

## Quid Pro Quo

(Season three of London's Night Stalkers)

### Chapter 11 – Minions of the Gods

**“It was probably an illusion, though it was a really good one. Odours tend to give most people that sudden rush of memory of important or traumatic events. Pleasant odours, bad odours, it didn't seem to make any difference. For Patsy Smart it was the smell of a certain brand of floor cleaner. The slightest hint of that smell and she was back in the hospital, hearing that her father had died.”**

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Clara Copley was already feeling totally miserable and fed up by the time they reached the side of the pyramid. Normal sunshine, Earth type sunshine was bad enough. A client and his fiancé had once wanted to spend hours looking at the garden at the rear of the hotel, and of course Clara had to be there with them. A pretty garden, even if it was quite small. The dreadful couple had wanted to make sure it was suitable for their video of the great day. By the time it was over, Clara had streaming eyes, a new cough, and a sinus headache that hadn't gone away for months.

“Sorry.....Ignore me and my allergies.” She'd told the couple.

At least the couple had booked the hotel, though they had gone for the cheapest package on offer. The strange world with its two suns was making her feel worse than an afternoon with that couple. She'd sneezed so much that her mucus seemed to have dried up, and her tears. She could feel her eyelids scratching over the surface of her eyes.

“Oh Crap..... Sorry Liz, I know it's not your fault.” Said Mabina. “Where is the door though ? I had set my hopes on us arriving at a door, to take us into somewhere wonderfully dark.”

“It's there, we'll need to clamber up to it.” Said Liz.

It looked like a notch carved out of the side of the pyramid. Quite some way above them, so it probably looked smaller than it was. Clara was fit in the old use of the word, she could run for hours, covering miles with little effort. Imagining the climb up to the doorway though, in the bright light of two suns.....

“Fuck.....Come on then, let's get it done.” She said.

“You'd think whoever built this thing would have put in proper steps.” Said Mabina.

“Perhaps they did..... They're probably not human.” Said Liz.

It had been built as a step pyramid, but each step was about five feet high. Not that much of a struggle to climb, but enough to get them all wishing the door had been built at ground level. By the time they reached the wide gap between the stones, her skin was feeling burnt on her cheeks and across her nose. Never, even in the famous summer of nineteen seventy six, had her skin burned. Mabina had the same nasty looking burns on her cheeks. Not sunburn from overdoing a little sunbathing without sunscreen. The burns on Mabina's face looked serious, as though the sunlight was trying to burn her down to bone. Clara had no doubt that her face looked just as bad.

“Definitely not a good world for vampires.” Said Clara. “I really do think that too much time under these twin suns could kill us.”

“I'm just hoping Liz can open the door.” Said Mabina.

“You're forgetting that I am the Unnamed, Keeper of the Final Gateway. Of course I'll be able to open the door.” Said Liz.

None of them had been looking at the view from where they were on the side of the pyramid. All Clara wanted to do was get out of the sun and Liz was single minded on getting to the twenty first gateway as quickly as possible. Clara noticed the movement out of the corner of her eye.

“Look..... It’s a city.” She said.

Clara had no idea where the compass points were, or even if that world had a North or South. She pointed behind them and to her right. A long way off in the distance was a city full of glass that caught the sunlight and turned it into a reflected rainbow of colours. What confirmed it was a modern city were the objects in the air above the city.

“Those aren’t they ?” Asked Liz. “Tell me I’m not imagining it.”

“Flying machines Liz, aircraft.....If you’re imagining it, then we all are.” Said Mabina. “If only there was time to explore that city.”

“You’d probably find people who didn’t like us, no one seems to like us.” Said Clara. “Only instead of clubs and swords, they probably have weapons that can kill us quickly and efficiently.”

“My dear Clara, you’re such a cynic.” Said Mabina.

“I suspect she’s right though.” Said Liz. “We’ve yet to meet anyone friendly since entering the first gate. We should leave, I’ll open the door.”

Clara was used to seeing Liz change her hands. The long black tendrils formed a shape on the stone doors that only those fingers could trace out.

“I just realised...This door can only be opened by you.” Said Clara.

“Yes, which is why the door is high up on the pyramid. These people obviously thought that like them, I’d use a flying machine to get here.”

Liz changed her hand gestures and made wide sweeping movements over the surface of the door, before rolling her tendrils hands over each other. The doors began to open outwards, causing all three of them to step back a little. The dust and dirt of countless millennia, seemed to fall from the doors as they opened. As the doors fully opened a shudder passed through the pyramid and caused ripples through the ground, that went on for miles.

“Crap, we’ll need to hurry.” Said Liz. “The people in the city are bound to arrive soon. They may be happy to see us, or we might not be what they expected. Either way, we need to be on our way before they get here.”

“They might be friendly.” Said Clara.

“That is the worst outcome, we’d be stuck here for years.” Said Mabina. “Imagine how the modern day people of Egypt would react if the pharaohs returned. It would be a circus.”

Clara walked into the darkness beyond the doors and simply leant on the wall for a few seconds, enjoying the absence of burning sunlight on her skin. Mabina joined her and for a while, they both ignored Liz and her insistence that they needed to hurry.

“I think.....Yes, there will be lighting.” Said Liz.

Just a touch of Liz’s hand on the wall and some of the stone cladding began to glow with a low but steady light. Not enough light to read by, but it would be enough to find their way.

“Just think how long those lights have been waiting to be used.” Said Mabina.

“Come on, I can feel the gate.” Said Liz. “It’s a long way down, well below ground level.”

A passage led down from the doors, at a fairly steep gradient. It turned and dropped again, taking them into a large circular chamber.

“I felt the floor move just a little.” Said Clara.

The slight wobble of the floor reminded Clara of something. There had been a time when Simon and her, had used a window cleaner’s rickety platform to escape from a tall building.

"I know..... It's an elevator." She said.

Clara stamped her foot to illustrate the point by making the floor wobble. To everyone's amazement, including her own, the floor began to descend.

"Easier than thousands of stairs, or ramps." Said Liz.

The floor never descended at more than a slow speed, but it was easier than walking down. It gave them a few minutes to go through their packs and apply salve to burned skin. A drink of water and Clara felt ten times better than she had since they'd entered the world with two suns. Eventually the floor stopped descending and they walked out into a large underground chamber.

"Which way?" She asked Liz.

"Straight across." Said Liz.

There wasn't much light, only a few areas of stone panelling along the walls glowed with any sort of light and that was a dull yellow. Clara turned on the light fixed to her chest, quickly followed by the other two.

"Wow, it's like the terracotta army, made out of metal." Said Liz.

The plinths were stone, but the statues on them were made out of a silver metal. Rows upon rows of them. Clara wondered if they might be robots, until she had a closer look. All the statues looked to have been wrought out of the silver metal, with various weapons welded on later. Every statue reminded her of the carvings she'd seen in the tourist books Laura had brought back from Luxor. Mainly the body of a human topped with the head of a beast, though some were the other way around. There was even the statue of a giant cat on one of the plinths.

"Your very own army to escort you into the afterlife." Said Mabina.

"Or a symbolic battalion of guards." Said Liz.

They all heard the rumble of machinery, as the elevator platform headed back towards the surface.

"They're here sooner than I'd hoped." Said Liz. "Their flying machines must move at great speed."

"The elevator might return to the surface automatically." Said Clara.

"Perhaps.....We can't risk it." Said Liz. "Come on, the gate is close, I can feel it calling."

Another set of doors, hopefully the last they had to get through, at least for a while. Doors made of metal with a golden colour, mixed with flecks of silver. Words on the door, in large letters Clara didn't recognise.

"I know what it says, even though the language is strange to me." Said Liz. "I can't explain that, we'll have to accept there will be such paradoxes on our travels. The words say that only true servants of the Gods may pass. Actually no, it says.... Only faithful minions of the Gods may pass."

"That sounds mildly insulting." Said Clara. "I'm no one's minion."

"Think about it and we're all the minions of one God or another, whether we like it or not." Said Mabina.

Liz placed a black hand full of tendrils on the doors and made a few loud sounds that reminded Liz of a she wolf howling at the moon. The door opened inwards, to reveal another large chamber. They weren't going to need their lights.

"I always wondered about the sphinx." Said Mabina. "I mean.....It doesn't really fit in with anything else the ancient Egyptians constructed."

"The way has been prepared for me." Said Liz.

The statue of the sphinx was about thirty or forty feet long and stood a good twenty feet high.

Carved out of a single huge piece of rock, it was glowing bright yellow. Clara had no idea how the light was generated, but it was bright and filled the entire chamber. As Liz walked right up to the sphinx, the light became even brighter.

“Ready ?” Asked Liz.

“No.” Replied Clara.

“Good..... Keep close to me, both of you.”

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Laura inspected her troops, both of them. Hardly a cohort of well trained and disciplined warriors, but both of them were tougher and stronger than most who were totally human. Akiva had speed, strength and a skill with weapons that was probably as good as hers. As for Liam ? She wasn't sure what had happened to his body in the caves, but most of the mutations had made him stronger and faster. Some had probably twisted his mind, but he could still get the job done. All three of them were stood next to an enormous pile of C-4.

“Alright, time to go Akiva.” She said. “Don't get caught, but don't lose them until you hear the explosion.”

She hugged him, it seemed appropriate. Akiva had asked her to sleep with him if he won the bet. He hadn't, but his interest in her in 'that' way had been noted. Hugging him now seemed the right way to send him into extreme danger. He hugged her back.

“See you soon.” Muttered Akiva.

He ran towards the entrance to the chamber with the tomb. All Laura and Liam had to do for a while was watch, listen and most important of all, hide. Once Akiva had lured away most of the Akhens, it would be time to put the explosives in place.

“He's very brave.” Whispered Liam.

“Yes, he is.”

The old gun she'd given Akiva had once belonged to one of North London's most successful drug dealers, or maybe one of his henchmen. It suddenly filled the ancient caves with noise, as Akiva began to fire at the Akhens. A little dust falling from above reminded her that noise always brought the risk of a cave-in. There was no other sensible plan though, so it was a risk that had to be taken. “I'll take the first load of explosives, then come back for you.”

Liam merely nodded at her, they'd already been through the plan several times.

Two more booms loud enough to cause a few large pieces of rock to fall from the roof of the cave, and the Akhens were flooding out of the chamber in pursuit of a fleeing Akiva. She watched through the night vision sight on her rifle, as Akiva fired again while running. One of the brutes chasing him fell after being hit, but it was soon up on its feet again.

“He's doing well Liam.” She said. “We'll give them another minute or so to clear the chamber.”

“They can run very fast when they want to.” Said Liam. “Akiva might be killed.”

“I know.”

She'd named the skeletal looking creatures Akhens, though she had no idea of their true origins. Perhaps the Gods had punished the heretics of Amarna for building the pharaoh Akhenaten, his city to worship the sun ? Or of course the creatures had once been people, who'd been mutated by some force at work in the caves. They made no sound those Akhens, as she saw them leave the chamber and chase Akiva towards the ruined temple.

“Now.” Said Laura.

She'd already taken the tops off the boxes of powerful explosives. By wrapping her hands through the rope handles at the ends of the boxes, she could easily lift four full boxes. Once loaded up with C-4, Laura pressed her elbow against the metal disc that was lodged against her ribs. She hoped that Horus wouldn't delay her progress to burden her with yet more revelations about Liam, or Akiva, or

even the Couziniers. Luckily she had no sooner pictured the chamber with the tomb than she was there. Laura placed the four boxes of C-4 right next to the sarcophagus, before returning to Liam. "I never did think we'd be lucky enough to get rid of all the creatures." She said. "There are about five of them left in the chamber. You can concentrate of placing the explosive around the sarcophagus, while I use my rifle on the brutes."

"Alright.....I can work fast..... You'll see Laura."

Two more boxes of explosive and the detonators hung around her neck like a necklace. Liam knew the plan, he clung to her back as though his life depended on it, which it probably did. No God created deviations in their course, they were instantly in the chamber with the tomb.

"Ignore them Liam, just get those explosives in place." She said.

While he worked pushing slabs of C-4 up against the outside of the sarcophagus, she stood back and aimed her rifle. Using it standing up and unsupported wasn't ideal, but the range was next to nothing. Laura fired at the nearest of the Akhen creatures and it fell to the ground. The second one suffered a similar fate. She wondered how much in the way of problem solving ability they had ? Two survivors remained at the door to the chamber, while the third headed out of the chamber at speed. Were they bright enough to go for help ?

"That seems to have put them off for a while." She said.

Laura helped Liam place explosives, and at least for a few minutes, she ignored the idea that an Akhen might have gone to fetch a few friends. They were on the last box of C-4, when Liam called out to her.

"Laura.....Laura.....They're back."

The huge skeletal looking creatures obviously weren't as stupid as she'd thought. One had gone out to bring help and now about a dozen of them were lurking near the entrance to the chamber. Silent as always, they seemed to be watching what was happening.

"Keep going Liam, I'm going to try and discourage them from coming closer."

Her rifle only held five rounds, but it hadn't been designed for dealing with a dozen super tough enemies. An Uzi might have done better, though Laura doubted if it would have had the stopping power. She lifted her rifle and emptied a fresh clip, while moving her weapon from side to side.

"Well..... That could have gone better." She muttered.

One of the creatures was on the ground, but the rest weren't running away. They seemed to be talking in low muttering voices, the first proper sounds she'd heard them make.

"Crap Liam.....I think they're planning something."

Liam was still packing the last few slabs of C-4 against the outside of the sarcophagus. She removed the string of detonators from around her neck and handed them to him. Neither of them were that expert at setting explosives, but they weren't trying to do anything clever. They just needed a hell of a big explosion.

"Hurry up.....Here they come." She said.

"I'm doing the best I can." Muttered Liam.

Neither of them had proper training, just a few pages Akiva had found online on how to blow something up, without getting yourself killed in the process. It had all looked fairly straightforward in the notes, but the writer probably wasn't being attacked by angry Akhens. They were moving quite quickly now, heading towards the sarcophagus. Laura used her rifle carefully, a headshot at the two closest monsters. They fell and much to her delight, neither of them got up again.

"There are a lot of them now Liam, more coming through the door."

"Almost there.....One more wire."

The timer had been acquired by Akiva, from what he referred to as a normally reliable supplier. Laura ignored Liam for a minute or two, as she dealt with two more of the Akhen brutes. There had to be two dozen of them in the chamber now and all of them were heading their way.

“Done.....I think.” Said Liam.

“Are you sure ?..... We need to be sure.”

“I’m sure.”

Now it had arrived, the moment Laura had been looking forward to. In those daydream moments though, everything had been perfect. She’d been able to gloat as Liam had the ultimate jaw dropping moment. Mainly though, in the perfect scenario, there weren’t at least fifty skeletal monsters coming to kill her. Laura grabbed hold of the lid on the sarcophagus and pushed with all her strength.

“No..... Horus said not to.....No.” Shrieked Liam.

The lid was far lighter than she’d expected, or adrenaline had given her extra strength. The lid flew up into the air, turning over once, before crashing into two of the Akhens. Laura fired five times at the fast approaching horde, before looking into the open tomb.

“No.... You mustn’t.” Yelled Liam

There was the skeleton of a human, probably male. As Horus had told her, there was only one thing worth taking. Around the neck of the dead human was a necklace, and attached to the necklace was a large gold ring. Laura snatched up the ring and showed it to Liam. No words, Laura allowed the presence of the ring to call him a liar.

“You don’t understand Laura.”

She hit him and wasn’t surprise when the heavy blow barely seemed to bother him. He had a knife in his hand and was coming at her. Laura liked close fighting though, using a blade when you were close enough to smell your enemy’s sweat. She hit the back of his hand with her knuckles, but he still didn’t drop the knife.

“Liar..... You even killed your own friends.” She yelled.

“You just....Have no understanding. Horus mustn’t get that ring.”

Laura felt a hand brush her shoulder, as one of the huge Akhens made a grab for her. They were all close now, close enough to touch. No time for subtlety or fighting etiquette. As Liam came at her again, she hit him hard in the face with the stock of her heavy rifle. His screech of outrage, just made her hit him again. One of the Akhens had Liam then, dragging him across the chamber.

“Goodbye Liam.” Yelled Laura.

Laura knelt down and set the timer on the detonators to five seconds. She wanted eye contact with Liam before leaving though, he had to know he’d lost. As they glared at each other, she pressed her hand against the metal disc under her skin.

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It was probably an illusion, though it was a really good one. Odours tend to give most people that sudden rush of memory of important or traumatic events. Pleasant odours, bad odours, it didn’t seem to make any difference. For Patsy Smart it was the smell of a certain brand of floor cleaner. The slightest hint of that smell and she was back in the hospital, hearing that her father had died. As she followed Simon along the grubby hallway, none of the odours of stale sweat triggered anything specific, just the need to be cautious. The smell of that many unwashed bodies meant there had to be people in the rooms they were passing. She gasped as Simon put out his hand to try a door handle.

“I’m not keen either Patsy, but we have to look in these rooms.” Said Simon.

“Alright, just be careful.”

Simon opened the door about halfway, to reveal a room full of people. Young and old, a complete family by the look of it. One woman was doing something in a sink in the corner. They were ignoring Simon completely, as he put a foot inside the room.

“Hello..... Where is this place ?” Asked Simon.

The family ignored them both until Patsy felt brave enough to touch the arm of one of the children. A boy dressed in clothes very close to being rags, he looked to be about nine, maybe ten. The boy shuddered and moved away from her touch.

“What’s wrong with you ?” Asked a young girl.

“I’m not sure.....It felt like someone just walked over my grave.”

An odd expression for a young lad. Patsy shrugged at Simon and they both left the room, closing the door behind them. They tried another two rooms and once again, it was if they were the wraiths, the ghosts in that world. The only thing the people seemed to notice was being touched and their reaction was always shock mixed with fear. If it wasn’t for the view of the hallway of the house in Hornsey through the open door, Patsy would have been quite scared.

“Couldn’t we just go back to our side of the door and nail it shut ?” She asked.

“These people haven’t tried to hurt us Patsy, I don’t think we even exist to them. Come on, just a few more rooms.”

The statue of the dragon with the head of a lion wasn’t there when they’d entered the last room, she was certain of it. Now it was stood outside the end door of the corridor, fluttering its wings.

“It’s back.....It looks so different.” She said. “It looks.....Real.”

“Maybe in here, wherever here is.....It is real.”

Still predominantly gold in colour, there were a few green streaks in its wings. It looked so real, she could see its eyes blinking as it looked at them. The creature tapped one of its front clawed feet on the floorboards and let out a low growling sound. Satisfied that it had their attention, it appeared to walk straight through the door behind it.

“Well..... That would seem to be a hint at where we need to go.” Said Simon. “The offer is still there Patsy....I will do this on my own if you want to go home.”

“I’m not letting that.....Thing, scare me into leaving. Come on....”

She really wanted to be anywhere but there of course, though she’d die before admitting it. It was like the time she’d burgled Mabina’s house and slashed her sheets, before pinning her pillow to the bed with a wicked looking dagger. Sometimes Patsy could call on a reserve of courage. Often weird, misplaced and foolhardy courage. Her hand beat Simon’s to the door handle. The room beyond was quite disappointing.

“Alright dragon, you got us here.” She said. “Now what ?”

It was preening itself like a bird. The dragon creature leapt up from the floor onto a desk under the windows. The windows ! There had been windows in the other rooms, she just hadn’t really taken much notice of them. The creature had drawn her attention to the strange view of grey rooftops under a grey sky. Rooftops full of chimneys spewing out dark smoke. It was a view of somewhere that didn’t resemble any part of London she knew.

“It’s become a statue again.” Said Simon.

He was right, it had. It was as if the living creature which had leapt onto the desk, had solidified or been petrified in some way. It was now just a very good golden statue once again. The room was so plain though, so disappointing. A few tables and chairs and some bookshelves. The books on the shelves were matching colours, as though they’d been bought for decoration rather than to read.

“Surely it must have brought us here for a reason ?” She asked.

“The Couziniers were famous for being slightly crazy Patsy. I wouldn’t assume anything they possessed worked to any kind of logic, as Laura said.....”

Simon had touched a book, one of a whole row with green coloured spines. As his fingers had brushed the book, the entire bookcase changed. It was transformed, almost as though it was brand new again. The bookcase with all its books was clean, bright and colourful. Even the books had changed to become a variety of different coloured volumes. Patsy put out her hand to touch the grubby windows and her hand hit a thick set of velvet curtains. Pulling them aside she saw a view of an old fashioned cobbled street, complete with gaslight street lamps.

“This has to all be an illusion.” She said.

“I’ve found a door, but it needs a key.” Said Simon.

It was like a kind of renewal, everything they touched looked like new. Patsy thought the room had been waiting for someone to arrive, perhaps for a very long time. There were lamps on the walls now, with old fashioned gas mantles. After everything was changed, they were both stood in the centre of the room, looking around in amazement.

“There is one last thing.” She said.

Patsy still felt nervous, but she was certain the room wasn’t going to harm them. She touched the statue of the dragon creature, actually stroking its neck. When it began to change she pulled her hand back.

“Careful.” Said Simon.

“It’s alright.....I know it will be alright.”

As her hand touched the creature on its head, it was alive once more. It rubbed its head against her hand, like a cat wanting its ears rubbed. The creature appeared to cough and something bright and silver was in her hand.

“It’s a key, probably to the door you found.” She said.

The key fitted the lock and the door opened to reveal another dull and grubby looking room.

“It looks like the same trick again, touch everything.” She said.

“It must be the early hours of Sunday morning back in the real world. Do you need to phone your mum or something ?”

Ridiculous really, but Patsy found herself blushing.

“It’s alright, I warned her I might be staying over. Come on we can’t stop now, there’s another room to explore.”

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Despite showering and changing her clothes at Akiva’s apartment, Laura still felt grubby. The entire business in the caves below Dessie had left her trying to rub off a top layer of skin and wondering if anyone was telling her the truth. She dropped her clean clothes over the chair in the hotel bathroom and dropped the gold ring on top of them. A good long shower, without waking Tim if she did it carefully and quietly. Then she’d take a long look in the mirror, just in case anything had changed since she’d looked in the cracked mirror on Akiva’s bathroom wall. Laura cranked up the heat of the water, until it felt like she might be scalded.

“All that for a gold ring.” She muttered.

She wasn’t stupid; she knew there was more to the ring than just its value in gold. She’d even kept the necklace it was attached to, just in case that turned out to be important. It wasn’t just Akiva being injured and Liam blown to atoms that was bothering her. She’d changed down there in those caves, really changed.

“Damn that’s still sore.....Another scar for the collection, Tim will be pleased.”

There had been blood from the wound when she’d showered at Akiva’s. Vampires healed fast though and now there was a little pain but no bleeding. One of the Akhens must have put one of its claws into her back. Laura hadn’t even noticed at the time, she’d been too busy fighting Liam and trying to stay alive. She liked the mirror over the sink at The American Colony Hotel, it was the right height. Often in hotels she found herself crouching or stretching to look at herself. She wiped the steam from the mirror and moved in close, really close.

“Fuck.....I didn’t imagine it.” She muttered.

Liam had kept telling her the caves changed you, he just hadn’t been good at remembering the timescale. He had mentioned that the early changes had been mostly favourable ones. Laura had no intention of entering the caves again, so the changes to her face weren’t going to get any worse.

“Actually.....I’m not hating the look.”

It was her cheekbones and Laura turned her face around to see the effect of side lighting. Her cheekbones were different, but she quite liked how she now looked. Didn’t some women say they’d give their right arm for better cheekbones ? Laura knew her own face better than anyone of course, she looked at it many times every day, usually in bathroom mirrors. Would anyone else notice the changes ? Tim would, he’d even counted her scars. Tim, Simon and Clara would be told the truth and she might even tell Patsy. As for everyone else....

“I’m using a new brand of makeup.”

No clothes, she usually slept naked when she was with Tim. She loved the feel of his skin against hers, especially if things became a little hot and sweaty. She picked up the ring though, looping the necklace over her head, so the ring rested between her breasts. She joined Tim under the bedsheet and kissed the back of his neck. Still half asleep he turned towards her.

“You’re back....Good.”

They kissed and he must have felt the ring rub against his skin. Tim looked down and held the heavy gold ring in his fingers.

“Where did you get this ?” He asked. “It looks valuable.”

“That ring caused the death of someone I hoped might be a new friend.” She said. “It caused someone I know to be injured and it has made me question the motives of the person who wants the ring. It’s changed me Tim, my whole world seems.....Upside down.”

“Do you want to talk about it ?”

“Yes I do, just not tonight. I have somewhere to go first thing in the morning, but then we will have that long talk I’ve been promising for far too long.”

“Great.....But please tell me why there’s a sword leaning against the wall ?”

Crap, she’d forgotten leaving Akiva’s favourite sword near the door. He’d expected her to ask him for something he valued after losing the bet, so she’d claimed his sword. She’d give it back to him of course, but only after he’d suffered a little first. Cracked ribs and mild concussion didn’t mean she wasn’t going to give him a hard time.

“Ahhh Akiva’s sword..... Can we add that to the list for tomorrow’s chat ?”

“It is tomorrow Laura, it must be almost dawn, but yes, explanations can wait.”

She kissed him with an intensity that surprised even her. There had been a temptation to enjoy sex with Akiva, but there’d probably always be someone around to tempt her. It was probably more lust and familiarity than love, but she wanted to be with Tim.

“Fuck me Tim..... Fuck me as hard as you can.”

An hour or so after sunrise, she left Tim tangled up in damp sheets. Laura wanted to meet Horus, give him the ring and move on to the next thing on his list of odd jobs he had for her. No shower or doing her hair, she just pulled it tight back and used an elastic band to hold it in place. Horus wasn't a date or a friend, she didn't think she liked him that much. She put on the clothes she'd left on the chair in the bathroom. The ring was still around her neck, probably covered in her lover's sweat. "Let's get it done." She muttered.

Laura closed her eyes and pictured his throne room in her mind, the room with so many empty thrones. In her mind she placed him on his throne, complete with those bird-like eyes of his. When she had the mental image as good as it was ever likely to be, she pressed hard on the Egg of Astaroth. There was a little pain from a bruise one of the Akhens must have given her, before the now familiar golden mist seemed to fill the hotel's bathroom.

"Everything is always gold....It has to mean something." She mumbled.

No sense of movement, it was as if reality had moved around her. Laura was stood in the throne room and again there was a lot of movement out of the corner of her eye. She was certain other Gods were there, watching, listening.

"You have done well Laura Selway." Said Horus. "I can feel you have brought the ring with you. I can also feel that the creature calling itself Liam Gagnon, now walks among the dead in the Underworld. There will be a gift for you Laura, perhaps several gifts."

She wanted to tell him how not knowing the truth from the beginning had nearly meant failure. Laura wanted to tell off a God and realised how stupid that was. She took the necklace from her neck and dangled it in her right hand. No use asking why it was so important, he's only become angry. And he might not give her the gift.

"Yes Laura.... The ring.... Come and sit before me."

The chair was new, normally she stood in front of him. The chair was gold of course, everything was gold. It appeared quite close to Horus, though she had stood closer. Laura sat on the chair and waited for him to ask for the ring. There was an unwritten and largely uninstructed etiquette when communicating with Horus, which she was picking up by trial and error. Never giving him something until he asked for it seemed fairly high on the list.

"So Laura.....Tell me.....What do you think I will do with the ring."

She had no idea what the ring even did, besides annoying Tim every time it had dug in his chest while they'd been having sex. The answer came to her, it was obvious when she thought about it.

"You're going to destroy it." She said.

"Well done Laura, you will definitely receive several gifts today. Give it to me."

She dropped the ring into his outstretched palm. He'd never ask her to explain her answer, though he must have understood how she knew. She might never have worked out that Liam was planning to kill her and grab the ring. The most likely outcome out of all that, was Akiva being killed and Liam being destroyed when she beat him in a fight and blew up the chamber with the tomb. Not that different to how things had worked out, apart from Akiva still being alive and Horus holding the ring in his hand. Logically either scenario was acceptable to Horus. Blown up or destroyed by him, the ring was probably going to be vaporised. It might be a harmless token, a fake to test her worthiness. Or the ring might be the ultimate weapon mankind needed to defeat the Gods. Either way, it became nothing but a pile of gold dust, as Horus crushed it in his left hand.

"You will still be given instructions by the Couziniers Laura. If you ever feel their information might be false or misleading, come and see me."

"I will, thank you."

She wasn't imagining it; Horus was actually relieved now that the ring was nothing but gold dust on his gold floor. Laura was beginning to understand why an Ancient God needed the help of mere humans, or even mere vampires. Mabina had showed her an idea in ancient books and Magda had hinted at something similar. Often it was only a glimpse of an idea, or a great truth. When Wiremi had told her, he had spoken in a whisper, as though it was heresy.

"There is a natural conclusion Laura to a great many converging ideas." Wiremi had told her. "That the only way the universe makes any sense, is if the Gods themselves have limits to their abilities." That was it, Horus needed her to go to places he couldn't go, to retrieve items he might not be able to find or even touch. No mentioning the gifts, that was certain to annoy him. As the throne room grew indistinct, she found herself in a chamber full of weapons and armour. Not a neat collection on racks or hung on walls, but in disorderly piles on the floor, or leant against walls.

"These are the weapons and armour of the fallen Laura. Take what you want.....Take all that you can carry." She heard the voice of Horus in her mind.

The fallen made no sense to her, who were the fallen ? Never look a gift horse and all that. Laura spent some time looking for anything she might like, or her housemates might appreciate. When she was carrying enough weapons to start a minor war, she pressed her elbow on the disc under her skin. Despite her thinking hard about Akiva's apartment in Rabat Eshkol, she was returned to the hotel bathroom at the American Colony Hotel. The Egg was a wonderful way to travel, but it sometimes seemed to have a mind of its own. The sound of her dropping a huge number of antique and priceless weapons, brought Tim running into the bathroom.

"Gifts....I was given a few gifts." She said. "Help me hide them somewhere the maid won't see them and then..... Finally we'll have that long and very overdue talk."

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