

Life in England isn't all tea and crumpets. Powerful vampire, Edmund Fitz Clare, knows this better than most. He's adopted a trio of humans, orphaned in the last Great War. They've grown up adoring their eccentric "professor" father, and he loves them more than he guessed his cold heart could. Redemption seems within reach . . . until a dangerous new enemy threatens to expose the truth of who and what he is.



Paddington Station, 1933

Graham Fitz Clare was a secret agent.

He had to repeat that to himself sometimes, because the situation seemed too ludicrous otherwise. He was ordinary, he thought, no one more so, but he fit a profile apparently. Eton. Oxford. No nascent Bolshevik tendencies. MI5 had recruited him two years ago, soon after he'd accepted a job as personal assistant to an American manufacturer. Arnold Anderson traveled the world on business, and Graham—who had a knack for languages—served as his translator and dogsbody.

He supposed it was the built-in cover that shined him up for spywork, though he couldn't see as he'd done anything important yet. He hadn't pilfered any secret papers; hadn't seduced an enemy agent—which wasn't to suggest he thought he could! For the most part, he'd simply reported back on factories he and his employer had visited, along with writing up impressions of their associated owners and officials.

Tonight, in fact, was the most spylike experience he'd had to date.

His instructions had been tucked into the copy of *The Times* he'd bought at the newsagent down the street from his home.

Paddington Station, the note had said in curt, telegraphic style. *11:45 tonight. Come by Underground and carry this paper under your left arm.*

Graham stood at the station now, carrying the paper and feeling vaguely foolish. The platform was empty and far darker than during the day. The cast iron arches of the roof curved gloomily above his head, the musty smell of soot stinging in his nose. A single train, unlit and silent except for the occasional sigh of escaping steam, sat on the track to the right of him. One bored porter had eyed him when he arrived, shaken his head, and then retired to presumably cozier environs.

Possibly the porter had been bribed to disappear. All Graham knew for sure was that he'd been waiting here fifteen minutes while his feet froze to the concrete floor, without the slightest sign of whoever he was supposed to meet. Doubly vexed to hear a church clock striking midnight, he tried not to shiver in the icy November damp. His overcoat was new, at least, a present from the professor on Graham's twenty-fifth birthday.

That memory made him smile despite his discomfort. His guardian was notoriously shy about giving gifts. They were always generous, always exactly what the person wanted—as if Edmund had plucked the wish from their minds. He always acted as if he'd presumed by wanting to give whatever it was to them. The habit, and so many others, endeared him to his adopted brood more than any parent by blood could have. The professor seemed to think it a privilege to have been allowed to care for them.

All of them, even flighty little Sally, knew the privilege was theirs.

Though Graham was old enough to occasionally be embarrassed by the fact, there really was no mystery to why Edmund's charges remained at home. Graham's lips pressed together at the thought of causing his guardian concern. If tonight's business kept him waiting long enough to have to lie to the professor about where he'd been, he was not going to be amused.

Metal creaked, drawing his eyes to the darkened train. Evidently, it wasn't empty. One of the doors had opened, and a dainty Oriental woman was stepping down the stairs of the central car. Her skin-tight emerald dress looked straight out of wardrobe for a Charlie Chan picture. Actually, she looked straight out of one, too, so

exotically gorgeous that Graham's tongue was practically sticking to the roof of his mouth.

He forced himself to swallow as her eyes raked him up and down.

"Hm," she said, flicking a length of night-black hair behind one slender shoulder. "You're tall at least, and you look healthy."

Graham flushed at her dismissive tone, and again—even harder—when she turned her back on him to reascend the stairs. Holy hell, her rear view was smashing, her waist nipped in, her bum round and firm. Graham knew he wasn't the sort of man women swooned over, not like his younger brother, Ben, or even the professor, whose much-younger female students occasionally followed him home. No, Graham had a plain English face, not ugly but forgettable. Normally, this didn't bother him—or not much. It just seemed a bit humiliating to find the woman who'd insulted him so very attractive herself.

That green dress was tight enough to show the cleft between the halves of her arse. His groin grew heavy, his shaft beginning to swell. The sight of her lack of underclothes was so inspiring he forgot he was supposed to move.

"Don't just stand there," she said impatiently over her shoulder. "Follow me."

Shoving *The Times* into his pocket, he followed her, dumbstruck, into a private compartment. She yanked down the shades before flicking on two dim sconces.

"Sit," she said, pointing to the black leather seat opposite her own. Her hand was slim and pale, her nails lacquered red as blood.

Graham sat with difficulty. He was erect and aching and too polite to shift the cause of the trouble to a different position. Hoping his condition wasn't obvious to her, he wrapped his hands around his knees and waited.

The woman stared at him unblinking—taking his stock, he guessed. She resembled a painted statue, or maybe a mannequin in a store window. In spite of his attraction to her, Graham's irritation rose. This woman had kept him hanging long enough.

"What's this about?" he asked.

She leaned back and crossed a pair of incredibly shapely legs, a move that seemed too practiced to be casual. Her dress was shorter

than the current fashion, ending just below her knee. Graham wasn't certain, but from the hissing sound her calves made, she might be wearing real silk stockings.

"We're giving you a new assignment," she said.

"A new assignment."

"If we decide you're up for it."

"Look," Graham said, "you people came to me. It's hardly cricket to suggest that *you're* doing *me* favors."

The woman smiled, her teeth a gleaming flash of white behind ruby lips. Graham noticed her incisors were unusually sharp. "I think you'll find this assignment more intriguing than your previous one. It does, however, require a higher level of vetting." She leaned forward, her slender forearm resting gracefully on one thigh. The way her small breasts shifted behind her dress told him her top half had no more undergarments than her bottom. Graham's collar began to feel as tight as his crotch. The space between their seats wasn't nearly great enough.

"Tell me, Graham," she said, her index finger almost brushing his, "what do you know about X Section?"

"Never heard of it," he said, because as far as he knew, MI5 sections only went up to F.

"What if I told you it hunts things?"

"*Things?*"

"Unnatural things. Dangerous things. Beasts who shouldn't exist in the human realm."

Her face was suddenly very close to his. Her eyes were as dark as coffee, mysterious golden lights seeming to flicker behind the irises. Graham felt dizzy staring into them, his heart thumping far too fast. He didn't recall seeing her move, but she was kneeling on the floor of the compartment in the space that gaped between his knees. Her pale strong hands were sliding up his thighs. His cock lurched like it could hasten their possible meeting.

"We need information," she whispered, her breath as cool and sweet as mint pastilles. "So we can destroy these monsters. And we need you to get it for us."

"You're crazy." He had to gasp it; his breath was coming so fast.

“No, I’m not, Graham. I’m the sanest person you’ve ever met.”

Her fingers had reached the bend between his legs and torso, her thumbs sliding inward over the giant arch of his erection. She scratched him gently with the edge of her blood-red nails.

“Christ,” Graham choked out. The feathery touch blazed through him like a welder’s torch. His nerves were on fire, his penis slit weeping with desire. He shifted on the seat in helpless reaction. Her mouth was following her thumbs, her exhalations whispering over his grossly stretched trouser front.

“I’m going to give you clearance,” she said. “I’m going to make sure we can trust you.”

He cried out when she undid his zip fastener, and again when her small, cool fingers dug into his smalls to lift out his engorged cock. Blimey, he was big, his skin stretched like it would split. She stroked the whole shuddering length of him, causing his spine to arch uncontrollably.

“Watch me,” she ordered as his head lolled back. “Watch me suck you into my mouth.”

Graham was no monk. He watched her, and felt her, and thought his soul was going to spill out his body where her lips drew strong and tight on him.

He didn’t want to admit this was the first time a woman had performed this particular act on him. He could see why men liked it. The sensations were incredible, streaking in hot, sharp tingles from the tip of his throbbing penis to the arching soles of his feet. She was smearing her ruby lipstick up and down his shaft, humming at the swell of him, taking him into her throat, it felt like. Her tongue was rubbing him every place he craved.

The fact that she was barking mad completely slipped his mind.

“Oh, God,” he breathed, lightly touching her hair where she’d tucked it neatly behind her ears. The strands were silk under his fingertips, so smooth they seemed unreal. “Oh, Christ. Don’t stop.”

She didn’t stop. She sucked and sucked until his seed exploded from his balls in a fiery rush. He cried out hoarsely, sorry and elated at the same time. And then she did something he couldn’t quite believe.

She bit him.

Her teeth sank into him halfway down his shaft, those sharp incisors even sharper than he'd thought. The pain was as piercing as the pleasure had been a second earlier. He grabbed her ears, wondering if he dared to pull her off. Her clever tongue fluttered against him, wet, strong . . . and then she drew his blood from him.

He moaned, his world abruptly turned inside out. Ecstasy washed through him in drowning waves. She was drinking from him in a whole new way, swallowing, licking, moaning herself like a starving puppy suckling at a teat. All his senses went golden and soft. *So good. So sweet.* Like floating on a current of pure well being.

He didn't know how long it lasted, but he was sorry when her head came up.

"You're mine now," she said.

He blinked sleepily into her glowing eyes. Was it queer that they were lit up? Right at that moment, he couldn't decide.

"I'm yours," he said, though he wasn't certain he meant it.

"You're not going to remember me biting you."

"No," he agreed. "That would be awkward."

"When I give you instructions, you'll follow them."

"I expect I will," he said.

She narrowed her eyes at him, her winglike little brows furrowing.

"I will," he repeated, because she seemed to require it.

She rose, licking one last smear of blood from her upper lip. As soon as it disappeared, he forgot that it had been there.

"Zip yourself," she said.

He obeyed and got to his feet as well. It seemed wrong to be towering over his handler, though he couldn't really claim to mind. She handed him a slip of paper with a meeting place in Hampstead Heath. As had been the case with the note tucked into his paper, the directions were neatly typed—no bobbles or mistakes. He had the idle thought that Estelle would have approved.

"Tomorrow night," the woman said. "Eleven sharp. You'll know when you've seen what we need you to."

"Will you be there?"

He thought this was a natural question. Any male with blood in his veins would want to repeat the pleasures of this night, if only to return the favor she'd shown him. But perhaps he wasn't supposed to ask. She wrinkled her brow again.

"I won't be," she said, "but chances are our enemy will."

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Kissing Midnight is scheduled for release
in June 2009.

Breaking Midnight and ***Saving Midnight***
follow in July and August.