

The Hornsey Vampires

(Season two of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 14 – Egg of Astaroth

“Everything hurt as she peed and it smelt foul, as though something truly dreadful was draining out of her. She actually screamed after looking down and seeing a dark black froth in the toilet bowl.”

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Patsy Smart had watched the recordings from the various cameras aimed at Vlad's house. To Simon her interest in who was looking after the house was just idle curiosity, but Patsy had been waiting for just the right opportunity. A middle aged couple occupied the house during the day, taking in the post, opening and closing the curtains and generally making Vlad's house look lived in.

“We know she has connections in London, they're probably hired help.” Simon had told her.

Armed house sitters, Clara had noticed a few tell-tale bulges under the various coats and jackets they wore. Originally the couple had been known as the house sitters, but Simon had insisted on calling them Will & Grace and for some weird reason the name had stuck. Despite being armed, Will & Grace weren't keen on being in the house at night.

“They probably don't know what Mabina is, but that fully equipped trauma treatment room is enough to give anyone the heebie-jeebies.” Clara had said.

Patsy knew the house, she'd been an unwilling guest in the basement, tied to a chair while Mabina fed her junk food and issued thinly veiled threats. There was a feeling in that house, a bad feeling. Even without the medical room and the store room full of trauma kits and local anaesthetic, there was the basement with its soil floor.

“Come on it's late, you've normally gone home by now.” She muttered.

Patsy had arrived by Tube, trudging all the way from Fulham Broadway Station. She was currently stood in the park opposite Vlad's house, waiting for Will & Grace to leave for the night. There was an alarm box on the wall, but they all knew it was just an empty box. It seemed that Mabina didn't want the police investigating an alarm going off, they might ask too many questions.

“At last.”

The beige Vauxhall moved, rolling out of the driveway and heading down the street towards Lots Road. Will & Grace had left the house later than usual, but at last the house was now empty. Patsy had no vampire's ability to vanish into the shadows, she let a dog walker get some distance away before crossing the road. It was a warm night but she had a fur lined hood to hide her face from the cameras in the garden. Would Simon recognise her walk? She limped slightly as she approached the house.

Quickly through the door in the wall that was always open and Patsy was in the overgrown back garden. She'd watched a lot of crime dramas on Netflix, she knew it was time to put on a pair of latex gloves and wait for her eyes to become accustomed to the darkness. The back door was locked and she was about to use her elbow to break the glass. A large plant pot full of dead blooms caught her eye.

“I bet you forgot that was there Mabina.”

A very grubby key under the pot, it obviously hadn't been used in years. After rubbing it against her jeans a few times it grudgingly fitted the lock and turned. After entering the kitchen Patsy stopped and listened for a while, before using her flashlight.

“This is the police !” She yelled. “Is anyone on the premises.”

Simon had often talked to her about his house breaking tips and exploits, after sex on their Chinese food and sex nights. Shouting was counter intuitive, but she was young and fit. Patsy was confident she could outrun most people and knowing the house was empty was far better than assuming. No one answered her shout.

“You’re too tempting to ignore.”

She muttered as she took the largest knife hanging on the kitchen wall. She’d intended to remain unarmed, but just holding the long serrated blade made her feel more confident. There was a definite smell of death coming up from the cellar, no wonder Will & Grace didn’t feel like staying in the building overnight. Patsy had no reason or desire to go down to the cellar and anyway, the door looked solid and there was an expensive looking number pad door lock.

“Laura’s right, the cellar should be filled with concrete.” She mumbled.

Patsy hadn’t been in the upstairs of the house for long the last time, just a few minutes to look for bandages and meds to help her wounded friends. Simon had nearly died in that house and Laura had been seriously wounded. No one had escaped injury, Patsy still had a scar on her neck.

“Police ! Show yourselves.” She yelled up the stairs.

Nothing, not even the sound of a nervous pet finding somewhere to hide. Upstairs had changed, Mabina’s old room now felt masculine with a slight smell of scotch and grubby socks. It was disorganised, the male clothing waiting to be washed left in untidy piles. It was Brendan’s room, which meant it was of no interest.

“Where do you sleep now Mabina, where is your lair ?”

She went from room to room and on the floor above, without finding a bed fit for a queen. There would be one, she was certain of it. Mabina might have sex with Brendan to take care of a physical need, but the ancient vampire queen would sleep alone. Patsy headed up to the top floor of the house, somewhere Clara had always suspected there was a hidden room. At the other side of a room full of old packing chests, there was a blank wall, a wall left with nothing piled against it.

“Can it be that easy ?” She asked herself.

Patsy had intended to thump the wall to see if it sounded hollow, or press in the centre to see if it flexed a little. None of that was needed, the door moved as she touched it. Either there wasn’t a catch or Mabina felt secure enough not to use it. The door opened right back to reveal a large room which smelled of expensive perfume. The room was at the back of the house and the curtains looked thick, the sort Clara called blackout curtains. Patsy turned off her flashlight and pressed the light switch.

“Perfect.” She muttered.

The bedroom was large and it might not have been the Palace of Versailles, but it was a room fit for a queen. One wall was taken up by five or six double wardrobes and two dressing tables. There was a desk at one end of the room, all the drawers locked. Patsy was tempted to break it open and take anything useful. That would mean explaining to Simon where she’d been, so the desk remained unmolested. She sat at one of the dressing tables, looking at the pictures tucked into the edge of the antique mirror. The age of the photos ranged from sepia tones to modern colour prints. One of the newest was of a man entertaining children while dressed as a clown.

“Why the hell did I come here ?”

There were lipsticks in front of her, one the colour of blood. Patsy scribbled ‘Bitch’ on the mirror and added three exclamation marks. She felt scared of Mabina and always would. The others might have agreed a truce, but she never would, or could. She wanted to sign the message, but that would turn

it into a suicide note as Mabina knew where she lived. The message was good, but it wasn't enough. Patsy walked over to the centrepiece of the room, a queen sized bed.

"I just might pee on your pillow.....Maybe even squat on it."

Like everything in the room, the bed was clean and tidy, not one spot of dust. Mabina had control issues, they all knew that. Patsy pulled the quilt off the bed, dropping it to the floor, before doing the same to the expensive Egyptian cotton sheet. She so wanted to squat on the bed and leave a nasty foul message for Mabina, but something inside her rebelled at the idea.

"I know, you'll hate this Mabina."

The knife was still in her hand. She raised it high before stabbing the pillows as hard as she could. Patsy didn't stop pushing until the long knife had gone a good way into the mattress. She stood back and admired her handiwork for a while. It would do, she felt better and slightly less afraid of Mabina Gladitch.

Patsy closed the bedroom door as she left, her message was meant for Mabina, not Will & Grace. She locked the kitchen door, calmly replacing the key under the terracotta pot. It was a long way back to Fulham Broadway Station, but she didn't mind.

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Laura buried the sharp point of her climbing axe into the baboon's head and watched its dead body hit the ground below. Every death of one of them caused the noise to increase, the constant wall of sound as hundreds on baboons shrieked, yelled, or barked.

"They're cleverer than I thought." Said Mabina. "Using each other as a climbing frame to get to us."

"No new ones arriving, we are winning." Said Laura. "It's just that at this rate it'll take us months to destroy them all."

The fight to reach the relative safety of the ledge hadn't been easy; they were both bleeding from nasty bites. The wounds would heal, but every drop of blood seemed to excite the baboons below. The brutes had learned to form themselves into a living ladder, which allowed the more agile to climb up and attack them. Mabina used a blade on the arm of a large male who was trying to grab her leg. Once again the wall of noise increased as the wounded creature fell.

"They seem more upset by the wounded than those we kill." Said Laura.

The ledge was narrow and went most of the way around the cavern. To Laura the ledge looked as though it had been carved out of the natural rock, though Mabina didn't agree. There was a narrow fissure at the end of the ledge, just wide enough for them to squeeze through. The narrow passage beyond the fissure was dark and didn't seem to lead in the right direction.

"We should explore further along the passage." Said Mabina.

A baboon appeared from below, shrieking as it climbed up onto the ledge. Laura sliced open its throat with her assassin's blade, before kicking it off the ledge.

"See, far less noise when we kill one of them. Don't you think that's weird?" She asked.

"Yes, strange..... But we have to do something Laura. We can't sit here waiting for a miracle."

"We both know we need to go down the stairs..... I was hoping these damn monkeys might quieten down just enough. If only they'd stop screeching for a while."

The stairs were quite a way into the cavern, they'd almost reached then in their last attempt. Laura knew with every bit of her instincts and feelings, that the Egg was down those stairs. There was something dreadful down there too, but she was ignoring that until it was no longer possible to ignore it. The current problem was the mass of angry baboons between them and the stairs.

"They know us now, they like the taste of our blood." Said Mabina. "We might not survive another fight with them. It only takes one of them to get lucky and open a major artery."

Another shrieking baboon arrived on the ledge, trying to sink its jaws into Mabina's ankle. Instead of killing the brute she broke its jaw with a single punch, before pushing it off the ledge.

"More shrieking and barking when we wound one, I told you." Said Laura.

"You're right that is weird, but it doesn't get us down those stairs. We need to use the passage Laura, or we'll be here forever."

"I know, it's just that..... You must feel it too ?"

"Yes, I feel the pull too, but we can't get there.... Too many fucking baboons."

Laura leant over the edge and used her axe on half a dozen baboons who were trying to help each other climb up to the ledge. One or two might have died, but most were just bloody and wounded as they fell. Once again the level of noise from below was deafening.

"They've seen it, that's what scares them..... Do you see it Laura ?"

"Yes, it might clear them from around the stairs."

The cavern was huge, the snake might well have come from a part of it they couldn't see. Laura wasn't sure when a snake became big enough and nasty enough to be called a serpent, but the monster heading across the cavern floor was too big to be just a snake.

"Crap, our baboon buddies are going crazy." She said.

"It must smell their blood when they're wounded." Said Mabina.

It was probably easier to catch the wounded ones, though the serpent could move fast and strike at lightning speed. Laura watched as it devoured an injured baboon in just two gulps. Its skin shone white in the light from their lamps, white with orange speckles. Useless camouflage in the light, but usually the cavern must have been completely dark.

"No wonder the monkeys get excited when we wound them." Said Laura.

The true size of the serpent wasn't apparent until it was almost right below the ledge. It was long, perhaps as much as a hundred feet of it was meandering between the stalagmites. A wide body too, it seemed to have no trouble swallowing a large baboon. There wasn't the slow snake like swallowing Laura had seen on TV nature programmes. Two gulps and its prey were gone, probably swallowed while still alive. It obviously hunted by the smell of blood and Laura suddenly felt very bloody and vulnerable as she stood on the ledge.

"You were right Mabina..... Time we weren't here."

"We have sharper fangs than its usual prey.... Maybe now is our chance to reach the stairs."

"Trust me Mabina, there is nothing natural about that serpent. We have to leave..... Now."

The baboons were screeching and running, they probably could have used the opportunity to reach the stairs. It was just that she knew with certainty that the serpent could swallow them as easily as it had swallowed the baboons. It was another aspect of an ancient God, come to thin out the herd.

"You first, into the fissure..... Quickly."

Mabina still didn't want to run, so Laura actually shoved her into the ragged hole in the cavern wall.

"Are you sure it's that dangerous Laura ?"

It had been ignoring them while it ate the injured baboons. As Laura moved towards the fissure it tried to bite her, its head ramming into the wall quite close to her. It had some kind of venom, she was close enough to see it dripping off the long sharp fangs. Laura struck the monster three times with her blade and each time the blue steel had no effect.

"Move back Mabina, give me space..... I can't hurt this brute."

It tried to bite her as she moved, its fangs scratching deep grooves in the wall. The serpent spat at her, green venom bubbled and fizzed on her jacket. Laura quickly took it off and ran into the fissure. They both ran for quite some distance before stopping and Laura could still hear the huge serpent

butting the fissure with its head. Eventually there was a rumbling sound and the fissure behind them collapsed.

"You felt something....What was that thing?" Asked Mabina.

"I'm not sure, but I think it was an aspect of one of the old Egyptian Gods. Magda would know which one. Don't you know? I thought you knew this kind of stuff."

There was a lot of dust coming from the now sealed up fissure. There was no option now, they'd have to explore the passage, even if it was going in the wrong direction.

"I'm not an expert on all arcane knowledge Laura." Said Mabina. "The serpent tends to indicate an aspect of Apep, their God of chaos."

"Great, I'm guessing this Apep is a bad guy?"

"It doesn't work like that, though yes he is depicted as the opponent of light." Said Mabina.

"Some of the ancient Gods might aid us, some might be against us.... And I suspect most will simply ignore us."

Laura used her hands to wipe the layer of dust off her blouse.

"I knew I should have brought a spare jacket." She said. "Come on, there's only one direction we can go, so we might as well begin."

"After we've had the last two tins of beer. I think we've earned them."

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Liz Grant had to get up in the middle of the night, which was rare. She felt bloated by the pizza, hot cheese so close to bedtime hadn't been a good idea. The gas was pressing on her bladder and it was a case of get up and go to the bathroom or a puddle in the bed. The amount of wine she'd drunk probably wasn't helping either.

"Oh, Christ on a bicycle..... Never again." She muttered.

Until the next time of course, she was sensible enough to know there were going to be other times. Liz didn't bother with a gown, she no longer had any embarrassment about being seen while naked. Besides, there was just Magda and Brendan in the hotel suite and she'd been intimate with both of them. Wearing just her panties, she turned on the bathroom light, before closing her eyes against the sudden and unwelcome light. Once her eyes weren't objecting to the glare, she sat on the toilet. "I think I might really stop the booze for a while."

A friend at the escort agency had told her age was a factor and that brain cells didn't replace after you reached thirty. Liz was going to be thirty six on her next birthday, but she felt as though she was closer to fifty six.

"Oh no, please not another dose of cystitis."

Everything hurt as she peed and it smelt foul, as though something truly dreadful was draining out of her. She actually screamed after looking down and seeing a dark black froth in the toilet bowl.

Nature needed to take its course though, she needed to empty her bowels as well. That didn't feel right either, though she didn't have the courage to look. Liz wiped and flushed with her eyes closed tight shut. There was a discreet knock on the door.

"Are you alright Liz?"

Magda's voice and Liz really wasn't in the frame of mind for being friendly to anyone.

"I'm fine, too much wine and maybe a dodgy pizza."

"Are you sure?"

"I just want to wash and go back to bed..... Sorry."

"Ok, I'll leave you alone."

Brendan must have got up too, she could hear them muttering at each other, before going back to bed. Liz filled the sink with hot water and washed her hands and face. That made her feel better, it always did. There was an odd sensation as she dried her hands, they looked and felt wrong. She hadn't lied to Magda, there had been no dramatic change after using the Half Moon, just a headache and mild nausea.

"That is weird." She muttered.

There were dark black veins on the back of hands. Liz blinked, rubbed her eyes with the towel and the veins were gone. The feeling of strangeness was still there though, the feeling that she was changing.

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For about the third time the way they wanted to go was blocked by rubble. Not just a little rubble either, it looked as though most of the ceiling had collapsed into the tunnel. Mabina no longer felt paranoid, but she was beginning to wonder if they were being led into a trap. The two bodies not far from the cave-in didn't help her state of mind.

"They've been nibbled and something has taken the eyes." She said. "Otherwise the state of preservation is remarkable. The hot dry conditions down here have almost mummified them. They're probably two more of Magda's Psochic Order."

Laura was holding up a hand gun and shaking her head.

"Different make and calibre of hand gun and no Disney back pack or day-glow coloured axes...Magda would never be that sloppy." Said Laura. "These are a different group of relic hunters, I'm sure of it."

Mabina dug through their pockets and found wallets with driver's licenses inside. The leather wallets were cracking apart, it looked as though the bodies had been there for some time.

"Meet Walter and Emily Couzinier, once residents of Ottawa in Canada." Said Mabina. "Being armed they probably came here expecting trouble, but I can't see any obvious signs of what killed them. Magda might recognise the names if we ever get out of here."

"Hey, what happened to two pissed off vampires being able to get out of anywhere?"

"The baboons and giant snake deity dented my ego a little."

"Walter and Emily might have died of thirst if they were stuck down here for too long." Said Laura.

"Poor bastards, it was probably a choice between dying here or going back to the baboon cave."

It was Mabina's turn to go in front, something she really didn't enjoy. It was always easier to react to something happening to the guy in front if you weren't the guy in front. There had been just one possible path to take for quite some time, the feeling of being led into a trap was growing.

Eventually a second steeper passage opened up on their left.

"Looks like part of the wall collapsed, but I can feel fresh air coming from somewhere. My vampire mojo is having an off day, I don't have any strong feelings about either way." Said Mabina.

The cave beyond the hole in the wall looked natural, there were even a few small stalactites hanging from the ceiling. Once there had been water dripping from the roof, but now everything was hot and dry.

"That way, through the cave." Said Laura. "Not far now.....It's waiting for us."

"Can you be more specific? A few details would be nice."

"Remember the carving of an aspect of Thoth that looked like a cross between a baboon and a gorilla?"

"Yes, huge brute of a thing."

"Well that is waiting for us and it's probably guarding the Egg." Said Laura.

Laura went first and Mabina didn't tell her it wasn't her turn. There were a lot of passages leading from the cave, yet Laura ignored most of them. There was an odour coming from the tunnel she chose to enter and it wasn't a pleasant aroma.

"Not far, be ready Mabina."

"Do we have a plan Laura ? Anything that might work against it ?"

"We run at it and hit it with everything we have until it dies, or we die."

The tunnel came out into what was obviously a manmade chamber and the unpleasant odour became a full on disgusting stench. The chamber was high, the ceiling looked to be over a hundred feet above them. The height gave the impression that the stone lined structure was tall and thin, but it was really a good thirty feet in width.

"It reminds me of pictures of the chambers inside the Great Pyramid of Giza." Said Mabina.

Mabina didn't need Laura to tell her where the Egg was, she could feel it calling to them. The chamber was long, their lamps showed no clear detail of where they were heading. There was the impression of a huge sarcophagus, which looked more like an altar as they walked closer to it. The simple disc of metal lying on the altar was the Egg of Astaroth and it wanted to be found.

"Fuck..... That thing is huge." Said Laura.

"It looks to be asleep, maybe even dead."

There was no heart beat coming from the massive beast, but Mabina had met other seemingly living creatures without a heartbeat. The large simian creature was sitting down, cross legged next to the altar.

"We found the source of the stench, maybe it is dead." Said Laura.

"Or waiting for anyone crazy enough to pick up the Egg."

The creature had an almost square head, but the enormous jaws were those of a baboon. It's muscles across the shoulders were unlike anything she'd ever seen before, even more developed than a gorilla.

"He must be twice our height when he stands up." Said Mabina.

"He ?..... Oh yes, I see....."

"I don't see a way out Laura, the chamber seems to end here."

"Unless something happens when I pick it up."

They hadn't talked about who was going to pick up the Egg, but it didn't seem the sort of place to toss a coin. Laura walked up to the altar and had to stretch to pick up the dull silver disc.

"It's filthy.....Centuries of dust and muck."

"Probably waiting there for millennia for someone to find it."

Laura wiped the disc on her jeans. It didn't look impressive, no sparkling lights and indications of locked up powers. The Half Moon of Thoth had probably spoiled them, the Egg looked so ordinary in comparison. The disc was about six inches across and as Laura pushed it inside her shirt, the huge guardian ape began to stand up.

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"You're sure you're not scared to be here Jack ?" Asked Gwen.

"No, I like it here."

It was strange, but even after years of observing her son, she still found it hard to get into his head. Jack had probably killed a man in the barn and that was bad, very bad. Then Daniel had told him the man was evil, so that made it alright. The worrying thing was that Jack's very black and white morality was beginning to sort of make sense to her. Gwen parked her open backed truck in front of the house, knowing that Daniel was certain to have seen or heard her arrive.

“Don’t forget your bag Jack..... And don’t run off.”

“I won’t.”

Yes, he’d learned that one, she doubted if her son would ever run off on his own again. The man’s body had gone into a grave next to the septic tank, Daniel had shown it to her. A pre-prepared grave, though Daniel hadn’t wanted to talk about that. She’d been sharing his bed for a long time, she was certain he wasn’t a bad man. Mind you, the wives of criminals probably always thought their man was a good man, despite any evidence to the contrary. Gwen picked up her overnight bag and joined her son on Daniel’s front path.

“He’s let it go wild..... Weeding for you to do in the morning Jack.”

“Shall I press the bell ?”

Strange, he’d never asked before. He probably felt this time it was different, that their trip there was important, and it was.

“Yes, I’m sure he’ll be awake.”

Jack put his hand up to bump knuckles with Daniel as soon as the door opened, something Laura had taught him. Once that was out of the way he ran inside, carrying his bag into the lounge. That left her with a confused looking Daniel.

“I did wonder if I’d ever see you again..... Are we alright again ?” He asked.

Were they ? Probably not in a lot of ways, but she was going to stick to the plan she’d been thinking about all day. She’d even practised the words in front of the bathroom mirror.

“We’re here for tonight..... Jack will be watching your TV by now. Can we talk ?”

“Yes, come into the kitchen.”

There was still the smell of bleach to remind her that Daniel had cleaned the house from top to bottom after the incident. Were there others who’d been hurt, maybe even killed ?

“..... I just don’t want to know....” She blurted out.

Daniel hugged her and all the rehearsed words left her head. He didn’t press her, which was one of the things she liked about him. The coffee machine was filled and turned on, he even made toast without being asked.

“There are a few spare rooms..... I’m not assuming anything.” He said.

“I’ll share you bed Daniel, I just don’t want to share your secrets. I’ve realised for some time that you’re not just an eccentric farmer who sells cheap gadgets on Ebay. I know that you and Clara need your private moments and that Simon sells drugs. Do you sell drugs, is that it ?”

“Gwen I give you my.....”

“No don’t tell me, forget I asked. Keep your secrets Daniel, I just want our lives to go back to how they were, can we do that ?”

“Yes Gwen, I’d like that too.”

“No actually I don’t want that I want more..... I want us to wake up together, with Jack in one of the spare rooms. We get up and have breakfast together like a normal family. Is that too much for you Daniel ? If I insist on that will you run away ?”

He kissed her and she knew he wasn’t going to ask her to leave or run away.

“It’s not too much Gwen, it sounds perfect.”

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Laura hadn’t fired at the huge creature until she was sure it intended to kill them. Breaking the top off the altar and throwing it at Mabina had been pretty good proof that it wasn’t going to be friendly. Like the baboons, it screeched when wounded, an ear splitting sound that bounced off the stone walls.

"The bullets hurt it, but I don't think they'll kill it." Yelled Laura.

Everything was shouted to be heard above the constant shrieks and bellowing of the beast. Even when shouting it wasn't always that easy to hear each other. The guardian creature had managed to hit Mabina; just one blow had put her out of action for three or four minutes. Laura had run at the monster simian, burying her blade in its lower back. That had gained its attention, though if Mabina had been on her own, she'd have probably been stomped to death. That was how it was now, running about and trying not get cornered by the foul smelling brute.

"It's bleeding..... There has to be a way to kill it." Shouted Mabina.

Laura was good with her guns, far better than she'd been in the basement when she'd killed Mabina. Her four shots were true and the gun had been loaded with hollow points. She'd hit the monster four times in the head, it had screamed before rubbing a huge claw like hand over its face. The paw came away covered in blood, the creature was bleeding copiously, yet it lived.

"We have the Egg, maybe we should go back into the tunnels." Yelled Laura.

"There's no way through..... We know that."

She did, it had been a suggestion made out of desperation. Vampires could live a very long time without food or water, but eventually they'd die and their deaths would be slow and painful. Laura lost concentration for a moment and a set of heavy knuckles sent her sprawling.

"Hey you bastard, come and get me." Shouted Mabina.

To back up her words, she used her axe on the huge ape, burying it twice in its back. The brute turned and hit Mabina, before trapping her in a corner. It managed to stamp on Mabina once, before Laura shot it twice in the back of the head.

"You bleed, why don't you fucking die ?" Yelled Laura.

There was a look of hate in its eyes and Laura still wasn't able to stand up. It was going to stomp on her until she was dead and Mabina looked to be unconscious. Laura emptied her gun into its chest as it came for her, she wasn't going to die easily. There was a sound behind her, a kind of popping noise and her devourer was running at the monster.

"Oh thank you Wiremi." She muttered.

Her Gudara leapt at the huge simian, biting into its throat. The beast shrieked and there was genuine pain in the shrieks. Mabina was on her feet and Laura thought they might now stand a chance of killing the brute.

"No Mabina, he's on our side..... That's my Gudara."

To Mabina it must have looked as though a second large primate had joined the fight, even if he was biting their enemy.

"Your what ?"

"I mentioned him on the plane....I'll explain later, I promise..... We need to help him."

Her devourer was smaller than the guardian of the Egg, quite a lot smaller. He was definitely hurting the monster, far more than her bullets had succeeded in doing, but the brute wasn't dying. Worse still, he was crushing her Gudara in his arms and causing him to yell out in pain. Mabina used her axe on the simian brute's arms and although the creature screamed, it still seemed to be winning.

"We're no better off than we were." Said Laura. "If we can pull them apart I'm fairly sure my Gudara can take us both back to the surface."

"Only fairly sure ?"

"Best idea I've got..... Sorry."

It was brutal and unpleasant, but there were no civilised options in such a fight. Her Gudara was still biting the creature's throat and the monster was bleeding but not dying. Her devourer on the other

hand looked crushed to almost the point of death. Laura used her assassin's blade on the monster's eyes, stabbing deep into one and then the other.

"It's an aspect of Thoth Laura and it's beyond our ability to give it the gift of death." Said Mabina. It bled but healed, its eyes reforming within seconds of being destroyed. They were doomed with only a choice between dying a slow death from thirst in the tunnels or killed by the guardian of the Egg.

"I'm sorry."

She squeezed the arm of her Gudara and prepared herself to die defending him the best she could. Laura had intended to bite the monster, perhaps even trying to use her fangs to get to its vital organs. At that moment she felt pain, intolerable, mind numbing pain. She sank to her knees.

"Oh..... Make it stop !" She yelled.

"What is it ?"

"I'm not sure..... The Egg, I think it's burning into me....."

The pain took away her senses and then it ceased as suddenly as it had begun. Laura was still in the vast chamber, but it looked different, there was a gold coloured tinge to everything. Time appeared to be different too, Mabina was hitting the brute with her axe in slow motion. The man with the head of an eagle might have been there all time, she just hadn't been able to see him. At first he seemed intent on watching the fight. The birdlike eyes looked at her and his human arms beckoned her.

"Who are you ?"

No answer, instead he placed his right hand on her head and spoke in a language she didn't understand. Hekau was a word she recognised, one of the words Wiremi used for power, divine power. The pain returned though not as bad as it had been. The chamber was back as it had previously been, the golden hue gone. The eagle headed man was gone, or she simply couldn't see him anymore. Laura felt angry at the beast, angry at her bad luck, angry at the fate that had brought them there, angry at anything and everything.

"Stand back Mabina, I'll rescue my devourer." She yelled.

All her anger was amplified by something else, a feeling of almost limitless power. She punched the monster in the face and it screamed. Laura kept punching as hard as she could until the brute stopped screaming. As she lifted up her injured Gudara, the huge guardian of the Egg vanished. There was its blood on the floor, but the beast itself was gone.

"Has it gone, did you kill it ?" Asked Mabina.

"It's gone, but I don't think it can be killed. We should leave here."

"How ?"

"My Gudara can take us to the surface.... Or at least I hope he can."

Her devourer had been grievously wounded, but with Mabina's help she got him onto his feet. His breathing seemed to be the problem, the guardian creature had probably broken a few ribs. Laura gently hugged him, it seemed the right thing to do.

"Thank you..... I'd be dead if you hadn't arrived." She said. "Are you alright ?"

He shook his head and made a few plaintiff sounds with his crushed throat.

"Will you heal ?"

A nod, even if he was still making the sounds that indicated he was far from well.

"Can you take my friend and I to the surface ?"

A nod, but she now knew she had to make sure there was no ambiguity in his simple yes or no replies.

“Will we be alive and well after you take us there ?”

Another nodding head, meant Laura felt confident enough to get a good tight hold on his arm.

“Come on Mabina, hold onto him and knock those ruby slippers together.” She said.

“Are sure this will be safe ?”

“I’m not sure of anything..... But do you want to stay here ?”

“No.”

There was a sensation of movement and Laura felt as though she was falling rather than going up. When they arrived back in the old ruined Temple of Thoth, her Gudara wasn’t with them. They were stood next to where the hole in the floor had been, though it was now filled with rubble and sand.

“Oh Laura, do I look as bad as you do ?” Asked Mabina. “We’ll need to shake the dust out of our clothes before we go back to the hotel.”

“Your jeans are covered in bloodstains. Just pray that we don’t run into the police.”

They took off their clothes and shook them out, turning their T shirts inside out. The axes were left in the temple and although they looked grubby when they walked out of the temple, they no longer looked as though they’d been in a war.

“Where did you suddenly get enough strength to beat that monster ?” Asked Mabina.

“It was the Egg I think, it burned itself under my skin. I’ll show you when we get to the hotel, I’m dreading having to dig it out.”

“So the Egg gave you the power ?”

“Maybe, but I think it was the guy with the head of an Eagle.”

“Horus..... You saw Horus ?”

“I have no idea who he was. He put his hand on my head and muttered a few words and suddenly I was full of anger and enough strength to defeat the guardian.”

“Wow..... Our Laura has a direct line to one of the major ancient deities.”

“I wouldn’t go that far.”

“Still, I think this should be one of the things we don’t tell Magda, agreed ?”

“Agreed.”

“Now Laura..... Tell me again about your Gudara, I want to know everything ?”

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