

## The Hornsey Vampires

(Season two of London's Night Stalkers)

### Chapter 13 - Luxor

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Wiremi spent so much time in the world of dreams, that he sometimes wondered if his physical existence was real at all. He was still sat in front of the fire at the base of the tree which seemed to have existed forever. Daylight told him he was in the real world; the land of dreams was a place of perpetual night, though not always a place of darkness.

“Has the sacrifice been prepared ?” He asked.

The woman to his right merely nodded. The people sat around the tree were the best of those he'd trained, the brightest and quickest learners from all the seventeen tribes of the forest. He trusted them to obtain a sacrifice at the right time, a sacrifice acceptable to the Gudara. Wiremi looked at the shadow of the great tree, as it touched his feet.

“It is time.” He said.

Wiremi didn't lead, his acolytes knew where the sacrifice was bound and waiting. Normally all their sacrifices were willing and eager, being sacrificed was considered an honour. Sometimes though, there needed to be a special offering to a particularly important Gudara. There was a nomadic tribe, who passed by the edge of the forest once or twice a year. A fierce race of warriors, their young men were prized as sacrifices to the devourers.

It was quite a walk to the glade where the yellow ashunt flowers bloomed. Normally the sacrifice would be left tied up and lying among the tiny yellow flowers. It wasn't unknown for the warrior nomads to try and free their people, so the young man was well guarded.

“This one is fierce, he killed two of our skilled hunters.”

“Good, his blood will be strong.” Said Wiremi.

The nomad was tied and gagged, but he was still struggling and his eyes were filled with hate rather than fear. He'd make the perfect sacrifice to feed Laura's Gudara.

“Bring him.....Follow me, carry him if you have to.” Shouted Wiremi.

Not far, he had them drop the sacrifice in amongst the thickest area of yellow flowers. Gudara were messy feeders, much of the nomad warrior's blood would end up covering the ground. The plants liked it though, next year's yellow flowers would be a brighter yellow.

“Move back..... Leave him, he can't go far bound at wrists and ankles.” Said Wiremi.

The young man was trying though, rolling himself to one side. Wiremi knelt beside him, almost admiring the warrior's determination to survive.

“I know the ways of your people, the Wanoyama.” He said. “Try to escape and one of my people will put an arrow in your back. What will your Gods think of that, a warrior killed while running away ? Stay still and accept your fate.... The Gudara kill quickly.”

The man nodded and stopped struggling. His people weren't far enough back, Laura's Gudara was a huge brutal male, nothing like the gentle aspect who visited her.

“Move back..... Further, he hasn't fed in quite some time.”

The brute didn't need to be summoned, Wiremi could see him pacing about among the trees. The seer waved the devourer forward, but remained stood between the creature and his meal. The Gudara ran forward, roaring as he came, but Wiremi stood his ground.

"This offering comes with conditions." He said.

The beast was so big, it towered over him, its hot breath hitting his face. The Gudara could be unpredictable, but so far none had ever seriously injured him. They might not be able to speak, but they were intelligent and knew that Wiremi controlled the most precious thing of all, the offerings of blood. He put his hand on the devourer's huge chest and pushed, just a little.

"This is no docile and submissive offering." He said. "This is a warrior, a fighter with strength in his blood. An agreement is the price for this offering and your obedience. You must agree to come instantly if I summon you and attack whoever I send you against. No hesitation, no changing your mind. I will send you against whatever might be attacking Laura. Do you understand?"

The devourer was nodding, but his eyes weren't promising anything. Once again Wiremi stood his ground, keeping the brute away from his meal. Wiremi put his face right up against that of the Gudara. The beast was huge, its fangs large enough to look like tusks. One fang was so huge that it couldn't close its mouth properly, spittle ran over its lips and down its neck in a steady flow. One day Laura would learn the dreadful truth, if she hadn't worked it out already.

"This is important." Yelled Wiremi. "There are others who would like this precious blood. You must agree to come when I call and fight whoever I send you against. Laura's enemy must be your enemy.... Do you agree?"

Good, the brute nodded and its eyes were in agreement this time.

"Then the offering is yours..... Just remember what you must do."

Looking away was an insult to the sacrifice, so he watched, as did the rest of his people. The Gudara ripped out the warrior's throat and fed on the steady stream of blood. A great deal of it was spilled onto the ground, but the devourer drank enough to last it for some time. Another reason for not looking away was that it would show disrespect for the blood and blood was everything. The Gudara ripped open the man's chest after the flow of hot blood ceased. It ate the heart, before dropping the body and walking back into the forest.

"Bless the Gudara." His acolytes chanted. "He protects us and his leavings fertilise the ground."

Yes, one day Laura was certain to understand one of the truly great secrets. The Gudara were older than mankind and had once fed on all creatures that walked or slithered across the ground. Humans weren't fallen angels or risen apes, they had adapted and evolved from the Gudara. All the billions of people on planet Earth were descended from the devourers, the ancient vampires.

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Jack had thrown a few tantrums about missing London and wanting to live permanently in the five star hotel. It had been annoying, but Daniel now thought of those tantrums as a blessing, they'd prevented Gwen from sharing his bed that night. So far he hadn't beaten the man called Steve, or threatened him that much. There had been the obligatory warning that he shouldn't try to escape of course, with the 'or else' left as an implied threat. Daniel leant over and pushed Steve upright and against the barn wall, so he could speak to him better. Fiona his prize sow had slobbered over the man a little, but hadn't taken a bite out of him.

"You're driving license says you're Steve Gorman." Said Daniel. "I thought you gangster types never carried personal ID on a job."

"That's just in the movies..... Can I have a drink?"

"After we've talked I'll make you a proper breakfast. You'll need to be honest with me though."

“And if I don’t feel like talking ?”

Daniel wasn’t sure what he’d do if Steve Gorman refused to confirm that he worked for Bill Jarrold. The men from London had shouted about killing him and Gwen, yet he found it hard to work up any enthusiasm for inflicting pain.

“For a start there’ll be no breakfast.” Said Daniel. “I know you and the others did some damage and I should want to beat the crap out of you. I’ve fed though and fed well on Tony, Martin and the other guy. Part of me feels I owe you a huge thank you for bringing them here.”

“Connie, the other guy was Connie.” Said Steve. “What did you do with them ?”

“Buried nice and deep, I’ll deal with your car tonight.”

“What the hell are you Daniel ?” Steve asked him.

“Come on Steve, you know what I am.”

“You don’t have to kill me.....I have money, I can vanish abroad. I give you my word.....”

Daniel waved his hand at Steve, they both knew how their conversation was going to end. Breakfast first as promised, before Steve went into the grave waiting for him near the septic tank.

“No use Steve, you know that.” Said Daniel. “Killing all of you will bring its own problems, but not as many as letting you go. The police will eventually look for you to ask about the others and they might end up on my doorstep.”

“If you’re going to kill me anyway.... Fuck you and your questions.”

“Really, do you mean that ? What I did to Tony was fast, I could have taken days over killing him. Are you good with pain Steve ?”

Steve wasn’t, Daniel could see the fear in his eyes. Like a lot of brutal men who were good at delivering pain, Steve probably wasn’t good at taking it.

“Fucking psycho..... What do you want to know ?”

“Easy really, let’s start with who sent you. I know it was William Jarrold, I just want you to confirm it, so there’s no mistake.”

“Yeah. Bill sent me here, even insisted that I offered you money instead of thumping you. He’ll send others now, probably eight guys next time.”

“I’m quite good at dealing with unwanted guests.” Said Daniel. “Last question and then I’ll make you some coffee and a fried breakfast. Who does Bill think I’m working for ?”

Good there was confusion on Steve’s face. There had been no hint in the conversation between the four men the night before that Daniel might know Simon or Clara. The look on Steve’s face had just confirmed his ignorance.

“Work for ? That bitch Tasha said you were a freelance journalist..... Who do you work for ?”

“Never you mind, I’ll get you that breakfast.”

“Untie me first, my feet have gone dead.”

“When I get back. And don’t upset Fiona or she might take a bite out of you.”

“Oh we’re fine, she’s agreed to a second date.”

Daniel moved the men’s hired car on the way back, just in case the postman arrived that morning and asked questions. There was some damage in the house, but he’d already cleaned up the worst of the blood. It would need a thorough clean with bleach, but a casual caller would see nothing out of the ordinary and Daniel rarely had casual callers.

“And the condemned man ate a hearty meal.” Daniel muttered.

The sausages were a day or so out of date, but they smelt fine. He made Steve the full English breakfast he’d intended for himself. Daniel put everything on a tray, including his own coffee and two slices of toast to nibble at. His stomach was still full of blood, but he still fancied toast.

"I'm back." He yelled. "Can we take the threats as read if I untie you so you can eat ? Trust me, you'll never outrun me."

"Fine, tether me to the pig if you want."

"That's not such a crazy idea."

Daniel put the breakfast tray on the table, next to the machete he'd brought in case Steve wasn't talkative. He untied all the flex from Steve's wrists and ankles, before using some of it to tether him not to the pig, but to one of the thick wooden uprights of Fiona's pen.

"If I so much as think you're trying to undo this....."

"It's too tight, my hand is going red."

"Shut up and eat."

Steve ate while he nibbled at his toast. Everything was fine, until there was the sound of a car coming up his driveway. A little too early for the postman and he wasn't expecting any other visitors. It sounded like Gwen's car, but he wasn't expecting to see her until the evening.

"Sit quietly and eat, otherwise....."

"I know.... I know.... Fiona will savage me." Said Steve.

It was Gwen, her car was in front of the house, with her about halfway up his front path. Did he look alright ? He hadn't checked himself for blood stains since giving the basement a quick clean.

"Gwen, I wasn't expecting you."

"It was Jack, wanting to see how the animals were doing. Plus I think he's worried you might get someone else to take his job as parcel wrapper."

"I'd never do that..... Where is he ?"

"He ran off to find you."

Daniel heard the sound of Fiona squealing, though he was certain Gwen's hearing wasn't good enough to hear the sound. The huge sow was one of the most peaceful and quiet pigs he'd ever owned. Something had to be upsetting her.

"Stay here Gwen, please..... Trust me."

As Daniel ran he could hear the sow becoming more and more agitated. By the time he entered the barn, her squealing was almost deafening. She was scared, knowing there'd been a fight, sensing the violence.

"Quiet girl..... Quiet." Called Daniel.

Steve had undone the flex tied to his wrist and tried to run, that much was obvious. There was Daniel's machete in the centre of Steve's chest and a growing pool of blood. Poor Jack was kneeling on the ground and crying. Daniel knelt and tried to comfort him.

"Are you alright Jack ? What happened ?"

"Fiona was upset, he scared her..... He yelled at me..... I was so afraid....."

Jack would probably never tell anyone the full story, even Gwen. Daniel could guess that Jack had been panicked by Fiona's squealing and the presence of a large threatening stranger. He might have just picked up the machete simply to defend himself. Daniel hugged the poor boy.

"Did I do wrong ?"

"No Jack, he was a very bad man."

Steve Gorman wasn't quite dead, Daniel could sense a very slow heartbeat. As the mobster died he felt another human heart beating behind him. Daniel turned and saw Gwen standing just inside the barn, a look of horror on her face.

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Getting to Luxor hadn't been that straightforward, several different vehicles and a private jet courtesy of Sam had been required. Some of it was to do with local politics, but most of the complications were so they could arrive looking like tourists. It had cost a lot of money and favours called in by Sam, for their executive jet to land at Luxor International Airport.

"My rather eccentric reputation will work in our favour." Magda had told them. "I'm known here and after the initial flurry of gossip, the locals will forget all about me."

Laura hadn't been involved in the logistics of the trip. For her it was all a whirl of changing cars several times before boarding a private jet. In Luxor there had been another whirl, being whisked through immigration as a friend of Magda's, a writer and collector of antiquities with an international reputation. At the hotel the best suite in the hotel was demanded and provided. Laura loved not having any decisions to make for a while, allowing herself to be cosseted and pampered by the hotel staff.

"I could get used to living like this." She'd told Mabina. "I'm normally the one doing all the pampering at the hotel. So nice to enjoy five star living from the other side."

Before bed there had been a call to London. Laura didn't worry about the time difference, if he was up he was up and if he wasn't, there was voicemail. Clara might get angry about calls at weird hours, so she'd decided on the plane to always call Simon. His phone went straight through to voicemail. After a fairly standard 'I'm loving it here, the weather is wonderful,' type of message, she ended with.

".....I'm sensing Liz and Magda are forming a bond, perhaps a physical relationship. Brendan doesn't appear to have noticed, but this might cause complication."

Liz was probably just keeping Magda happy; she'd probably slept with other middle aged women for money. The signs were subtle, but to her eyes Magda looked fairly smitten. The most worrying thing was how Brendan might react, if he thought Liz was making whoopee with the opposing team. After a suitably lavish breakfast, the hotel provided them with something called a microbus to take them to Karnak. In no time at all they were all behaving like tourists, with Liz even taking pictures on her phone. It was hot and sunny of course, which meant a lot of sneezing and headaches for Laura and Mabina. Brendan was suffering too, the way all those with ginger hair and freckles have always suffered under harsh sunlight.

"Floppy hats, that's what we need." Said Mabina. "Big large brimmed, floppy hats."

It wasn't only vampires wanting to escape the sun; there were plenty of vendors selling floppy hats to tourists. The hat didn't stop all the nasty side effects of too much sunlight, but Laura found she could now function without sneezing and wheezing.

"Here we are.....The temple of Thoth." Said Mabina.

It all seemed far too easy, just a short trip in an air-conditioned microbus after a superb breakfast in a luxury tourist hotel. It didn't seem right; there'd been no struggle to get there, no arduous trip across the desert by camel, no avoiding heavily armed bandits. Laura smiled at Magda, but felt a little disappointed.

"There are so many people here, is this really where people from your order have died?" She asked, quietly.

"It is all a bit more..... Disneyland than I expected." Said Liz.

"Is Thoth the guy with the beak?" Asked Brendan.

He was pointing to one of many carvings, all showing a muscular looking man with the head of a bird.

“Yes Brendan, Thoth is shown in many forms, but usually with the head of an Ibis.” Said Magda.  
“We’re actually stood in the Temple of Thoth at Qasr el-Aguz, a little off the main tourist routes.”  
“It’s not what I expected..... But it’s beautiful.” Said Liz.

It was there again, the expression on Magda’s face whenever Liz spoke. Laura just hoped they could find the Egg of Astaroth and be back in London, before Brendan noticed Magda was getting hot and sweaty with his girl.

“Gorgeous, a real hidden gem.” Said Mabina. “But are you really saying there is a secret part of the temple just under our feet ? Surely with so many tourists every year.....It would have been noticed.”  
Magda kept walking, leading them past various reliefs on the walls, most of them still legible to anyone who might know hieroglyphics, which Magda obviously did.

“This is a temple to Thoth, so not surprisingly most of the surviving walls are covered in writing praising him and talking about his powers.” Said Magda. “The temple may be small, but we are talking about Thoth, God of the Moon, Magic and Writing. The wisest of the Egyptian gods.”  
There had been no fence or signs, yet it felt as though they’d wandered off the official route. There were no longer any tourists near them, as Magda pointed at a hole in the ground. It looked what it probably was, a three feet wide hole where something below had collapsed.

“Down there..... You’re joking.” Said Laura

“Surely someone’s child might easily fall down there.” Said Liz. “Then there’d be a search..... Wouldn’t there ?”

A dusty hole in the ground didn’t seem very Indiana Jones, but Magda was actually laughing.

“Your faces, but I have maps back at the hotel, detailed maps that members of my order gave their lives to put together.” Said Magda. “Some of their bodies have never been recovered, you will probably find what’s left of them down there. As for the secret levels never being discovered....You can partly thank the Egyptian government.”

“But they encourage tourism.” Said Brendan.

“Yes, but try coming here with a trowel and a shovel and you’ll be arrested. The country survives on tourism, most of it brought in by the historical sites. Nothing is ever allowed to threaten their heritage, even legitimate archaeologists. Like an over protective parent, the government ties people up in years of red tape to get permits to dig here.... Most simply give up.”

“Good news for us.” Said Mabina.

“Yes, but sad for those who genuinely want to make new discoveries.” Said Magda. “Go down that hole and you’ll find a passage heading north. Know the right place and a secret door will take you into a partially collapsed chamber.... Another hidden door..... Then another. Deep under our feet is a labyrinth of passages stretching for miles. An army could get lost down there.”

“But not us..... You have a map.” Said Mabina.

“Precisely, though obviously you’ll need to come back at night.” Said Magda.

Laura looked down the hole and felt something pulling her mind down there, along the passageways she’d seen in her dreams.

“Hold onto the grains of sand.” She muttered.

“Sorry, I missed that.” Said Magda.

“We should do it tonight, no point in drawing things out.” Said Laura.

Magda was giving Liza that look again, obviously looking forward to spending a few nights in the hotel.

“I think..... You need to be fully prepared.” Said Magda.

“She’s right, we’ll do it tonight.” Said Mabina.

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Simon knew about the events at Daniel's house before his weekly meeting with Tom. As usual Daniel had talked only to Clara about what had happened and even then he'd needed to be cautious over the phone.

"It was all told in Daniel code." Clara had told him. "It appears a few of Bill's people won't be going home again. Which means that Bill might send half his mob after Daniel next time."

"I can't ask Tom directly, but he's usually talkative. I'll probably find out something from him. How is Gwen taking all this?"

"She wasn't there at the time, but she arrived the next morning, just in time to see the aftermath. From what Daniel said she's removed herself from his life and will only return if he offers her a reasonable explanation for all the blood and mayhem."

"Crap..... I wish him luck with that." Said Simon.

"I made all the right noises, but Gwen might have gone forever." Said Clara. "There was something Daniel wasn't telling me, something he's ashamed of."

"Daniel ashamed..... Are you talking about our Daniel?"

"I know, but there's something and Jack is a part of it."

"I'll see what Tom knows, but no promises."

Simon drove up to the breakers yard not really knowing what to expect. They had no idea he knew Daniel, but Tom knew that Simon was planning something against Bill. Taking out a few of his men might look like Simon had recruited someone north of the border. The gate opened for him, with Beetle fussing about as he drove inside.

"The boss is down by the river." Said Beetle. "He wants to see you, important he said."

"But it's pouring with rain."

"He took some umbrellas."

Simon drove as close as he could get and then trudged across the area of wet cinders, which led down to the river. Tom had two chairs setup by the fence and he was holding two large golfing umbrellas. As Simon sat on a slightly soggy chair, Tom handed him an umbrella.

"Beetle said you wanted to see me."

"Something dreadful happened Simon and I'm hoping it's none of your doing. Steve Gorman is missing presumed dead and he'd known Bill for years, since the old days when they'd stolen cars together. Steve was like a brother to him, or so Bill says now. A few weeks ago Bill was calling him a useless wanker, but now he's dead..... He was like a brother. You know how these things go."

Simon often thought of his days as an assassin with the Medici as the golden year of his existence as a vampire. Those days really did feel like simpler, more innocent times.

"I promise you Tom, the disappearance and death of poor Steve was nothing to do with me."

"Good I didn't think it was your style."

"Does Bill have any theories about who did it?" Simon asked.

"Steve went to offer someone a bribe, an old guy who wouldn't say boo to a goose. Some of Steve's guys had dealings with a hard card in Glasgow though, a brutal piece of work called Neil. Bill has put two and two together and come up with about sixteen. You can guess what will happen next."

"Yep, Bill will send his friends north of the border and no one will ever see Neil again." Said Simon.

"Precisely, I'm just glad it was nothing to do with you.... Now if it had been death from a sniper on the roof or anything....."

Simon held his hands up in mock surrender.

"Not guilty Tom, Laura is currently out of the country."

“Anywhere nice ?”

“Egypt I believe, she’s doing the full tourist trail.... Pyramids the works.”

“Sounds nice.”

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Magda had been through the maps and notes so often that she was sick of them, so she knew how Mabina and Laura must be feeling. The two vampires were as prepared as they were going to be and she was now making sure their backpacks contained anything they might need.

“I still think we should have been dressed in black.” Said Laura.

Poor Laura was still upset at not being given a handgun to take with her. It might have been useful, but the risk of it being seen by the ever present police force was too great. Liz didn’t help Laura’s bad mood.

“I think your Lion King T shirt is gorgeous.” She said.

“I know you can run fast and hide in the shadows, but you’re better off looking like tourists out for a late night stroll.” Said Magda. “We’ve been through this, you both agreed.”

“Fine.” Said Laura.

“I’ll dress up in anything, if it means finding ways to be at my best again.” Said Mabina. “Just make sure Omer has left the weapons we asked for inside the temple.”

“He’s already called to confirm that.” Said Magda.

Mabina didn’t worry her at all; the ancient vampire queen was on a mission to restore herself, to restore her powers to how they’d once been. Laura was different though, she was an unexpected arrival, an unknown. Magda didn’t like unknowns, they could be dangerous.

“My pack feels a bit light.” Said Laura. “Are you sure everything is in there ?”

“There’s a little water, but you said you didn’t need food.” Said Magda. “Besides, you’ll need space for the Egg and anything else you might find down there.”

Neither of the vampires realised the Egg was being recovered for Sam, that surprise would come later, much later.

“Good luck, I wish I was going with you.” Said Brendan.

“To be honest, I’m glad I’m not.” Said Liz.

Laura looked over the table, as if making sure everything they’d agreed as essential had gone into the back packs.

“It’s a little early, but you’ve got a long walk ahead of you.” Said Magda.

She had to hug them both, though only Laura hugged her back and that was probably just out of politeness. Brendan put his hand on Mabina’s arm for a split second and the vampires left the room and headed towards the elevator.

“I hope we see them again.” Said Liz.

“Do you think a prayer might help ?” Asked Brendan.

“Wrong deity Brendan.”

Liz was muttering something under her breath that sounded like no language Magda knew and she recognised most languages, especially the dead ones. Brenda was harmless unless he thought his queen was threatened, but out of the whole group, Liz worried her the most.

“I don’t fancy the restaurant..... Shall I call room service ?” Asked Liz.

“Sounds fine, do you think they do pizza ?” Asked Brendan.

“I’m sure they do, pizza for you too Magda ?” Asked Liz.

“Yes, with all the trimmings, plenty of garlic bread..... Lots of wine with it.”

“I want beer.” Said Brendan.

There were times when Liz seemed so ordinary, but at other times.... Magda found herself staring at Liz sometimes, trying to see clues, signs of what might have happened to her. The ritual with the Half Moon had worked, Magda was sure of it, yet Liz claimed to feel no different. The real worry that it wasn't Liz claiming to feel no different, but the darkness hiding inside her.

"Can we order anything ? I feel like cheesecake, a lot of cheesecake." Said Brendan.

"Order anything you like." Said Magda.

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Mabina Gladitch picked up the two mountaineering axes and offered one to Laura.

"Even these are vivid colours." Said Mabina. "Do you want red or green ?"

"I'll take green.... Crap I'm just glad we're going underground, I'd be embarrassed to be seen carrying this thing."

"Magda said it might not count as carrying a lethal weapon if any cops show up....Personally I think Magda is sometimes full of crap." Said Mabina.

"Let's just hope her maps aren't crap."

There was a decent moon, they found the hole in the ground without using lamps.

"I had a good look when we here before, it's only about an eight foot drop." Said Laura.

Laura was gone, down the hole without any thought about getting out again. Mabina followed her, both of them digging in their packs for the sort of head lamps that cavers used, or those looking for antiquities in dark places. They had two spare batteries each, enough to last for several days.

"I like this, just the right length and weight for swinging about in confined spaces."

Laura said while trying a few swings with her dayglow green axe.

"I get the feeling Magda and Sam have been planning this for some time, long before we came on the scene." Said Mabina.

"Yep, we're definitely using the equipment bought for the next expedition down here by the Psochic order."

They would never have found even the first secret door if it hadn't been for Magda's maps and instructions. Mabina pushed a place high up on the passage wall and there was a slight audible click. They both pushed and the door swung back, to reveal another section of dark dusty passage.

"I don't like that." Said Laura. "I know we have to close the doors to stop anyone following us, but it feels as though we're locking ourselves in."

The door had clicked as they'd closed it and there was no obvious way to open it from that side.

"Come on Laura, two strong angry vampires can get out of anywhere."

"Hmmm I'm not angry yet, just mildly pissed off."

"Magda might have sent us down here as an offering to something."

"It all seems a bit elaborate for that.... Do you feel something ?" Asked Laura.

"A little maybe, a presence far below us."

Every passage or tunnel took them deeper, the gradient always gradually downward. There were quite a few secret doors, every one of them locking shut as they were closed. They were tough and strong, but even vampires have limits. Magda had assured them there were several other ways out. If there weren't, they might never get back to the surface.

"This flooding looks deep, are we going the right way ?" Asked Laura.

Mabina unfolded the copy of the map she'd brought with them, complete with its scribbled notes.

"Yes, the water is only about five feet deep."

They carried their packs over their heads and the flooded section went on for some time, but it never threatened to fill the tunnel.

“Ouch..... Fuck, walk carefully.” Said Laura.

“Why ?”

“My foot just found a submerged rock.”

Not far past the flooded tunnel they found a wide chamber full of the debris from a fight. Torn clothing, a few broken lamps, even what they both knew were large bloodstains.

“This is where Magda said they found two bodies.” Said Mabina.

“Look what they missed.” Said Laura.

“Oh.... I’m not sure about you having that.”

“We’re collaborating now Mabina, trust me.”

Laura was obviously delighted to have found the gun, tutting about the dirt and dust as she removed the full clip of bullets.

“I need to clean it up a bit..... Do you fancy a rest and a beer ?” Asked Laura.

“Yeah right, as if Magda would have packed beer.”

“Not Magda, but Liz put four tins in my pack, after I bribed her with a few Egyptian pounds.”

Laura handed her a tin and it was warm and a little flat, but it tasted like nectar after all the trudging through hot dusty passages.

“You are a wonder Laura Selway, take all the time you like to clean your toy.”

“Hey, you had a gun in your house.”

“Merely to scare the shit out of human burglars.”

Once they’d passed out of the chamber, the gradient increased, often become steep enough to make walking difficult. There were more flooded tunnels, though usually only a foot or so of water. Nothing had attacked them, though they heard the sound of living creatures scurrying away from their lights and Laura’s cursing.

“Fuck..... It’s hot down here.”

They were respecting the map now and Magda’s notes. There were many side tunnels leading off in all directions, yet they ignored them all and carried straight on, towards the last chamber the order had explored.

“After that the map is based on ancient texts and guesswork.” Magda had told them.

The chamber was the largest they’d found and again there were signs of a battle having taken place there. No weapons this time, which seemed to disappoint Laura.

“One of their senior guys died here.” Said Mabina. “A Brother Michael, a history teacher from Chicago.”

“I wonder what they’re families are told.” Said Laura. “They can hardly tell them that Michael won’t be coming home because he died in a grubby chamber under an Egyptian temple.”

“They might be members of the order too.”

“I suppose..... Look at this.”

Laura had found a skeleton that looked small for a human, several skeletons, all in a pile beside the door they intended to use. Magda hadn’t mentioned the skeletons, but she had talked a lot about Thoth.

“Baboons, they’re an aspect of Thoth, or he can send them to do his bidding. I’m not sure if they are a part of him, or his minions.” Said Mabina.

“A bunch of monkeys.....That’s not much to worry about.”

“It depends how many there are Laura and I doubt if their bite is harmless. These baboons will be minions of a God after all, the God of magic.”

They moved slower, looking carefully down each side passage. The heat increased as they kept going deeper under the ground. There was now an indistinct but definite feeling of something waiting for them, something unpleasant.

“Do you feel it Laura ?” Asked Mabina. “I’m surprised we haven’t been attacked yet.”

“Maybe it’s not used to our kind.... It might be waiting and watching what we do.”

When the attack did come, it came at an intersection of passages, a crossroads somewhere deep below Luxor. Just two huge baboons screeching as they came. Laura put her axe through the head of one, while Mabina slammed the second into the wall. Neither of the brutes appeared to be magical, they died easily enough.

“Damn..... They’re big for monkeys.” Said Laura.

“A big male can weigh eighty pounds and stand four feet tall, more if they rear up. We killed these two without much of a problem, but imagine fifty or so attacking together.” Said Mabina.

The creatures had bad breath and looked well fed, which was a bit of a mystery. The map was vague, only indicating what were thought to be main locations. There was no mention of anywhere for animals to be kept and fed.

“Do we have the last two beers ?” Asked Laura.

“After we’ve found the Egg, it’ll taste better.”

Whatever malevolent force was waiting for them was still below them, when they came to the sealed doors. The doors showed detailed carvings of Thoth in all his aspects. As a man, as a bird and in the form of a huge baboon. There was another carving, of something far larger than any simian Mabina had ever seen.

“Do you think that monster is waiting for us ?” Asked Laura.

“Doesn’t matter, we’ll never get past these doors.... We’ll have to risk one of the side tunnels we passed.”

“Maybe....But if the map says go this way.....”

Laura thumped the doors hard with her hand and there was something about the sound that hinted at hollow space.

“The doors are thick, but we are two strong angry vampires.” Said Laura.

“Do we run at them together and use our shoulders ?”

“You only see people shoulder barge doors in films, it looks good. In real life you’ll just break your collar bone or dislocate your shoulder, or if you’re really lucky, both. I’ve see Simon kick in doors, he uses the heel of his boot.”

Together they kicked the doors, destroying what were probably priceless carvings. After the third kick the doors began to come apart, by the sixth they fell inwards. They were at the top of stone steps, which led down into a vast cavern. Mabina went first, only stopping when her lamp showed faces below them.

“There must be a thousand of them.” Said Laura.

No profanity, which probably meant Laura was genuinely worried. The cavern seemed to be full of baboons larger than the two they’d killed. The huge apes were just watching, as if waiting for something.

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