

Adelaide's first experience of the Cavaliers was at their Summer Party of 1983, the end of her second year at Oxford.

She'd been in love. With the city, with the University, with her friends and above all with Sam, who she'd been together with for nearly two years. As far as she was concerned, the only thing that could improve matters was for Sam to do something sufficiently noteworthy to be accepted into the Cavaliers. One of her best friends was dating a member, and she was incredibly jealous of the social prestige it had brought her and the doors it had opened.

"With my background that wouldn't happen whatever I did," Sam had moaned when she'd brought the subject up.

"Oh don't believe the stereotypes," she'd snapped. "Contrary to popular belief, as long as you're willing to kowtow to tradition they care more about where you're going than where you're coming from."

He'd shrugged, and she'd continued to make her case. "You're clever, you're handsome, you enjoy dressing up, and everyone loves you. Let me help you excel in something, and they'll snap you up."

Deep down she'd known it was a lost cause. When Jamie, the Union Librarian, had bragged that he was in the running for selection and invited her to the Summer Party, she'd been unable to refuse, even though she'd suspected that his intentions were far from honourable. Sam had begged her not to go, but she'd promised not to do anything that would upset him, and he'd relented as he always did. She didn't see why she should miss out on the event of the year just because he hadn't made an effort.

It was a fantastic party, right until the moment when the inductees had to select a partner. Jamie called her up, and she had a momentary flash of panic, wondering what she'd be expected to do and how she'd get out of it.

Then, Augustine appeared. Immediately, she had a strange feeling of recognition and was unable to stop staring at him, but busy with the ceremony, he didn't seem to notice her.

Adelaide watched as the members drank from the candidates and made them drink their blood in turn. She was amazed that no one was screaming, but glancing around saw that everyone was frozen as though in a trance. Terrified, she decided that her best chance of survival was to pretend that whatever they'd done to the others had worked on her. She assumed a blank look and watched the cycle of blood exchange, trying hard not to faint or call out. As soon as Augustine started to speak, however, she had a strange feeling in her head and almost immediately slumped to the ground.

She woke to find Jamie standing with his hands on her shoulders. Suddenly, there was some kind of signal, and the old vampires leant forward and bit the dazed girls, before quickly thrusting the newly turned ones onto them. Some of the new members hesitated, some outright tried to refuse, especially where their partner was also their long-term girlfriend. Good old Jamie had no such qualms. He sunk his teeth into her neck with vigour. Adelaide's resolve to stay quiet and pretend she was as out of it as everyone else broke and she started to scream.

Tristan, the member in charge of that year's proceedings, came over, held her head and tried to make Adelaide look at him, but she wouldn't be pacified. Tristan called for Augustine in desperation. Augustine had looked at Adelaide properly for the first time and had momentarily frozen. The next thing she knew, he had grabbed Jamie, dragged him off her and thrown him half way across the stage. He bent and licked her neck to close the wound, the tension on his face showing what a challenge it was not to start drinking himself.

Tristan watched in amazement before scuttling away to tend to Jamie and to give Augustine some privacy.

"Who are you?" whispered Gus, wide-eyed.

"Adelaide French," she replied, trying to sound confident, though her voice was shaking and her throat ached from Jamie's attack.

"You remind me of the first person I ever killed. Outside of the battlefield at least. She was my wife. I was made to drain her in order to complete my transformation, and I couldn't forgive myself for centuries. Perhaps letting you go will be some kind of recompense."

She hadn't known how to even begin replying to that and had simply nodded.

"I'm going to drive you back to your college," Augustine continued. "By rights, I should wipe your memory, but I want you to remember me, and I'm sure no-one would believe you anyway. Promise me you'll say nothing."

She started to promise, but suddenly remembered where she'd seen him. Not in a past life, but in the Financial Times. He was the head of one of the country's biggest stockbrokers, the place she was hoping to work.

"I'll say nothing if you get both me and my boyfriend onto the Meridian and Lamb training scheme."

Looking at him to gauge his reaction, she saw to her surprise that he was smiling. "You have her personality too. I think we have a deal Adelaide. Now get us both another drink!"

She poured herself a much-needed brandy, took a swig of it and passed another glass to Augustine.

“Would you mind awfully if I were to put you under again whilst we finish here? I promise you won’t get hurt.”

Not wanting to push her luck too far, Adelaide nodded her assent. He touched her head, and the woods started to spin.

When she woke, she found herself sitting in his Bentley. They drove back to her college, talking and talking. Part of her was terrified, but on the whole she’d felt oddly comfortable, and the conversation flowed. Almost too soon for her liking, they were back to Somerville.

Once parked, Augustine asked if she’d let him try just a little of her blood. “As you’ve seen, I can control people’s thoughts and actions to a certain degree, but I promise I won’t use this power on you. You can make your own choice.”

Somewhat against her better judgement, she silently nodded. He leant in, gently licked her neck, and then slowly let his fangs sink through the skin and into the vein. She gave a little yelp at the moment of penetration, but after that, it didn’t hurt at all. She closed her eyes, and enjoyed the feeling of relief, of closeness and of being cleansed. It was difficult to keep track of time, but it could only have been a few moments before he pulled away.

“Thank you,” he sighed. “Please let me return the favour. I have no intention of letting you take enough to effect a change, but it’s a mark of respect to let someone drink our blood and not just use them for sustenance.”

A firm believer in trying everything once, she nodded again, and when Augustine opened the vein in his wrist she clamped her mouth to the wound and drank. It tasted more like mulled wine than blood, rich and slightly spicy, although there was a metallic undertone. She kept drinking, and quickly began to feel very relaxed and content. After a few moments, he pulled his arm away. He gave her the briefest kiss on her lips, licking away the last traces of blood as he did so, and then was suddenly all business again.

He opened the door and let her out. He wished her good night, said what a pleasure it had been to meet her and assured her that the job offers would be in the post. Already, the horror of what she’d seen at the party was fading. It felt like a bad dream and Augustine the only reality.

After a few seconds, he called her back. “Take this,” he said solemnly, taking a pendant from around his neck and pressing it into her hands. “I don’t ever want that sort of situation again, some young upstart thinking that they can help themselves to your blood. Wear this always and no one will dare.”