

Daemons

Two nudges pressed against my cheekbones, as gentle and fleeting as a kiss. I looked up into the face of another daemon. She was beautiful, with arresting, contradictory features – her mouth too wide for her delicate face, her chocolate brown eyes too close together given their enormous size, her hair too fair for skin the color of honey.

‘Dr Bishop?’ The woman’s Australian accent sent cold fingers moving around the base of my spine.

‘Yes,’ I whispered, glancing at the stairs. Miriam’s dark head failed to emerge from below. ‘I’m Diana Bishop.’

She smiled. ‘I’m Agatha Wilson. And your friend downstairs doesn’t know I’m here.’

It was an incongruously old-fashioned name for someone who was only about ten years older than I was, and far more stylish. Her name was familiar, though, and I dimly remembered seeing it in a fashion magazine.

‘May I sit down?’ she asked, gesturing at the seat just vacated by the historian.

‘Of course,’ I murmured.

On Monday I’d met a vampire. On Tuesday a witch tried to worm his way into my head. Wednesday, it would appear, was daemon day. Out daemons than I did about vampires. Few seemed to understand the creatures, and Sarah had never been able to answer my questions about them. Based on her accounts, daemons constituted a criminal underclass. Their superabundance of cleverness and creativity led them to lie, steal, cheat, and even kill, because they felt they could get away with it.

Even more troublesome, as far as Sarah was concerned, were the conditions of their birth. There was no telling where or when a daemon would crop up, since they were typically born to human parents. To my aunt this only compounded their already marginal position in the hierarchy of beings. She valued a witch's family traditions and bloodlines, and she didn't approve of daemonic unpredictability.

Agatha Wilson was content to sit next to me quietly at first, watching me hold my tea. Then she started to talk in a bewildering swirl of words. Sarah always said that conversations with daemons were impossible, because they began in the middle.

'So much energy is bound to attract us,' she said matter-of-factly, as if I'd asked her a question. 'The witches were in Oxford for Mabon, and chattering as if the world weren't full of vampires who hear everything.' She fell silent. 'We weren't sure we'd ever see it again.'

'See what?' I said softly.

'The book,' she confided in a low voice.

'The book,' I repeated, my voice flat.

'Yes. After what the witches did to it, we didn't think we'd catch a glimpse of it again.'

The daemon's eyes were focused on a spot in the middle of the room. 'Of course, you're a witch, too. Perhaps it's wrong to talk to you. I would have thought you of all witches would be able to figure out how they did it, though. And now there's this,' she said sadly, picking up the abandoned newspaper and handing it to me.

The sensational headline immediately caught my attention: VAMPIRE ON THE LOOSE IN LONDON.