Mam! Where are you taking me?" asked Victor. "Be quiet, my sweetheart, we are just going on a...little walk" his mother said. The words floating out her mouth as soft as a whisper. She tried to hold the smile, but her expression faltered. She pursed her lips together to smother the sob that welled in her throat. His mother hastily walked through the streets with little Victor hoisted up on her hip. She was painfully emaciated and though once beautiful, now looked like a walking skeleton. Her high cheekbones formed two slashes across her face and gave her a haunted look. There were shadows and bags like giant, purple suitcases, under her big brown eyes that had seen too much.

Victor snapped back to reality with a large rat crawling across his tummy. He reached out to pet her but she scurried off. His heart sank right through his chest onto the concrete floor where he lay. The pain of losing his Mam spread through his chest like a dull ache and a horrible sense of loneliness filled him. He looked around. Thousands of rats scurried towards the woman, a stampede of fur like a big brown wave. A possessed, furry tsunami of greedy animals. Their putrefying stench filled the sewer, but Victor knew no different. They started gnawing at the woman's arm like corn on the cob. Delight shone from his eyes like beams from a torch. He tilted his head forward and made an avuncular smile at the rats.

"I'm feeding my babies" he said in a croaky whisper. Victor felt a rush of warmth flow through his body. The rats made him feel loved, appreciated, like he was part of something. He looked after them and they looked after him.

The woman let out a scream that tore through Victor like a shard of glass. The rats immediately jumped up, but went back to their chewing. Her face was an eruption of blood, flesh and bone. As she screamed, she twisted in agony and thrashed savagely. This had never happened before, he

didn't know what to do. He strode over to the woman, trying not to stamp on the swarm of rats at his feet. He had to shut her up before someone heard.

He put his hands over her mouth. Her blood covered his hands and arms. The rats started to sniff him curiously. He thought nothing of it. These rats were his family, he was used to playing with them. But their thirst for human blood had become strong. They gnawed his fingers and drew blood. Then they frantically started squeaking and burrowed themselves into Victor's hands and arms, chewing at his veins like wires. Victor let out a shrill scream and tried to fling the rats off him. It didn't work. They clung on like magnets. They began to hastily crawl up his arms and within moments he was buried in them. He fell to the floor; submerged, drowning in the sea of rats, choking on their long slimy tails. He smelled their rotten stench for the first time. The creatures he had nurtured and loved had betrayed him, turned against him. The hurt he felt when his mother abandoned him returned and exploded in his heart like a firework. His heart sank. What heart? He should have destroyed everything he loved before everything he loved destroyed him.

Victor looked up and stared at the man hole. The light seemed to get bigger, until all he could see was white. Victor whimpered.

"Mam, why did you leave me? I was only five. Why, Mam? Why?"