

Quid Pro Quo

(Season three of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 13 – Tim Upgraded

“Wiremi explained it to me mum. I see things differently to most people. That means I can step between worlds.”

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Tim Chance knew Laura had a way of moving herself from one location to another, a sort of teleportation, though she had never used that word. They were still hiding a huge number of weapons from the cleaners, which she'd turned up with one morning. He'd been told about most of her life, but it was obvious there was something still being kept from him, one last great secret. She'd once arrived back in their bedroom at the hotel with a few leaves in her hair. They'd looked like London leaves to him, freshly blown off a Plane Tree, as winter took hold of London. For someone with a double life, she actually spent a lot of time with him, and Tim wasn't someone who enjoyed rocking boats. Laura appeared in their suite at the American Colony Hotel, accompanied by a flash of golden light. He was there, actually looking in that direction, as the air in the room moved to make way for her.

“Tim.....How do you fancy an afternoon doing touristy stuff in Jerusalem ?” She asked.

No good, the blossom all over her had his attention. Like mimosa blooms, bright pink mimosa petals, that were falling off her like rain. Only it couldn't have been a carpet of mimosa petals on the hotel floor, they didn't make a fizzing noise as they disintegrated.

“Crap Laura, where have you been ?” He asked.

“I'm honestly not sure.....Another world I think.”

“Another world?!”

The bright pink petals fizzed as they fell apart. A visible brown vapour rose up from the disintegrating blooms, it smelled slightly of burning leaves. The vapour became thinner, lighter in colour, before vanishing altogether. Within two or three minutes of Laura arriving, the beautiful pink blooms, had completely vanished. No trace of them remained, not even a little dust on the carpet. Laura just stood there, seemingly as amazed as he was.

“What sort of other world Laura ?” He asked.

She was using her hands to brush a little dust off her shoulders. That too fizzed and became nothing but a little vapour.

“A long and unlikely sounding tale Tim, I think it calls for the decent wine out of the minibar.” Said Laura.

There was only one decent wine in the room, a bottle of Pouilly-Fuissé they'd been planning to drink on their last night in Jerusalem. Tim opened the wine and filled two glasses.

“Are there any things you'd like to do Tim, or know, that you'd risk your life for ?” Asked Laura.

“Not more games.”

“Humour me, this is far from being a game.”

They sat side by side on the bed, sipping at a ludicrously expensive wine.

“Just the usual stuff I suppose Laura. Why am I here ? Where did I come from ? And of course the really big one, how long have I got ?”

She looked disappointed with his answers, which seemed unfair, as he had no idea where the questions were leading to.

“Nothing about knowledge ?” She asked.

“I thought why am I here covered all that.” He said.

“Nothing about religion and the afterlife ?”

“Stop it Laura, this is all games again. What do you really want me to say ?”

Her expression changed and the Laura looking at him was far more serious than the one he was used to.

“Would you risk your life for the chance to meet a God ?” She asked.

“Oh, I just wanted to know where you’d been. If you can’t talk sense....”

She grabbed him quite hard, her fingers digging into his arm. Her fangs had dropped and were perilously close to his face.

“Would you.....Simply question Tim. Is meeting a real God something you’d risk your life for ? Not just your life, he might kill me just for taking you there....Well, would you ?”

“Christ, you’re serious.”

“Nothing to do with him, I can take you to see the most powerful of the Ancient Gods of Egypt, the main guy, the original source of everything. Are you willing to risk your life to see Horus sat on his throne, perhaps even talk to him ?”

It was a question that needed some thought, but the chance to meet a God....The answer came from his heart rather than his head.

“Yes, I am Laura.”

“You’re sure ?”

“Yes. When do we go to see him ?”

“Now, this instant, right away. Are you still sure ?”

“Yes Laura.”

“Right, we should finish the wine first. I think we’ll both need a little liquid analgesic for this trip.”

~ ~

Gwen Logan noticed that her son had been different since returning from wherever he’d been with Liz Grant. He wasn’t as talkative as he’d been during their vacation in London, but he was using whole sentences a lot more than he ever had before. Jack had more focus too, far more than her it seemed, first thing in the morning.

“Not that milk mum, it’s off. Use the unopened bottle.”

Ideally he’d have poured the bad milk down the sink and rinsed the bottle, but did any kid ever do that ? Daniel hadn’t noticed any differences in the boy, but Daniel was hardly a good judge of normality. Not that she thought her son was miraculously cured of autism, he still did most things a little differently to most people. He was better than he had been though, a lot better. Gwen opened the new bottle of milk and poured it over the boy’s cereal.

“Next time pour away the milk that’s gone off.” She said.

“I will mum, if I remember.”

He was grinning at her, the little scamp was joking about it. Gwen felt happier than she had for years. She was sharing a bed with Daniel every night and now Jack seemed to be drastically improved. The worries about what would become of him when she passed on, was no longer there. He’d need a bit of support from the local council of course, but he’d survive pretty well.

“Daniel !” She yelled out of the back door. “Breakfast !”

Seven in the morning and Daniel had been busy in the kitchen garden since six. Gwen still insisted on them getting together round the table for breakfast though, no matter how many hours they’d all been up and dressed.

"Did you feed the chickens Jack?" Asked Daniel.

"Yes....And I collected the eggs. Half a dozen this morning."

No thinking about it, no going through all the remembering, about the various steps he'd have needed to take to feed their hens. Even Daniel looked surprised. She wanted to yell 'see, you noticed that,' at him. She'd asked Jack several times if he felt different since he'd returned from seeing Wiremi.

"Yes mum, of course I do."

Had been his rather annoying answer, every time. She decided to approach the question from a different angle.

"When you were away Jack." She said. "What did you talk to Wiremi about?"

"All sorts of things, it seems like a dream now."

"Did he teach you things?" Asked Daniel.

"The gift you mean?"

Jack had their full attention now, Daniel was even letting his eggs get cold.

"Yes, tell us about the gift?"

"Wiremi said he'd given me a gift, by taking something away. I told Laura about that and she said he always talks like that. She said he can be.....Bloody annoying."

"When did you see Laura?" Gwen asked. "Did you call her on the phone?"

Jack was looking at her as though she'd lost the plot.

"No..... Silly. She came here....To ask me what Wiremi had said."

"Does she come to see you a lot?" Asked Daniel.

"Only twice."

"If she comes again, tell her I want to see her." Said Gwen.

There it was again, her son looking at her as though she needed to wake up. Gwen didn't mind, Jack had changed and changed a lot, all of it for the better. She was even prepared to forgive Laura for sneaking into the small holding to talk to Jack, without asking her first. Daniel was grinning at Jack and it was a perfect family breakfast, until....

"Wiremi said I will need to help The Unnamed, one last time." Said Jack. "I told Laura about it."

Gwen dropped her spoon and heard it bounce off the edge of her bowl.

"No.....I said before, you can't go again!" She yelled. "I forbid it.....Tell him Daniel."

"I have to go mum, it's important..... You can't stop me."

"Of course I can stop you..... You're just a child." She shouted.

"Actually he isn't a child, not anymore." Said Daniel. "If it's important he has to go. When will this happen Jack?"

"I'm not sure."

At that moment she hated them both, but knew the feeling would pass. Why couldn't they both enjoy the life they had. It often felt as though they went out looking for trouble, dangerous trouble. She held her son's hand and kissed his cheek.

"Sorry Jack, I know you're not a child."

"That's alright mum."

"Why you though, why does this....Unnamed need your help?" She asked.

"Wiremi explained it to me mum. I see things differently to most people. That means I can step between worlds."

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"If only all the gates were in places like this." Said Liz.

Clara tended to agree with her, the ninth gate looked to have been placed in a tiny bit of paradise. An island probably, they'd been following the coastline for a couple of hours. A warm blue ocean full of fish, and trees with ripe fruit hanging from them. If they were on planet Earth, the sun had indicated they'd arrived there just after midday and it was still early afternoon. Every paradise has its monsters though....

"A lot of well-trodden pathways." Said Clara. "And given that no one ever seems pleased to see us."

"It might be different this time." Said Liz.

Mabina joined her in a hoot of derision. They were all still carrying their heavy antique weapons and Clara was in no doubt that they'd be needed. The first shock was when Mabina noticed the trail in the sky.

"Look, that's a vapour trail from an aircraft." She said, pointing.

Clara held her hand up to shield her eyes from the sun and of course, that made her sneeze.

"Fucking sunlight again." She muttered.

"A dot high in the sky, it has to be an aircraft." Said Liz. "Not every gate is going to be underground or somewhere unpleasant."

The plant life was lush, the sort of place where you could push a lolly stick into the ground and it would take root and grow. They only saw the villa when they were right on top of it. The four people sat on pool loungers noticed them, at about the same time Liz noticed the Villa.

"It looks Mediterranean." She said. "The Greek Islands somewhere, I knew it."

Seeing three fairly grubby looking women, carrying medieval weapons, couldn't be just an ordinary day for the people sat by the pool. They didn't seem unduly worried or scared though. One began to shout at them in a language Clara sort of recognised.

"My Greek is useless..... Do you speak English ?" She shouted back.

"I do.... Are you lost ?" Shouted a girl wearing a two piece swimsuit.

"No, we decided to go exploring." Said Clara. "We're with a film crew and we were filming a couple of miles along the coast."

"How did you get here ?"

"By boat."

A middle aged man began to talk to the girl, though Clara only understood about two words and neither of those were alarming.

"My father asked if you're part of the people filming on Rhodes ?"

"Yes, that's us, but the beaches there are too crowded." Said Mabina. "Besides, your beaches are far cleaner....Much better for our fight scenes."

The girl muttered at her father, before talking to them.

"Oh, how exciting." Said the girl. "Will you stay for a while ? We have cold lemonade."

From her father's expression, he was no keener on the idea than they were. A nice cold drink was a wonderful idea, until someone noticed the blood on their clothing didn't look fake.

"We need to keep moving.....Sorry." Said Clara.

"If you change your mind, you know where we are."

Liz was still their guide, or at least the one who knew where the gate was located. Clara noticed how Liz took them off the path and down towards the beach. A perfect beach of fine white sand.

"Ten to one they'll call the local police." Said Liz.

"They didn't seem scared of us." Said Mabina. "I thought our story had them fooled."

"Oh, they're not scared, they're worse." Said Liz. "They're curious.....Curious enough to mention us to the local cops."

"I think she's right." Said Clara. "But how much of a threat will the local police be ? Probably an old guy on a bicycle, with a couple of years until he retires. They're hardly likely to have a SWAT team somewhere like this."

"I'll zig-zag our walk though. From the beach to up the hill, then back again." Said Liz. "It'll take a bit longer, but we'll still reach the gate before nightfall, all being well."

Clara inwardly cringed. All being well was one of those phrases that seemed to insult the deity who looked after everyone's luck. Somewhere a supernatural being took note of every time it was said, Clara was certain of it. By the time they'd reached the top of the hill, a police vehicle was heading towards them.

"Crap !.....I knew it." Said Liz.

Not an elderly cop on a pedal bike, a serious looking all-terrain vehicle was coming over the grass towards them. Αστυνομία was on the side of the vehicle, probably Greek for police. Not that they didn't know who was coming to see them, cop cars have the same colour scheme and flashing lights, all over the world. It stopped and two young men in smart uniforms got out.

"I knew it....Never say all being well." Clara muttered. "The universe takes it as a challenge."

Two young cops got out of the vehicle, both armed, fit looking and alert. One began to yell at them aggressively in Greek.

"See.....Why is no one ever happy to meet us ?" Asked Clara.

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Tim had helped Laura put all the weapons and armour into several large bags she'd obviously bought for the purpose. Drinking the wine after they'd finished would have been more sensible, but they managed.

"Alright, just make sure you keep a good hold on the bag handles." Said Laura.

"What are these weapons Laura ?" He asked. "Where did they come from ?"

"They're the Weapons of the Fallen."

"Yeah right, carry on....."

"I'm not certain, Akiva knows more than I do." Said Laura. "They seem to be the weapons of those who have died while in the service of the Ancient Gods, specifically Horus."

"There are a lot of weapons."

"He's been around for a very long time. I only picked up a few of them."

"So where does Akiva fit into all.....This ?" He asked.

She had the nerve to sigh. After avoiding all his questions for months, she had the nerve to sigh.

"Come on Tim, easiest thing is to show you. Grab the bag handles."

He did, while she held a few handles in her left hand and him with her right. Laura did something weird with he left elbow, as though she was trying to hurt herself. When the room began to spin around, he closed his eyes.

"Open your eyes.... We're here." Said Laura. "Usually the journey is fairly quick....Usually."

If they were in the throne room of Horus, he needed to hire better help. The floor was filthy and piles of carrier bags filled every corner of the room. There was a smell too, like the laundry basket in his room at the hotel, combined with bad, sweaty feet. It took Tim a moment to realise he was feeling hot too, hot and sweaty.

"Laura.....Where are we ?" He asked.

"I thought you wanted to see Akiva. This is his place....Though, a lot of the stuff is mine, it came from my lair. We're in Eastern Jerusalem, a place called Ramat Eshkol."

Akiva's apartment was a hot, smelly dump, but Tim knew when to keep quiet. His own room at the hotel had been just as grubby and probably smelled worse, yet Laura had rarely moaned at him about it.

"Very nice..... Shall I open a window or two ?" He asked.

"No, the smell of C-4 might still be strong enough to be picked up. The boxes were only passing through..... You never know though."

Tim thought the days when he asked her nothing at all, were probably the last time he felt totally sane. So easy to ask her why they'd stored C-4 in the apartment, but he decided it was probably better if he didn't know.

"Make yourself at home." Said Laura. "I'll put these in the spare room."

He couldn't lift the bags containing the Weapons of the Fallen, yet Laura carried them about with ease. As she went into what had to be the spare room, he realised drinking half a bottle of wine quite quickly, had other side effects than making you feel a bit squiffy.

"Can I use the toilet ?" He shouted.

"Of course..... The corridor that leads to the front door. Last door on the right. Don't open the front door and, this is really important. Don't open the door opposite the bathroom, ever."

The bathroom was quite clean, though there was a worrying odour he couldn't quite place. After emptying his bladder, he discovered another side effect from the wine. He felt curious about the room opposite the bathroom, and he felt brave enough to open the door, maybe. He stood for a minute, his hand on the door handle.

"Akiva ! Get up.....I brought Tim to see you !" He heard Laura yell.

"Now or never." Tim muttered.

There was a large cupboard behind the door. To one side was the oldest vacuum cleaner he'd ever seen. A few shelves with boxes on them, a few spare lightbulbs and some bottles of bathroom cleaner. The whirling mass in the middle of the floor, stopped him looking too closely at anything else in the cupboard.

"Help us.... Free us." He heard in his head. "We'll reward you.....Free us."

He knew the manacled man and woman weren't living humans. Ghosts or spirits of some kind, chained together with a chain that sparked as they pulled at it.

"Free us, or we'll eat your soul."

Wow, that relationship had turned sour in a hurry. As the woman turned and twisted, her legs passed right through the old vacuum cleaner. Tim felt waves of malice coming from the ghosts, and a certain amount of pain. Whatever else the chain might be doing, it was definitely hurting them. He jumped as Laura touched his arm.

"You have seen this pair before, though you probably don't remember it." She Said. "Tim, meet Walter and Emily Couzinier. Once they were famous tomb robbers, the best in the business."

"They lied to us, tried to get us killed. Now they're spending time in here, until they learn to be truthful."

Tim hadn't recognised the male voice, though the face looked vaguely familiar. Yes, a strange character who'd turned up at their hotel one morning, asking for Laura. The girl on the reception desk had nearly called the police. Not that he'd done anything, there was just that feeling about him.

"Tim Chance, meet Akiva Yatsko." Said Laura.

Akiva was just wearing a pair of boxer shorts.

"Hi Tim, I bet you'd like coffee." Said Akiva.

Tim shut the door to the cupboard, though he was sure he could still hear the Couziniers writhing about in their chains.

"Oh yes please." He said. "Coffee might make all this seem less....Crazy."

"I doubt it." Said Laura,

Laura opened a few curtains just a little, letting a bit more light into the lounge. All that seemed to achieve was to throw the piles of dust into sharper relief. Tim sat at the large table, noticing that at the centres of the table was a half assembled assault rifle. There seemed to be quite a few weapons in the room, including two large swords, left leaning against a wall.

"Milk and sugar?" Shouted Akiva from the kitchen.

"Just milk thanks."

Akiva was still only wearing boxer shorts when he brought in the coffee. As Tim often didn't dress at all on a Sunday, he viewed Akiva as almost a kindred spirit. The coffee tasted really good, as it began to undo the damage the wine had done to his squiffy brain.

"You've some nice weapons." Said Tim

"Thank you, though most of the expensive toys are Laura's. I believe you're here for the potted history of me, the Silver Dawn and the Couziniers. I'm just amazed you're here at all."

"Why?"

"I thought Laura would kill you once you realised what she was."

They were laughing, both of them, though Tim didn't think it was particularly funny.

"Actually I was going to take him to see Horus first." Said Laura. "But if you're in a talkative mood, he can see you first."

"Oooh, an uninvited mortal being taken to see a God." Said Akiva. "Pretty risky I'd say, for both of you."

"I know, but I still want to go." Said Tim.

"Brave man, I'm glad she didn't kill you."

"So am I."

"Right Tim, I'll begin by giving you a history of what some would call the illustrious history of The Order of the Silver Dawn, though I think of them as infamous, rather than illustrious."

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"I'm useless at left hand drive cars." Said Mabina.

"Does it make a difference with an automatic?" Asked Liz.

"It does, trust me..... Clara will have to drive."

Mabina wasn't going to be bullied into driving the police vehicle. She was pretty good at driving her Mercedes around London, but once, in Berlin.....No, she wasn't going to risk driving a left hand drive vehicle again, automatic or manual box.

"I don't mind, though we should tidy up a bit first." Said Clara.

The two young policemen weren't dead, just quite bloody. It was their fault, waving their guns at them. The smaller man had fired his weapon at her, so Mabina had left him with a few less teeth than he'd had at the start of the day. If his shot had actually hit her, she'd definitely have killed him.

"You're not going to do anything silly are you?"

She asked, as she easily picked up the injured cop. His mouth had been duct taped, both the cops were almost mummified in the stuff. Wrists, ankles, mouths, and even some to bind knees and elbows. Mabina had teased Clara about packing some it, but now she was a convert. The stuff was bloody marvellous. Clara put the other cop in the back of their all-terrain vehicle, before giving them both a warning to keep still.

"If we're being sensible.....They have seen us." Said Clara.

"Oh come on, I don't even know where we are." Said Liz. "Do you know the name of this island ? I know I don't. The chances of them ever identifying us are negligible."

"But there is a chance." Said Clara.

"Kill them and the police will make a huge effort to find us." Said Liz. "Leave them taped up somewhere and it might all get put down to a prank."

"You both make good points, but it will be dark soon." Said Mabina. "We should take a vote on it and do whatever needs doing."

Mabina voted with Liz and the two young cops lived to harass tourists another day. Mabina hadn't gone soft, she'd just realised the truth of what Liz had said. Two beaten up cops was one thing, but two dead ones would start a Europe wide investigation. They cleared up various bits of their litter from the grass and drove towards the 9th Gate.

"I could get used to travelling like this." Said Clara. "Any chance we could get the cop car through the gateway ?"

"No, it'll just be a useless piece of nonworking technology when it arrives on the other side of the gate." Said Liz.

"I remember you mentioning something along those lines in London." Said Clara.

Even over rough ground and the occasional diversion to find a way across a few streams, they were still at the gate well before dark. Mabina felt as sad as Clara, as they pulled their packs out of the comfortable police vehicle.

"Back to being on foot." She said.

"We're not alone." Said Liz.

The gateway was a Menhir, a large thick upright stone. There was probably some local legend about it, there were even two benches for tourists to sit on. Three vague shapes were between them and the stone. As they walked towards the Menhir, the shapes dispersed like morning mist.

"What was all that about ?" Asked Clara.

"Not all will want me to succeed." Said Liz. "For now they're content to have me watched, my progress reported. They may not dare to face me yet, but.....As we get closer to the 21st Gate, we need to be prepared for trouble."

"Wonderful." Said Mabina.

"Ready ?" Asked Liz.

"No." Said Clara.

There was the usual falling sensation, before they were on solid ground, in the dark. Complete stygian darkness, not one speck of light.

"Damn.....We packed the caving lamps." Said Mabina

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Tim's head was full of the Silver Dawn, the organisation Laura had decided to work for. Not that she intended to move to France in the immediate future, which was good news. For a while at least, she was going to work from London.

"Just until I see how it works out." She'd told him.

Tim had heard about creatures he'd always thought were mythical and Gods he'd never believed had ever existed. Crap ! He'd never believed in any God, despite his parents being quite religious.

Now his head was full of it all and every bit of knowledge was giving birth to a dozen questions.

"If Horus is an immortal God, why did he have a childhood ?" He asked. "Why did he need a nanny ?"

“That is one of the things that bothers me too. You just have to accept some things just as they are Tim. Even if it seems illogical, it’s the way it is.”

“That....Makes no sense at all Laura.”

“Don’t you dare say anything like that when you meet Horus.” Said Laura. “Come on, hold my hand.....Talking to Akiva took longer than I thought.”

He held her hand, but the questions in his mind refused to keep quiet.

“Surely I can ask him a few questions Laura ? If I do it politely.”

Tim yelled as her knuckle caught him between the ribs. He shouted loud enough for Akiva to briefly come and make sure nothing untoward was going on.

“No Tim, you’ll be seen but not heard.” Hissed Laura. “There will be no speaking until you’re spoken to. If Horus asks you a question, you will answer it honestly, in as few words as possible.”

“I know Laura, like I’m in a line up to see the Queen.”

Her hand went back, but her knuckle didn’t arrive. Instead she was grinning at it.

“Actually that’s a perfect analogy.....Pretend I’m taking you to see the Queen. Be polite, that’s the main thing. If he thinks you’re being rude, we might both be punished.”

“I heard he once turned his high priest into a monkey.” Said Akiva.

“Crap.... What sort of monkey ?” Asked Tim.

“Shut up Akiva, you’re not helping.” Said Laura. “Come on Tim, we’re going right now, before I change my mind about the whole business.”

He wanted to ask if they’d be seen without an appointment, but the room had begun to spin around as she’d grabbed his arm. A feeling of nausea came over him, as the air around them became tinged with gold. At one moment Tim felt as though he was upside down, the next the air pressure was high enough to make it difficult to breathe. In the end it was the heat that made his pass out.

“You were lucky Laura, their bodies are so fragile.”

“Thank you for helping him....Tim means a lot to me.”

Tim was lying on a couch, watching Laura talk to a man with the head of a bird. Strangely that bothered him less than the ghostly shapes moving around the huge throne room. As he tried to sit up, several almost invisible arms, helped him to his feet.

“Stronger than I gave him credit for being....Come Tim Chance, come and stand before me.”

Horus, it had to be Horus, though his voice didn’t sound at all birdlike. Tim found it hard to get his feet to move, he felt heavier, or gravity was playing games with him. They seemed willing to wait though, watching him struggle for every step. Eventually he was stood next to Laura.

“An ordinary mortal in the world of the Gods.” Said Horus. “You’re not the first Tim, but you’re one of a very small number. Many have tried to enter my domain.....And most have died. You are very welcome here, especially as Laura seems so fond of you.”

Tim managed a fairly deep bow, without falling over.

“I am honoured to be here and I am at your service.” Said Tim.

He had no idea why he’d used those words, he might have seen someone use them on TV. It sounded the right thing to say, but Laura was looking worried.

“At my service.....Thank you Tim.” Said Horus. “I had a general once, who always said that one volunteer is worth a thousand conscripts. I do have need of your services....Help Laura with her tasks for me and.....I will be extremely grateful.”

Laura’s face was telling him there was more to it than being asked to do a favour for an omnipotent God. Tim knew he was obligated to helping Laura with her Quid Pro Quo, or die in the attempt.

“I am pleased to be of service.” Said Tim.

“So polite....Laura informs me you’re full of questions. When Laura has finished her tasks for me, ask her to bring you here again. If I think they’re appropriate, I may answer one or two of your questions. Be careful though....If I believe your questions are impertinent, there may well be consequences. Step forward now Tim, feel my breath on your cheek.”

So hard to take those few steps forward, he’d been standing for too long in that world. Tim concentrated on nothing else and succeeded in taking a single step.

“Closer Tim, or I’ll feel insulted.”

One step would have done it, but Tim tried so hard, that he took two steps. His head was right next to Horus, they were cheek to cheek. Not that Horus seemed to have the head of a bird any longer. Tim felt his cheek meet the skin of a very human face, just for a second or two. Cool dry skin, which rubbed against his, as the God breathed into his ear. Tim heard words in that breath, though the language was unknown to him.

“Bring him back to me Laura.” Said Horus. “If he survives the tasks ahead of him.”

Tim felt stronger and his breathing was easier, just as the world began to spin again. He didn’t pass out, but he was quite dizzy, as they arrived back in Akiva’s apartment.

“So..... Horus didn’t turn him into a monkey.” Said Akiva.

“He felt the breath of Horus on his face.” Said Laura.

“Oh, you’re in his service forever now, completely fucked.” Said Akiva.

Tim was confused, he thought the breath of a God was wonderful, a good thing, perhaps even miraculous.

“But I.....I feel stronger.” He said.

“It may seem like.....” Began Akiva.

“No.... Enough.” Shouted Laura. “No more teasing him. You will find you’re better at many things now Tim, but as with everything there will be a price. You must help me with my tasks for Horus and some of those are likely to be dangerous, very dangerous.”

“I gave my word to help you and I will.” Said Tim.

Laura kissed him briefly on the lips and the world seemed to make sense again.

“The first thing I’m going to do is teach you to use a gun.” Said Laura. “Then you have to promise not to get yourself killed during our first battle.”

They kissed again, a proper kiss.

“Yeah, very romantic.” Said Akiva. “Does this mean I’m now surplus to requirements?”

“Don’t be an arse.” Snapped Laura. “Go and unchain Walter & Emily. Time to ask them about our next task. They should have learned the consequences of lying to us by now.

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It was about half one in the morning, on a fairly cold night. Ronnie Neophytou knew the way there fairly well by now, well enough to know a route she liked. Upper Erith first, she drove the borrowed van along Belmont Road. Past the bread factory that seemed to bake bread around the clock. She loved the wonderful smell of fresh bread, but it probably brought down property prices in the area. Her phone beeped to tell her a text message had arrived.

‘Outside your place You aren’t here Where are you’

There was a guy in her life, though she wasn’t as into him, as he seemed to be into her. A little younger than her, which never seemed to work. Ronnie always got angry when her friends said it, but she was definitely into older men. Plus Harry was like her, a Greek Cypriot and that was always a disaster.

‘Sorry something came up Call you tomorrow’

'Fine'

If he didn't want to see her again, that was fine. Plenty more fish in the sea and she was quite keen on Ashley, the new sales trainee at work. Not a great thinker was Ashley, but he had the sort of body...

"Concentrate you silly bitch." She mumbled.

Left at Northumberland Heath, she'd nearly gone straight across the junction. Past a tidy looking parade of shops, all closed for the night. Now it was straight down the hill to Lower Erith and Tom's yard. Tonight was different, she was collecting a van full of boxes, rather than delivering a jiffy bag or two. They trusted her now, Simon had told her.

"The hours are doing me in." She'd told Simon. "Tom and his lads seem to work round the clock."

"Well.... If you don't need the cash?"

"Oh, you just ignore me Simon, I just enjoy moaning. I love the work really."

Well, she loved the money. She could earn more for delivering a few jiffy bags a couple of nights a week, than she could working a seventy hour week trying to get arseholes to buy new phone systems. Small business owners could be a fucking nightmare.

"It'd just be nice to get a bit more sleep."

A right, second on the left and Ronnie could see the gate to Tom's yard. The van pulled a little to the left as she braked. Potentially dangerous, but she'd only be using it once. It was one of Tom's deniables, registered to an identity that looked plausible, even though it was totally false. One toot of the horn and the gate rattled out of her way.

"Coffee, at least let them have coffee waiting." She muttered. "Tea would do at a pinch."

Beetle was there, the lad seemed to be there twenty four hours a day. He showed her where to park, before taking the keys off her.

"It'll take them a while to load the van." Said Beetle. "Tom is in the office."

The office was a grand title for what had probably once been a gate house for a factory of some kind. The solid brick building was the only surviving structure, of whatever had once been on the site. Grubby, damp and impossible to heat properly, Ronnie wasn't looking forward to waiting in there. Her attitude changed as she opened the door. The smell of pizza and garlic bread was like a welcoming hug. Provided they hadn't eaten it all of course. She opened the door to the back office, the one with the least damp. The office Tom used as his personal sanctum.

"Ronnie...Come in, there's pizza and coffee." Said Tom.

"Tins of coke too, if you prefer." Someone said.

It was obviously a big night for Tom's side line as a purveyor of designer drugs. There were faces she'd never seen before and a few regulars. All of them jammed around a table in Tom's small holy of holies. Someone was offering her a plate with a huge slab of pizza on it.

"Do you like garlic bread?" Asked Tom.

Of course she did, and the dip all of Tom's guys seemed to be avoiding. They'd kept a chair for her and some clean cutlery. By the time she was looking for more pizza, Ronnie was happy. She was one of them now, one of Tom's inner circle.

"We always knew you were alright." Muttered Beetle.

She'd have probably kissed him, if his jumper hadn't stunk of engine oil.

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