

## Quid Pro Quo

(Season three of London's Night Stalkers)

### Chapter 19 – The Last Crate

**“The kitchen always felt cosy and safe, mainly because as far as Patsy knew, nothing really weird had ever happened in there.”**

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Vampires never thought of it as the red mist, or berserker strength. Something happened to Laura though, when she consciously allowed her fangs to drop. The world became much simpler in many ways. There were no areas of grey when it came to enemies, or worrying too much about the damage created to reach where she wanted to go. A wise decision not to bring Jim Weaver with her, he had no idea about her true nature. If the alarms hadn't sent him into a panic, seeing her vampire face probably would have. She stopped for a second, actually panting from the exertion, which was very rare. Akiva had waited for Tim to keep up, bless him.

“We need to move faster.” She said.

“Leave me if you have to.” Said Tim.

Why did he have to be so damn understanding and willing to see her side of everything. Anyone else and she'd have thought they'd enjoyed playing the martyr, but Tim was totally genuine.

“If they catch you.....You can identify us.” She said.

“Maybe we should kill him now.” Said Akiva.

“Yeah.... Very amusing.” Said Tim.

Poor Tim did look done in, but she had been setting a fast pace. Akiva put his shoulder under Tim's to support him.

“I'll help him, how much further is it ?” Asked Akiva.

“This place is a maze.....One more set of stairs and we should be there.”

Laura ran again, though not as fast as she had been running. Another fire door had been added close to the stairwell she'd been heading for. She was beginning to take the fire doors personally and didn't even slow down. She hit the door at a fast run for a vampire, but an impossible speed for a human. Weight mattered of course, it became momentum once you added a bit of speed into the equation. Laura didn't weigh that much, but moving at close to thirty miles per hour, her shoulder took the door off its hinges.

“Fuck !” She yelled.

Her body was tough, though not tough enough to be used as a battering ram. As she ran on towards the stairs, something in her shoulder was complaining and her elbow felt numb. Everything would heal of course, it always did. To add to her general annoyance at the situation, the alarms sounded louder after busting through the door.

“Keep up ! Keep up !” She yelled.

Down the stairs and yet another door that wasn't supposed to be there. Laura drop kicked it on the run, which she knew was a mistake the second her feet left the floor. The door smashed against the wall as it opened and she was still moving at speed. She hit the ground and rolled over several times, before hitting a row of chairs. A weird and undignified way to arrive, but they were there. It was 'the' room, or rather a wide corridor where the drawers full of Egyptian small objects were kept. A

lot of drawers containing a lot of objects, some priceless and some only valuable to keen historians. Akiva helped Tim to a seat, where he sighed as he sat down.

"This is it.....Isn't it ?" Asked Akiva. "We're there."

"Yes, we're there.....I can even see the drawer number."

There it was the drawer she'd come to steal from, though she was still contemplating taking more than the Ankh and the rings Jim wanted. The drawer was about eight feet long and close to three feet deep. Of course it was locked.

"I can hear someone coming.....Lots of running feet." Said Tim.

Tim was back on his feet, making himself useful by watching the short corridor that led to the stairs. "It'll be the museum's guards." She said. "Fire a few rounds well over their heads. They'll send for the armed police.....That should gain me enough time."

Tim nodded at her, before aiming his serious looking handgun down the corridor. A part of her wanted to remind him not to actually hit anyone, not yet anyway. He knew what he was doing though and in many ways he was probably the coolest head out of the three of them. Laura heard two shots, as she and Akiva pulled at the drawer. Two people with superhuman strength.....It was only going to end one way. No blaming whoever had made the drawers, they couldn't have anticipated the forces that would one day be used to open it. The lock and a large piece of the drawer came apart, as the drawer opened.

"To be honest Laura, I did wonder if we could pull this off." Said Akiva.

"If we're being honest, so did I."

There seemed to be a lot of gunshots for one man trying to not actually hit anyone. Tim was back inside the room with them, still aiming his gun towards the door.

"They're firing back at me." He said.

"Crap, the cops have arrived earlier than I thought." She said. "Help him Akiva, I need a few more minutes"

"Do I use the stun grenades." He asked.

"Yes, use them.....All of them if you have to."

As she opened the drawer to its fullest extent, she heard one of the stun grenades go off. She had no idea where Akiva had obtained the grenades, but he'd assured her they were top of the range.

"They're the business Laura." He'd told her. "Some risk of long term damage, but still safer than having to use live rounds on whoever they send."

Whoever they send might eventually mean paramilitary police, but she hoped to be long gone by then. Her hand was drawn to the rear of the top shelf.

"I've found it." She yelled.

Too much noise to be certain they'd heard her. Laura closed her hand around the Ankh and felt the power.....The power of a God.

"No, I will not be tempted." She muttered.

She dropped the sacred ankh back into its place and pulled the whole drawer out. It had a hinge device to stop it coming too far, but once again the designers hadn't allowed for vampire strength. All that gold in several levels of the drawer, it had to weigh close to half a ton, maybe more. Laura couldn't support the weight on her own and had to let the drawer crash to the ground.

"There are a lot of them out there Laura." Said Akiva.

"Any armed with assault rifles ?"

"Not yet."

"Then keep them out of here.....I need just two more minutes, tops."

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Patsy had a set of keys for the house in Hornsey. She was the semi-official picker upper of post and messages when everyone was away. Plus a house with lights coming on in different rooms at different hours, was less likely to get burgled. Or at least that was the theory and if it meant she had a set of keys, Patsy thought the theory was sound. She was carrying a bag full of fish and chips, as she unlocked the door and walked into the lounge.

"I got you cod, chips and a saveloy." She said.

A weird mixture to her, but it was what he usually bought for himself.

"Good timing, I just finished emptying this crate." Said Simon.

The crates from Jerusalem made her nervous, though she was there as a volunteer, not a conscript.

"Did you find anything?" She asked.

"Probably enough ancient scrolls to excite a roomful of historians, but as for clues to help me with Festina Lente.....Nothing at all. And Clara will kill me for going through the boxes without her."

"Just don't tell her I helped you."

"You'll be fine, you're Laura's best friend. I'm the one who'll get the bruises and stink eye for months."

"Come on, the chips will get cold."

The kitchen always felt cosy and safe, mainly because as far as Patsy knew, nothing really weird had ever happened in there. They ate their food with cutlery like civilised people, but out of the paper wrapper rather than off a plate. Simon had a thing about it tasting better that way.

"It tasted best out of newspaper, though the printing ink could stain the chips." He'd once told her.

"How many more crates to go through?" She asked.

"Two, though I haven't looked at all the packing papers properly from the last two."

"I could do that if you like?"

"Brilliant."

Coffee was taken into the lounge, where Simon took a pry bar to another crate, while she carefully flattened piles of paper used as packing material to see if it looked important.

"I'll put it all carefully into one box, even if it looks useless." She said.

"There's this feeling that I'll know if something is important Patsy. That said.....I had no idea the dragon statue was important."

"Zeus is getting quite big by the way." She said.

"Is he still bullying next door's dog?"

"No, he's becoming quite a loveable cat. Follows mum everywhere, even into the bathroom."

"Still.....Mabina wouldn't lie about something like that. One day you might come home to find a dead burglar with Zeus sat on his chest."

"I hope not, mum would really freak out."

The ancient Egyptians seemed obsessed with gold. The small statue of a cat Simon had found in the crate was different. It looked to have been cast out of silver, with a lot of painted details. A lot of dark patina had built up over the passing years, but the wrapping paper had rubbed it off in places, to reveal the silver beneath. Its painted green eyes seemed to stare at everything in the room at once.

"Wow, that looks interesting." She said.

"I was just thinking that myself."

The cat was sat back on its haunches, its head up and alert, its large ears fully extended. Simon stroked it, breathed on it, he even kissed its cheek at one point. Eventually he gave up on trying to get a response.

"I'll put it next to the TV, with the gold scarab from the last crate." He said. "They might move later, like the dragon."

"I'll keep half an eye on them."

The wrapping paper Patsy picked up next wasn't encouraging. A hand out to advertise a fast food place in Jerusalem, with just enough repeated in English for her to work out what it was. Something was inside it, carelessly wrapped as though someone was discarding rubbish.

"Oh Simon, this is beautiful and we both nearly missed it." She said.

A gold necklace of incredibly tiny links. Hanging from the necklace was a bird in flight, maybe a skylark or something similar. Poor Simon always had that slight pallor of someone who rarely gets outside on sunny days. His face had become ashen, as if he'd seen a ghost.

"That belonged to Niña.....I thought it was, no I'm sure. It can't be the same one, it was buried with her."

Simon took the necklace off her and looked it over carefully for quite a while.

"This was hers, she died holding it to her chest, it has to be a sign Patsy. What was it wrapped in?"

"Just an advertising notice for a restaurant in Jerusalem."

Simon constantly teased her about being jealous of Niña, and in some ways it was crazy to be jealous of a girl who'd died hundreds of years before she'd been born. To Patsy though, Niña was a pretty girl living in a house with two men who obviously adored her. She had to know....

"The necklace is beautiful, did Giovanni give it to her?"

"No, I did.....Though I didn't buy it. Such work at that time.....Pieces in gold like this were commissioned by wealthy people for their loved ones."

"Did you steal it?" She asked.

"Not steal, though how I came by it isn't that much better. I did a little freelance work, taking care of problems for those who could afford my fee. Not always jobs that ended with someone dying, I had to run someone out of town to earn the necklace as part of my fee. Not that I knew it was going to be included in with the gold coins when I took the job.....But gold is gold."

"Why give it to the girl?"

"She saw it and fell in love with it, even pretending the clasp was broke so she couldn't take it off. Poor sweet Niña.... She loved the necklace so much that I didn't have the heart to take it from her. I never did tell her its true value, it was a third of my fee and I never did any job that didn't pay well."

"Quite a gift for a girl you claim was never a lover."

"Oh, why the jealousy Patsy? The poor girl has been dead for so long."

"I don't know why I'm jealous, but I am."

"Can you stay tonight?" He asked.

Predictable, the idea that a night of sex would put things right. Usually though, even if she hated to admit it, it worked.

"I do have college tomorrow.....But alright, I can wear these clothes again."

"Good..... We can open the last crate and get everything tidied away before going to bed."

"Oi, I'm not your unpaid skivvy you know."

After a tussle on the sofa, which became quite a bit of kissing, Simon picked up the pry bar again.

Patsy began smoothing and examining various pieces of packing paper that Simon had left strewn across the floor. One piece had something on it she recognised. The profile, the jawline, the way the

collar of the girl's top was cut. The girl was in profile, but the man was someone she recognised immediately. Patsy smoothed out the drawing and didn't say anything until she was certain.

"She did see you Simon, she saw both of us.....Look."

He took the pen and ink drawing off her, the drawing of him and her. She could even remember it had been the night when she thought he might have become stuck in the recording they could see through the mirror. The concern on her face, the worry on his. It was a very good drawing of both of them. Simon simply looked at the picture, as if he'd seem two ghosts instead of them.

"There's writing in Italian I think Simon, what does it say?" She asked.

Instead of answering, he picked up the pen Clara used to write notes to herself, usually things to add to the shopping list. It seemed like he was committing a crime, adding to that drawing from the age of the renaissance with English words written in ball point pen. He handed the drawing back to her.

'Tonight I saw both of the ghosts, again.' – Niña.

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Liz had the option to become the Unnamed one, the Guardian of the Final Gate. To do so might well mean remaining in that form though, with a very real chance that she'd turn on her two friends. The creatures created by Anubis had to be dealt with though, by one means or another.

"Let the hounds keep them busy." She said. "Don't let some sense of honour stop you from backstabbing them, they're just automatons really."

There were at least a dozen of the monsters and others might be hiding in the shadows. Bodies vaguely human in appearance, though much more muscled and far taller. Their hands were clawed and a few carried brutal looking clubs. The really dangerous weapons were the teeth though, rows of them in powerful jaws in dog shaped heads.

"Don't let them bite you." Said Liz. "They bite harder and deeper than a great white shark, and their bites tend to become infected."

"Crap Liz, any good news about these guys?" Asked Clara. "Do they have a weakness?"

"None I'm afraid. We just keep hacking and slashing until they die."

"Let's get it done then." Said Mabina.

No worrying about her hounds not wanting to attack other creations of Anubis, they were eager to begin the battle.

"Go on.....Show my enemies how fierce you are."

The hounds didn't understand her words, but they sensed her intent in some way. All four of them hurtled towards the creatures standing between them and the fifteenth gateway. Her hounds seemed to scream with anger, as they leapt at her enemies. In theory Liz knew how the creations of Anubis should move and fight, but she still watched how they dealt with the attack of her hounds. It seemed the two vampires had the same idea.

"They move fast for their size." Said Clara.

Mabina just grunted before running to help the hounds. Clara looked at her and smiled, before she too ran to join the fight. Liz fondled the huge axe, which she was becoming quite fond of and picked one of the enemy creatures at random. She ran towards it, giving her best impression of a berserker scream.

"You!" She screamed, as she brought the axe down.

Clara was right, they did move quickly for big bulky creatures. Liz's intended target moved quickly to the right. Her axe missed its head, but landed on its shoulder, taking off its shoulder, arm and a piece of muscle from its chest. There was little blood though and the beast didn't fall over.

"Fuck.....These things are tough." She yelled.

The sounds of battle told her the two vampires were finding that out for themselves. Liz brought her axe up fast, digging it into where most creatures would have a gut full of viscera. Still the brute refused to fall to the ground. It actually came at her, while blood dripped from a belly wound that should have proved fatal.

“Why won’t you die ?”

The beast used its one good arm to hold her as its jaws opened up. She managed to move her head out of the way of the first attempted bite, but it still had a good firm hold of her arm. For a moment Liz thought she was about to discover if having half her face bitten off would actually kill her. Her hand became a mass of black writhing tentacles without her thinking about it. It seemed her other self, the being that was the Unnamed one, could take over her body when it chose to. Liz wasn’t sure if that was a good thing, or a potential disaster.

“Now you will see what I can do to you.” She shrieked.

Another of the creatures was coming to help kill her, but stopped when her tentacles made the beast close to her howl. A loud howl like a living thing being caused more pain than it could possibly endure. Where her tentacles touched its head and jaws, the flesh melted away like snow caught in the heat of the sun. Oh, how it howled as she moved her hand deep inside its flesh. Finally, when there was little left of it, the beast fell over. Liz stood over the heap of ruined flesh and bone, raising her axe above her head.

“Who wants to be next ?” She yelled.

Her friends had managed to kill one or two of the creatures, there were definitely bits of their grey flesh and red-ish blood on the ground. The vampires both looked hurt though, Mabina had what looked like a bite to her shoulder that had gone right through her clothing. Liz ran to help, pushing her tentacle fingers into the first creature stupid enough to get in her way.

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Laura had to ignore the sound of Akiva using another stun grenade. She’d never summoned her Gudara into the middle of a fight before and it might be a problem. His first duty was to protect her and he might well head straight down the corridor to tear apart those attacking her. He might well die in the attempt and ‘Giant primate killed at British Museum,’ wasn’t a headline she wanted to see, ever. She sat cross legged on the floor and emptied her mind of everything, apart from the need to summon him.

“Gudara....Come to me, I have need of your strength.” She muttered.

He was there almost instantly and she could feel the tension coming off him in waves. Laura grabbed one of his huge paw like hands.

“No.....I’m safe, ignore what’s going on. Everything will be fine.”

He looked at her, but there was a low growl coming from him. Her Gudara’s eyes were flicking towards the door and the constant sound of gunfire.

“Listen to me ! I need your strength. You’ve always been my strength.”

She carried on squeezing his hand until she had his full attention.

“Ignore the sounds in the corridor, I will be leaving this place very soon. Do you understand ?”

He wasn’t stupid, just determined to protect her from any threat. He nodded at her, but his eyes still kept moving towards the door.

“Listen to me.....Do you see the drawer lying on the ground ?”

Another nod.

“It’s very heavy, well beyond what I can lift. You are my strength; I know you can pick it up.”

She had his interest now, he was looking at the enormous drawer and nodding.

"I want you to take it to the rooms I showed you, the ones with metal walls. Do you remember where they are?"

Another nod of his head. As he began the gurgle in his throat that meant he was happy, she knew things were probably going to be alright. Provided her Gudara really could pick up about half a ton of priceless artefacts.

"This is important ! Take the drawer to the metal rooms and you can go. Don't come back here, I will be going to somewhere safe. Do you understand ?"

Her Gudara nodded and very gently rubbed one of his huge fingers across her cheek.

"Go on....Quickly....Take the drawer to the rooms with metal walls."

He stood up and looked at the drawer for a second or so, like a weight lifter deciding on the best technique for a medal winning lift. Eight feet was obviously too wide for even his huge arms. He stood across the drawer, gripped it around the middle and gave a loud grunt.

"You can do it my friend, I know you can." She said.

Up came the drawer, up and onto his left knee with one lift. Her Gudara obviously decided that was high enough. Huge drawer resting on his slightly bent knee, he vanished. Hopefully the drawer with its priceless artefacts would be waiting for her in the Silver Dawn base in Northern France. Laura heard the sound of automatic weapons before a worried looking Akiva spoke to her.

"We have to leave Laura, at least two of them now have assault rifles."

Tim barely dodged a burst of fire as he came into the room at a run. Whoever was out there wasn't trying to intimidate, they were trying to kill them.

"Grab me, both of you.....Tight as you can." Said Laura.

They were both old hands at being instantly hurtled into the realm of the Gods, before arriving at anywhere Laura had visited and could visualise. She pressed hard on the Egg and all three of them vanished from the British Museum.

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"No, I'm not going to work for a competitor." Said Ronnie Neophytou.

The day had come, she was earning more than enough with Tom to leave the sales job. Part of her reason was survival. She was running on autopilot when she'd side swiped the car on a night run. Sleep was essential and she'd been coasting along on two or three hours a night. Eventually, one way or another, the lack of a decent night's sleep was going to kill her.

"I knew it..... You're doing something on the side with Simon." Shouted Anthony.

Sort of true of course, though not in the way Anthony was getting angry about. She'd already called Simon to tell him about her decision to work full time for Tom in Erith.

"Give Anthony a letter, make it official." He'd told her.

So she had and the inevitable summons to his office had arrived in the form of an angry Anthony bellowing down the phone. Anthony lived a life where he was perpetual shouting, or so it seemed. Given a real excuse to shout and he probably broke decibel records.

"No....No, you have my word. Simon is angry with me too." She said.

"So you told him before telling me ?"

Shit; she really should have seen that hole in the road and avoided it. Constant tiredness, that was the problem. She remembered a friend saying they didn't have the bandwidth to deal with life after a boozy weekend. A cool saying that seemed to suit her life perfectly. Ronnie didn't currently have the bandwidth to deal with anything.

"Sorry Anthony, but I will work out my notice period."

"What ?! Leave you sat there passing on leads to a competitor."

That shout had to have broken several health and safety rules, and wasn't bullying staff now in the forbidden zone with lunch time drinking and smoking in the office ? Tempting to say something like 'I'm off Tony baby and screw you,' she didn't need a reference after all. Anthony could be a little dangerous when he was angry and although she didn't think he'd hit a woman.....Still, safest to keep everything polite.

"I am not going to work for a competitor Anthony." She said.

"Who are you going to work for then ?"

"I prefer not to say."

Fuck him, her month's salary was already in the bank, complete with the last quarter's commission. She'd timed her resignation well, you had to with employers like Anthony Jordan. He did a little bashing about in his drawers, before coming and leaning over her.

"Don't expect any commission on the leads you brought in this week." He yelled. "And I want you out today.....Gone from this office."

"Whatever you think is best Anthony." She said.

A guy called James had left with a bruised eye, Anthony did have a bad reputation when it came to dealing with leavers. He got really close and glared at her for a full five minutes, before going back round the desk and sitting in his chair.

"Go on then Ronnie.....Fuck off." He shouted.

He'd called the swamp of fear and loathing, the bear pit where a dozen or so people in cubicles made up to a hundred calls a day to potential customers. One of the girls had obviously been asked to make sure she left without taking a laptop with her. There was a little difference of opinion about the carrier bag of personal items Ronnie was taking with her. Eventually she was outside on the pavement, with her bag of stuff and feeling a sense of freedom, a feeling of having escaped.

"Considering how that could have gone." She muttered. "That was a bit of a result."

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Clara looked at the dead monsters surrounding her and felt underappreciated. There should have been a photographer from a tabloid there at the very least. She did have a phone with a decent camera, but she'd removed the battery and it was deep inside her pack somewhere. Not that it would have been sensible to take pictures of such things anyway. She could have only shown it to a very small circle of people and they'd probably seen dead monsters before.

"I felt really tired for a while." She said. "Now I wouldn't mind another few of them turning up."

"Good...Because you're on your own until I finish healing Mabina." Said Liz.

Clara picked up the axe that Liz had been wielding to good effect. Over half the dead creatures had fallen to her axe or tentacles, or a mixture of both. She swung the axe about and it really did feel like a weapon designed for a vampire. Far too heavy for a human to use, but the weight and balance were perfect for her. She took an experimental swing at a small rock, shattering it with one blow. Someone sighed and tutted at her, yes a definite tut. She turned to find Liz glaring at her.

"What ?"

"If you're bored Clara, you can hold Mabina's arm still for me." Said Liz. "I need to get deep into the wound and it's likely to be painful."

"Yes, of course.....The axe though, once you've finished with it. I'll gladly buy it off you. What do you think ?"

Liz could be a bit hard to read. Clara was holding Mabina's arm as instructed, yet Liz was still giving her the stink eye.

"I'm going to mount it above the fireplace at home." Said Liz. "Brendan and I can then amaze family and friends with tales of my adventures in the underworld."

Clara was getting better at sarcasm, but she'd noticed that sometimes Liz could mean the weird things she said.

"Really?" She asked. "Wouldn't that be dangerous?"

"Oh..... Just hold Mabina....And yes, you're welcome to the axe once I'm finished with it."

The creature had bitten deep into Mabina and a green secretion was beginning to ooze out of the wound. Clara had so many questions she wanted to ask, though she didn't want to risk any more of Liz's rather weird style of sarcasm.

"Will Mabina be alright?" She asked.

"Yes.....Get ready, this is the bad part."

Mabina yelled and passed out, a rare thing for a vampire. Liz used her tentacles to go deep into the wound and the green secretion turned a creamy sort of colour. No stitching the wound, where Liz touched the dreadful wound, the skin healed, the wound closed.

"There.....Not as good as new, but her own body will finish the healing process." Said Liz.

"You're getting better at healing." Said Clara.

"I am and while we wait for Mabina to wake up, I'll see what I can do for the injured hound."

There were now just three hounds and one of those didn't look too good. It had been bitten twice and the way it was hanging its head.....Clara didn't think it was likely to survive for very long. Clara watched as Liz tended its wounds with the same care she'd shown Mabina. The poor beast tried to pull away as Liz probed a deep bite.

"I'll hold it still."

It took a while, but eventually the hound could stand with its head up, its ears up and listening for potential enemies. Like Mabina it didn't look exactly as good as new, though it would probably be able to keep up with them as they trudged along miles of the royal road.

"It might be a good idea to sleep here, for a while." Said Clara.

"No, I've got a bad feeling about this place." Said Liz. "And I'm beginning to listen to those kinds of feelings. When Mabina wakes up we'll go through the gate."

"Should I wake her?"

"Might be a good idea.....We can take turns carrying her pack."

Mabina didn't appreciate being woken up, but she did appreciate not being expected to carry a pack on her back for a while. They must have looked a fairly unimpressive group, as Liz activated the gateway.

"Come on, we'll make camp at the first safe place we find." Said Liz.

Clara followed Liz into the glowing portal and it really was as though they'd simply stepped through a wall. There it was in front of them, the royal road that would take them all the way to the final gate. Mabina finally recovered enough to speak.

"How far to gate sixteen?" She asked.

"About thirty miles."

"I'll sleep anywhere.....Let's camp right here." Said Mabina.

The hounds had smelt something in the air, Clara was picking it up too. Two of the hounds ran off with the third limping behind them.

"Water and it's not far away." Said Clara. "I can smell it.....Over there."

Liz helped her with Mabina's pack by carrying it between them. It was only fifty yards or so to where fresh clean water came out of an underground spring, but it felt like the longest fifty yards Clara had ever walked. Now that the adrenaline was coming out of her bloodstream, she felt so tired.

"I'm going to put my bedroll on the ground and sleep here." Said Mabina.

She did just that, without even clearing away any sharp stones. Down went her bedroll and Mabina seemed to be asleep in seconds. Clara wanted to do the same, but she helped Liz set up camp.

"Are your senses tingling Liz? Is this a safe place?"

"Yes, I think it is.....We need to set up a watch schedule though."

"Of course, let me know what my hours are."

Clara sat watching the hounds play in the water, her back up against a rock that was quite uncomfortable. It would keep her awake though.

"Can you do first watch Clara.... How about the first three hours?"

"Too long.....Can it be two hours? I'm so tired Liz. Fatigue has sort of crept up on me."

"I need sleep too. How about two and a half hours?"

"Agreed.....Sold to the lady with the wiggly fingers."

"What?"

Had that been a terrible insult or something? Clara found she was far more interested in their hounds than she usually was. They looked like domestic pet dogs, as they tumbled over each other.

"Good doggies." She muttered.

The rock against her back was uncomfortable, but it didn't stop her drifting off into a deep dreamless sleep.

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They'd chosen the hotel to be close enough to central London, to make it easy to get to and from the British Museum. Yet far enough away to be outside any potential police cordon. Part of a chain with identical hotels all over the world, the accommodation was clean but uninspiring. Worst of all the room service closed when the kitchen staff went home.

"Alright if I take the last naan bread?" Asked Brendan.

No answer, the human dustbin had finally gone to sleep. Brendan quite liked Jim Weaver, though the guy was obviously a nervous eater. They'd had an Indian meal delivered, enough for about six people. Jim had ended up eating most of it. Brendan picked at the cold naan bread and watched the TV with the sound down.

'Incident at British Museum; Police have yet to confirm reports of gunfire at scene of attempted robbery.....'

The rolling text along the bottom of the screen gave him all the news there seemed to be. He'd imagined the news would be all over every channel. He imagined all criminals thought their heist was that important, but theirs was that big. To steal ancient artefacts from the British Museum.....It was huge, yet it was just another item on the twenty four hour rolling news.

"Why are they downplaying it?" He muttered.

Attempted robbery was worrying, it hinted at everyone being caught by the police. No police cell could hold Laura though, he was certain about that. Eventually Laura would be there, even if she arrived with bad news.

'Several members of the public claim to have heard gunfire.....'

It appeared the authorities were mentioning the police using stun grenades and saying the public must have heard those going off. No mention of arrests though, or pictures of Laura and the two men being led away in handcuffs.

"I suppose we'll just have to be patient Jim." He said.

The only answer he got from Jim was a loud snore. Brendan had fallen asleep himself, his head leaning against the side of the high backed chair. The beeping of his phone woke him, a text from Laura.

'Downstairs On my way up.'

He shook his head in an attempt to wake up, as he opened the room door and looked in the direction of the elevators. He heard the door open and saw Laura come out. She was carrying a shoulder bag, which was rare. He waited for her to be inside the room with the door closed, before asking the obvious.

"Did it go alright ?" He asked. "The news reports are really weird."

"It went perfectly Brendan, better than I'd hoped. How has Jim been ?"

"A bit anxious until I ordered food and he realised I wasn't going to run out on him. He can eat though.....Never seen anything like it."

"Yes, our Jim does enjoy his takeaways. Come on, we'll talk in the bathroom to avoid waking sleeping beauty."

The bathroom was small and smelt of bleach. An odd place to talk, but at least it was private. Laura took a thick envelope out her shoulder bag and gave it to him. He'd been given the occasional envelope by customers who expected a discount for cash, so he recognised the feel and weight of fifty pound notes.

"You didn't have to.....I wasn't expecting." He said.

"I know you weren't, but I got away with the entire drawer full of artefacts. Trust me Brendan, I can afford to give you this. Once Liz is back we must get together for a meal or something. There must be ways you can both help with my job at the Silver Dawn. You will be paid of course."

"Talking of Liz, is there any way you can check if she's alright ? It has been a while."

"Hmmmmm I can go and see an Ancient God of Egypt, who if I ask very nicely will send me to somewhere they will eventually arrive. It's fiddly, but it will work. And you're right, it has been a while."

"A God, you really need to see a God ?" Asked Brendan.

"Oh yes.....It's the only way. Collect a few things together you think she might need and I'll do the same for Clara and Mabina. If they haven't come home by the end of the week, I'll go and sweet talk a God."

"How much can you carry ?"

"Lots Brendan, load me up like a cart horse....Come on, time to wake up Jim and give him his reward for a job well done. I'm looking forward to seeing his expression."

Laura took three gold rings out of her bag and large beetle, which again looked to have been made from solid gold. Once she had them neatly arranged on the bedside table, she prodded Jim until he woke up.

"Wake up Jim, I brought the rings and a couple of other items I thought you might like."

It was good to see Jim's eyes light up, as he saw the objects.

"Wow, really ? I know these other pieces, they're worth a fortune."

"Couldn't have done it without you.....And I might need you again, if that's alright."

"Anytime Laura, anytime."

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